

# Groton Daily Independent

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Chicken Soup  
for the Soul



“IT IS NOT  
HAPPINESS  
THAT MAKES  
US GRATEFUL.  
IT'S GRATEFULNESS  
THAT MAKES US  
HAPPY.”

-DAVID STEINDL-RAST

## Council votes down ordinance to pass on \$7.85 surcharge

In a surprise vote, the Groton City Council voted down an ordinance that included a \$7.85 per month surcharge on the water rate on a 3-2 vote. Councilmen David Blackmun, Jon Cutler and Shirley Wells voted no. Karyn Babcock was not present and Councilmen Brian Bahr and Kristie Flihs voted for the surcharge.

City Attorney Drew Johnson suggested having the vote abeyance until the next meeting when it can be re-introduced again. The city has received a loan to pay for water project improvements. The debate is over whether the city needs to pass on the surcharge. It was stated that according to state documents, the city does not need to increase its rate to pay for the loan. Other councilmen, however, feel that the taking the payment out of the existing rate structure could strap the water department in regular maintenance. The vote will be taken up again at the next council meeting.

Ken Heir from IMEG Corp (formerly Clark Engineering), talked about the contracts for the two water projects. The name has changed from the original contract of Clark Engineering and there is also a reduction in fees as well. The second project will be a struggle to get started this year. He said they would at least like to get the borings under the railroad tracks. The contracts were approved.

Contractors will be in Groton around June 15th for the painting of the new water tower.

There was discussion about allowing beer at baseball games. Special event pass would need to be approved. Councilman David Blackmun asked the question about amateur games for now. There was discussion that maybe a business or organization in town would be interested selling beer at those events.

Groton City Hall will be closed at its old location on Friday as City Hall will move to the new location at 120 N Main and will reopen at the new location on Monday.

The following were hired for summer employees: Softball coaches Sue Fjeldheim, Maddy Bjerke and Brad Penning, and grounds keepers as needed Bradin Althoff and Caleb Hoover.



## **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 City Financial Report for April

April 2021

Dacotah Bank Checking Acct	\$ 2,688,876.69
General Cash	\$ 300.00
SD FIT Acct	\$ 1,452,225.84
Dacotah Bank Water CD	\$ 84,912.52
SD FIT CD	\$ 102,514.21
Cemetery Perp Care CD	\$ 32,876.69
Total	\$ 4,361,705.95

Invested In		
Cash	\$ 300.00	0.01%
Dacotah Bank	\$ 2,806,665.90	64.35%
SD Fit	\$ 1,554,740.05	35.65%
Total	\$ 4,361,705.95	100.00%

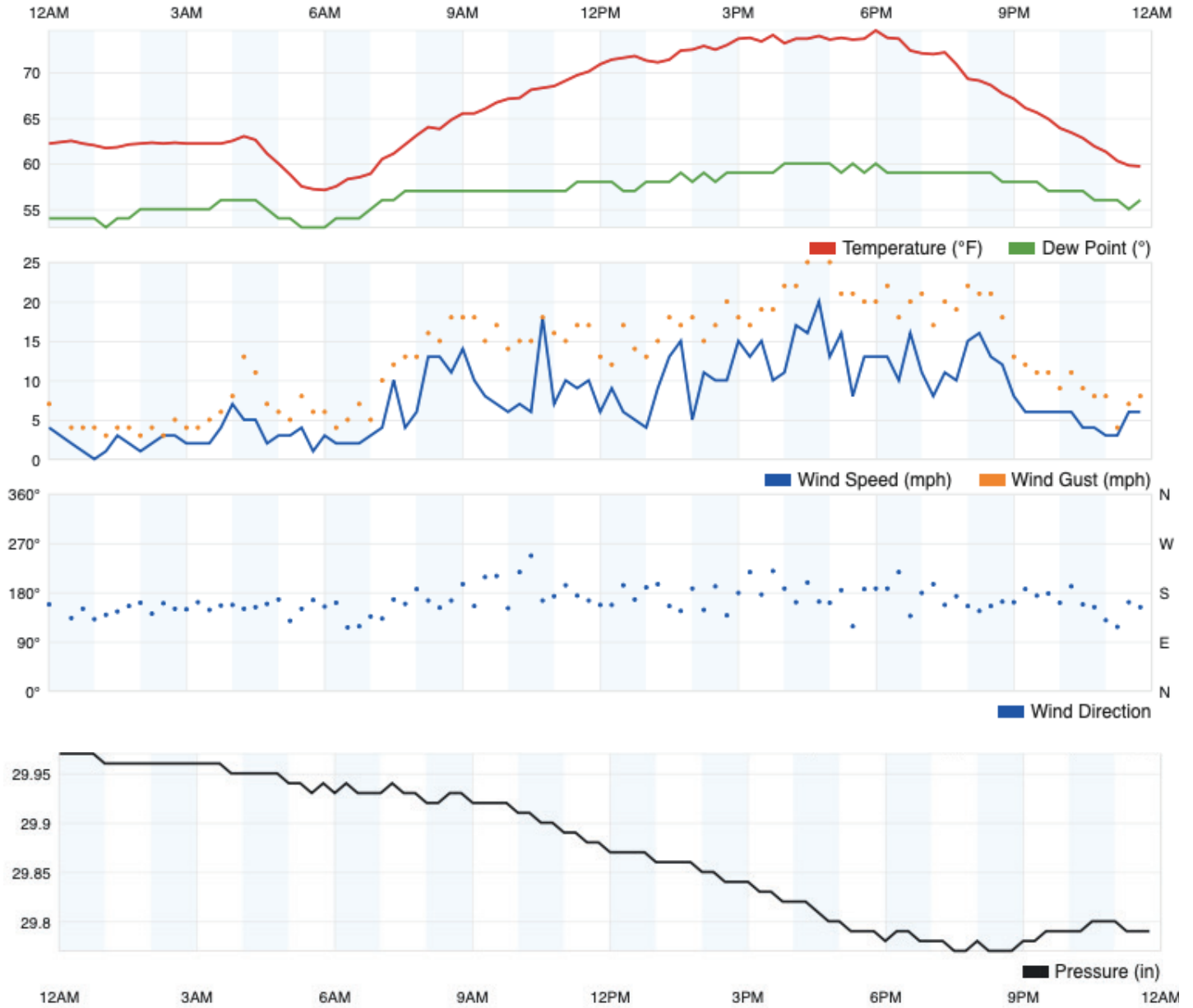
	Beginning Cash Balance	Receipts	Expenditures	Transfers	Ending Cash Balance
General	\$ 666,824.72	\$ 122,093.00	\$ 60,939.91		\$ 727,977.81
Bed, Board, Booze Tax	\$ 89,452.10	\$ 2,367.42			\$ 91,819.52
Baseball Uniforms	\$ 1,710.20				\$ 1,710.20
Airport	\$ 16,199.41				\$ 16,199.41
**Debt Service	\$ 157,130.93	\$ 951.97	\$ 11,320.38		\$ 146,762.52
Cemetery Perpetual Care	\$ 34,756.69	\$ -			\$ 34,756.69
Water Tower	\$ 180,000.00				\$ 180,000.00
Water	\$ 273,845.56	\$ 32,974.09	\$ 19,097.11		\$ 287,722.54
Electric	\$ 2,167,905.23	\$ 145,595.95	\$ 69,461.82		\$ 2,244,039.36
Wastewater	\$ 393,634.47	\$ 16,990.94	\$ 183.37		\$ 410,442.04
Solid Waste	\$ 31,730.70	\$ 11,650.17	\$ 8,032.09		\$ 35,348.78
Family Crisis	\$ 8,912.79	\$ -	\$ 124.07		\$ 8,788.72
Sales Tax	\$ 20,629.83	\$ 9,111.51	\$ 10,908.26		\$ 18,833.08
Employment	\$ (3,897.77)	\$ -	\$ 798.87		\$ (4,696.64)
Utility Prepayments	\$ 83,827.81	\$ (886.65)	\$ 3,171.86		\$ 79,769.30
Utility Deposits	\$ 81,793.01	\$ 250.00	\$ 15.00		\$ 82,028.01
Other	\$ 204.61	\$ -	\$ -		\$ 204.61
Totals	\$ 4,204,660.29	\$ 341,098.40	\$ 184,052.74	\$ -	\$ 4,361,705.95

**Debt to be Paid		
**2015 Refinance	\$ 2,418,062.49	by 12/1/2035
**West Sewer	\$ 58,581.35	by 10/15/2022
**RR Sewer Crossing	\$ 32,042.81	by 7/15/22
Total Debt	\$ 2,508,686.65	

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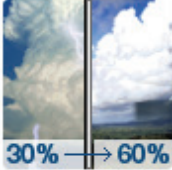


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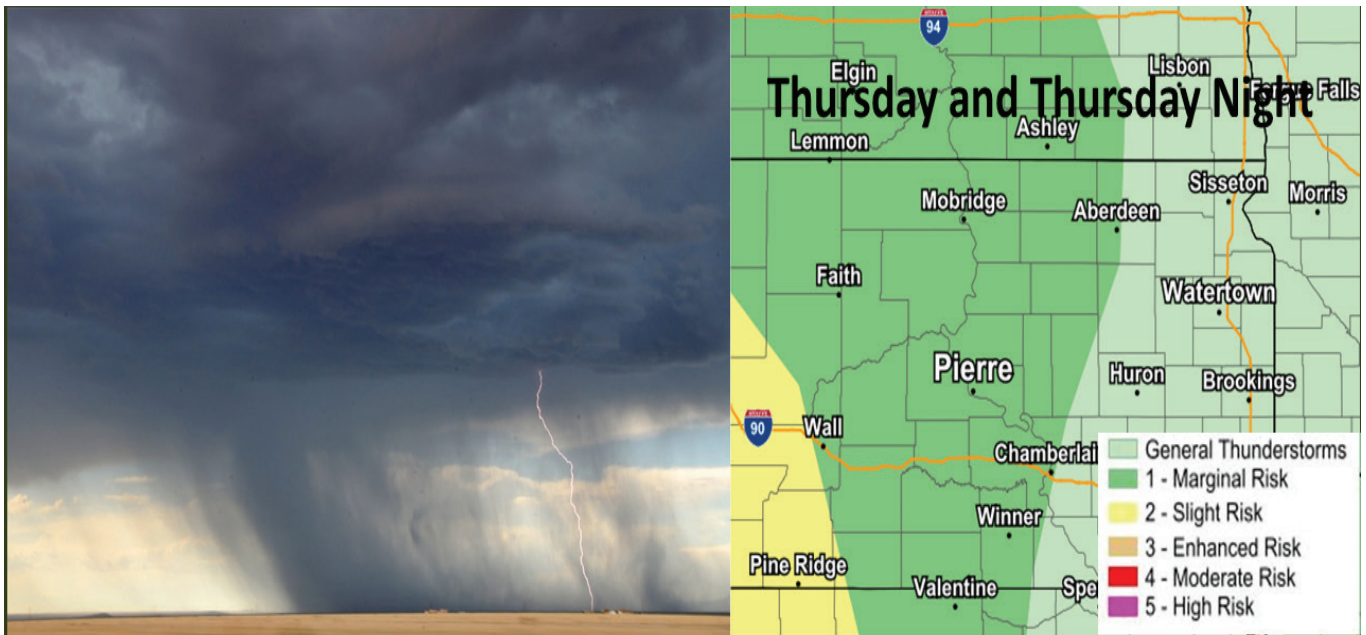
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Broton Daily Independent

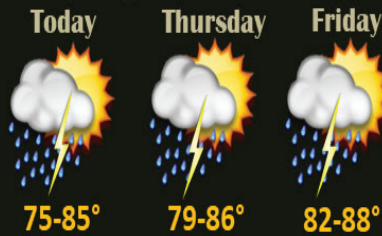
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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
20%	50% 60%	30% → 60%	40%	20%
Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms then Showers Likely	Chance T-storms then Showers Likely	Chance T-storms	Slight Chance T-storms and Breezy
High: 82 °F	Low: 59 °F	High: 83 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 87 °F



Scattered showers and thunderstorms today into the weekend

## 3 Day Forecast



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

5/19/2021 5:44 AM

Scattered showers and storms are expected off and on into the weekend. There is a marginal risk of severe weather west of the James River Valley Thursday and Thursday night. Highs will be in the mid 70s to the mid 80s both today and Thursday.



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## Today in Weather History

May 19, 1982: With the ground in the Black Hills already saturated from heavy rains the previous week, developing thunderstorms were not a welcome sight. The thunderstorms produced additional heavy rains including 3.58 inches at Spearfish, 3.32 inches at Cheyenne Crossing, and 0.82 of an inch in twelve minutes at Hot Springs. With Flash Flood Warnings in effect for much of the area water came out of the banks of many streams causing widespread damage in the Hills. A diversion Dam broke at Spearfish causing a mudslide to cover some roads. In Deadwood, the main water line broke leaving the city temporarily without water. Homes were evacuated at Nisland, Hot Springs, and Bridger. Damage throughout the Black Hills included washed out bridges, flooded basements, several breached dams, and roads completely washed away.

1780: The infamous "dark day" in New England tradition. At noon, it was nearly as dark as night. Chickens went to roost, and many persons were fearful of divine wrath. The "dark day" was caused by forest fires to the west of New England.

1915: A spring storm came to an end after producing widespread snow. Total snowfall from the storm included: 17.6 inches in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, 8 inches at Cheyenne, Wyoming, 7 inches at Chadron and 3.9 inches in North Platte, Nebraska.

1780 - The infamous "dark day" in New England tradition. At noon it was nearly as dark as night. Chickens went to roost, and many persons were fearful of divine wrath. The phenomena was caused by forest fires to the west of New England. (David Ludlum)

1955 - Lake Maloya NM received 11.28 inches of rain in 24 hours to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1975 - Thunderstorms produced golf ball size hail and wind gusts to 110 mph in Minnesota, between Fridley and Hugo. Fifty persons were injured. The hail and high winds destroyed fifty mobile homes, and a dozen aircraft, and also destroyed a third of the Brighton Elementary School. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in Texas produced thirteen inches of rain northwest of Lavernia. The heavy rain, along with golf ball size hail, destroyed eighty percent of the crops in the area, while high winds toppled trees. Golf ball size hail was also reported south of Dallas and around San Antonio. Up to eight inches of rain drenched Guadalupe County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms in southwest Texas produced hail as large as tennis balls around Midland, with the hail accumulating up to a foot deep. Showers and thunderstorms in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region produced 3.5 inches of rain near Schuylkill PA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front spawned ten tornadoes from Illinois to Tennessee during the afternoon and night. Snow, wind and cold prevailed in the Northern Plateau Region and the Northern Rockies. Dixie, ID, was blanketed with nine inches of snow, winds gusted to 87 mph at Choteau MT, and the temperature at Crater Lake, OR, dipped to 11 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms deluged Hot Springs AR with thirteen inches of rain in nine hours resulting in a devastating flood. Two waves of water, four to six feet deep, swept down Central Avenue flooding stores and the famous bathhouses on Bathhouse Row. Water released from Lake Hamilton devastated the area between it and Rammel Dam. The 500 foot Carpenter Dam Bridge across Lake Catherine was completely washed away, as were cabins and mobile homes near the lake, many of which flowed right over the top of Rammel Dam. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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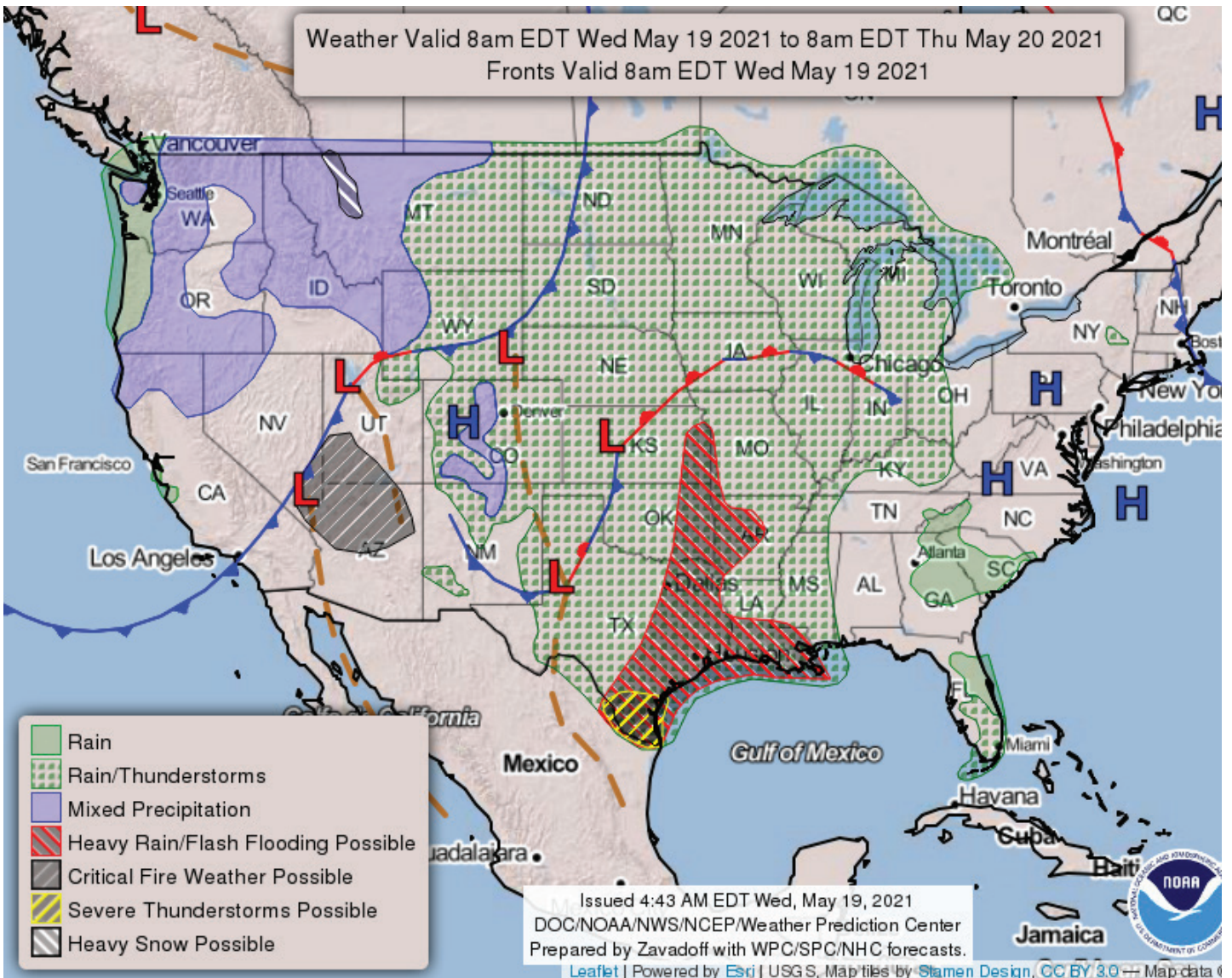
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 75 °F at 5:53 PM**  
**Low Temp: 57 °F at 5:49 AM**  
**Wind: 25 mph at 3:47 PM**  
**Precip: .00**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 97° in 1932**  
**Record Low: 28° in 2002**  
**Average High: 72°F**  
**Average Low: 46°F**  
**Average Precip in May.: 2.00**  
**Precip to date in May.: 0.25**  
**Average Precip to date: 5.97**  
**Precip Year to Date: 3.02**  
**Sunset Tonight: 9:02 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:58 a.m.**



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## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Have you ever met someone who did not like their name? Perhaps it reminded them of a person who disturbed them in one way or another. Or it may have represented something that was offensive to them. Maybe it "sounded" like a girl's name or a boy's name or a sissy's name to them. Sometimes we are "given" names by the way we act or what we do or even how we look.

David knew there was something unique and special about a name that was above every other name. He knew that there was one name that represented the solution for the problems of life. He understood the significance of "that Name." He knew that the road for us to recover from destruction and death to happiness and heaven – was in that Name.

"Save me, O God, by Your name; vindicate me by might." In asking God to save him, David wanted God to deliver him from his sinful condition – even though the Savior had not come into the world to complete His work on the cross. He was aware of his sins and shortcomings and knew that there was nothing he could do to rescue or redeem himself. Only a gracious God who had rescued His children from times of destruction and death in the past could do the same for him in the present. He knew God's power from His story in the past as He brought His children to their Promised Land.

When David called on God's name in prayer, he brought God into that moment in his life. He needed God to be with him, hear him, help him, deliver him and ultimately save him. What about you?

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for the power that Your name represents – power to deliver and save us from ourselves and the sins that would destroy us. We are grateful for the power in Your Name. Amen.

Scripture For Today: Save me, O God, by Your name; vindicate me by might. Psalm 54:1



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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  
06/12/2021 U8 Baseball Tournament  
06/17/2021 Groton Transit Fundraiser, 4-7 p.m.  
06/18/2021 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
06/19/2021 Lions Crazy Golf Fest at Olive Grove Golf Course, Noon  
06/26/2021 U10 Baseball Tournament  
06/27/2021 U12 Baseball Tournament  
07/04/2021 Firecracker Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
07/11/2021 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 10am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)  
07/22/2021 Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/30/2021-08/03/2021 State "B" American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton  
08/06/2021 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course  
09/11/2021 Lions Club Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)  
09/12/2021 Sunflower Classic Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
09/18-19 Groton Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
10/08/2021 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)  
10/09/2021 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm (Saturday before Columbus Day)  
10/29/2021 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
10/31/2021 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)  
11/13/2021 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)  
11/25/2021 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)  
12/11/2021 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon



## News from the Associated Press

### Navajo Nation surpasses Cherokee to become largest US tribe

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — The Navajo Nation has by far the largest land mass of any Native American tribe in the country. Now, it's boasting the largest enrolled population, too.

Navajos clamored to enroll or fix their records as the tribe offered hardship assistance payments from last year's federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act. That boosted the tribe's rolls from about 306,000 to nearly 400,000 citizens.

The figure tops the Cherokee Nation's enrollment of 392,000. But it, too, has been growing, said tribal spokeswoman Julie Hubbard. The Oklahoma tribe has been receiving about 200 more applications per month from potential enrollees, leaving Navajo's position at the top unstable.

The numbers matter because tribes often are allocated money based on their number of citizens. Each of the 574 federally recognized tribes determines how to count its population. Navajo, for example, requires a one-quarter blood quantum to enroll. Cherokee primarily uses lineal descent.

Tribal governments received \$4.8 billion from the CARES Act based on federal housing population data for tribes, which some said was badly skewed. The Treasury Department recently revised the methodology and said it would correct the most substantial disparities.

The Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, one of three tribes that sued the Treasury Department over the payments, said it's satisfied with an additional \$5.2 million it's set to receive. The Miccosukee Tribe of Indians in Florida and the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation in Kansas would get \$825,000 and \$864,000 under the new methodology. Both said those amounts didn't make sense when broken down to a per-person figure. They plan to continue their fight in court.

"We just cannot accept this as it is," Carol Heckman, an attorney for Prairie Band, said in a court hearing last week. "We're happy to keep talking about it, but Treasury would have to sweeten the pie."

The Treasury Department will avoid much of the problems it encountered with CARES Act funding in the distribution of the \$20 billion for tribes under the American Rescue Plan Act. The department said it will use tribally certified enrollment figures to pay out \$12.35 billion and tribal employment data for \$6.65 billion.

Another \$1 billion will be divided equally among eligible tribal governments, the Treasury Department said. Alaska Native corporations, which own much of the Native land in Alaska under a 1971 settlement, aren't eligible for any of the \$20 billion in funding. The U.S. Supreme Court is deciding whether the corporations will get a slice of the CARES Act money.

The Treasury Department set a Monday deadline for tribal governments to submit their information online for the American Rescue Plan funding. It acknowledged that no formula perfectly can capture the needs of tribes, which have suffered disproportionately during the pandemic.

Tribes also won't be under as tight of a deadline to spend the money as they were for the CARES Act and will have more flexibility. They can spend the money to replace lost revenue and improve water, sewer and broadband infrastructure that often lags behind the rest of the U.S.

The Navajo Nation is on track to get the largest share of the enrollment-based funding. About half of its members live on the vast 27,000-square-mile (70,000-square-kilometer) reservation that extends into New Mexico, Arizona and Utah.

The tribe opened the hardship assistance program in November, up against an initial deadline to spend federal virus assistance by the end of the year. It required that applicants be enrolled as Navajo citizens. The response was huge, with the tribe paying out more than \$322 million to more than 293,000 applicants, the tribal controller's office said. Adults received up to \$1,350 and children up to \$450.

On the American Rescue Plan Act funding, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez questioned the fairness of awarding more money to tribes that enroll people with less than one-fourth blood quantum.

"Here on Navajo, we verify blood quantum, and that's a requirement," he told The Associated Press. "If

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they had that same requirement, one-quarter Cherokee, just imagine.”

The U.S. Census reflects higher numbers for Native Americans than tribes’ enrollment records because it allows people to self-identify as Native American and Alaska Native and report ties to multiple Indigenous groups across North America, Central America and South America. Not all of those 5.2 million people are eligible to enroll in tribes. The 2010 count put the Cherokee Nation around 820,000 and Navajo at 332,000.

Cherokee Native Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. said the recent higher enrollment figure from the Navajo Nation government shows Natives are strong and an important force for economies, education and environment.

“It’s truly a positive anytime our citizenship grows and thrives,” he said in a statement.

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

03-05-56-61-66, Mega Ball: 4, Megaplier: 2

(three, five, fifty-six, sixty-one, sixty-six; Mega Ball: four; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$475 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$201 million

## Noem’s Mount Rushmore lawsuit sparks legal fight with tribe

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem’s lawsuit against the federal government over a July Fourth fireworks display she wants to put on at Mount Rushmore has reignited legal tensions between her and the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

The tribe last week sought to join the lawsuit in opposition to Noem, who is asking a federal judge to order the National Park Service to allow the fireworks display. The Republican governor sued the Department of Interior last month after the Park Service denied the state’s application for the event, citing safety concerns and objections from local Native American tribes.

The tribal lawsuit touches on a century-old dispute over ownership and control of the Black Hills, which include Mount Rushmore. The Supreme Court ruled in 1980 that the land was taken from tribes in violation of treaty agreements and offered them a monetary payment.

In the lawsuit over fireworks at Mount Rushmore, the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and Steve Vance, the tribe’s historic preservation officer, argue that they should be allowed to take part in the lawsuit because the land on which Mount Rushmore sits is “our most sacred site — the Heart of Everything That Is.”

“The fact that this event could be forced upon us in our sacred lands despite our clear opposition to the event traumatizes us as a people and inflicts grief upon us. To us, allowing this event to occur again is a colonial attack on one of our most sacred places,” the tribe and Vance argue in court documents.

Noem, in a document filed Sunday, opposed the tribe’s request to join the lawsuit, arguing that the tribe doesn’t have standing in what is a “state-federal dispute.” Her lawyers argue that the fireworks display wouldn’t hinder the tribe’s religious or free speech rights.

When she filed the lawsuit, Noem included patriotic arguments on why the fireworks should be allowed and argued that the permit’s denial was an “arbitrary and capricious” decision based on politics.

Chief Judge Roberto Lange of the federal district court of South Dakota hasn’t ruled on whether the tribe can join the suit. He indicated that he’ll decide by June 2 whether to issue a preliminary injunction to force the Park Service to allow the fireworks this summer. The governor’s daughter, who worked as a federal liaison for her mother for last July’s event, said in a court filing that the governor’s office had invited tribal leaders to provide their perspective on it.

Noem wrote to President Joe Biden last month that the tribes were consulted before the event last year.

But in a statement Tuesday, the tribe denied that was the case.

"The office of the Chairman has no record of any consultations with the State of South Dakota or the federal government regarding fireworks in the sacred Black Hills," the tribe said.

Noem and the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe have had a tense relationship that deteriorated last year when she threatened to sue it over coronavirus checkpoints the tribe set up to keep unnecessary visitors off its reservation during the pandemic. Noem backed away from her threat, but the tribe sued then-President Donald Trump's administration for attempting to coerce it into removing its checkpoints. That case hasn't been settled and it isn't clear if the tribe will persist with it under Biden's administration.

South Dakota also sued the tribe and its chairman, Harold Frazier, for changing speed limit signs on a state highway that runs through the reservation.

Noem has also clashed with other tribes in the state. But on Monday, she announced she would host an event called the Governor's Round Dance in Pierre this week. Out of nine tribes in the state, the elected leaders of two tribes — the Yankton Sioux Tribe and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe — said they would attend, according to Noem's office.

## As COVID-19 shots slow, doctors turn to 1-on-1 conversations

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The number of South Dakota residents receiving an initial dose of a COVID-19 vaccination has slowed dramatically in recent weeks, prompting medical experts and community leaders to turn to personal conversations to battle misinformation around getting a shot.

Just over 4,000 people statewide received their first shot last week, according to the Department of Health — a big drop-off from the end of March, when the state recorded a high mark of over 26,000 people receiving their first shot in a week.

At that point, vaccine sites were doing brisk business and the state seemed to defy a trend of skepticism around COVID-19 shots in states dominated by Republican politics. South Dakota had boasted one of the highest vaccination percentage rates in the nation; just weeks later, its ranking has tumbled to 24th.

"Demand just plummeted," said Julia Yoder, a spokeswoman for the Brookings Health system who has also been overseeing mass vaccination sites for Brookings County. "Before you couldn't keep enough in stock, and then it went to crickets. We couldn't convince people to sign up."

South Dakota appears to have run into what Alan Morgan, the head of the National Rural Health Association, calls a "rural wall" of vaccine hesitancy. Reaching those holding out against getting vaccinated will be crucial to avoiding further waves of the virus, but instead of mass campaigns, medical providers are planning the next phase of vaccinations around personal conversations and convenience, hoping that trusted doctors and faith leaders can assuage fears.

They plan to make the case to get vaccinated through an array of strategies: another push around the Pfizer vaccine being authorized for children as young as 12, one-on-one conversations with doctors and encouraging faith leaders to become proponents of getting a shot.

Morgan said that much of the messaging around vaccinations has not been "relevant" to rural communities, adding "politicians, government officials and movie stars" are not the best messengers to reach people in rural communities.

"In a rural context, this has to be local," he said.

In South Dakota, several rural counties have dragged far behind the state's population centers in vaccination rates, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Harding and McPherson counties, sparsely populated areas on the state's northern border, have yet to break 15% of people eligible for the vaccine receiving a shot, according to the CDC.

The Department of Health has reported that statewide 57% of people eligible for a vaccine have received at least one shot. Republican Gov. Kristi Noem has said she believes the state is "very, very close" to herd immunity, given the rate of vaccinations and people who have recovered from the virus. But the Department of Health has a goal of vaccinating at least 70% of people eligible for shots. To reach that

goal, almost 80,000 more people would need to get a vaccine. Unless the rate of vaccinations picks up dramatically, that would take at least the next four months.

State health officials say their counts do not include shots administered by federal agencies like Indian Health Services or Veterans Affairs.

Misty Rudebusch, the medical director of a network of rural health clinics called Horizon Health Care, has found herself addressing concerns her patients have after reading about the vaccines on social media.

"What I have found most effective is ... really letting them voice their biggest concerns and finding what we need to focus on for them," she said. "Everybody has a little different question."

Rudebusch said health care providers are looking for new ways to spark those conversations, including prompting during dental visits and by reaching out to schools to help deliver credible information on vaccines. Medical experts are also encouraging religious leaders such as pastors and priests to discuss vaccinations.

Herman Perez, a pastor who works with several rural Latino communities, has tried to address concerns people have after watching YouTube videos filled with misinformation. He said it's important to be sensitive, while using the trust he has as a pastor to encourage getting a shot.

"They ask me if it's OK to be vaccinated," he said. "I leave the door open. I tell them it's a personal decision, but I think it's a good idea."

## Thune has primary challenger for US Senate seat

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A man who describes himself as a ranch-raised South Dakotan plans to challenge John Thune for his U.S. Senate seat in next year's Republican primary.

Mark Mowry doesn't come from the world of politics. Mowry's career path includes music, writing, communications and education.

The husband and father of four grown children says he's running on an "America First" platform.

"The moorings of our republic are built on the strength of family. I will not vote in a manner that compromises the strength of the nuclear family," Mowry said. "I believe we have been bamboozled by the pandemic. I will support every effort to reopen every aspect of our economy to run at full strength again, without regard to the world's blessings or curses. We need to take up the helm if we are to maintain a republic."

He and his wife took their children to India in 1993 for a mission trip and ended up working and serving there for the next 20 years.

Mowry said he does not support defunding law enforcement, but does support managing protests with stronger measures and tough protections of the nation's borders. He said he believes in small federal government and less federal regulations, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Thune was first elected to the Senate in 2004 and currently serves as minority whip.

## Driver arrested, accused of running over and killing man

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Police have made an arrest in the death of a man who was run over by a vehicle in Rapid City last week.

According to authorities, investigators spoke with witnesses and reviewed surveillance video and determined that the driver, the victim and another individual were drinking alcohol in the vehicle while it was parked along a street last Friday night.

At one point, the victim, 47-year-old Paul Walking, of Pine Ridge, got out of the car and walked around to the rear of the vehicle. The driver, a 34-year-old Rapid City man, put the car in reverse and backed over the victim, then ran over him a second time when he put the vehicle in drive to pull forward, officials said.

The driver is being held in the Pennington County Jail on a possible charge of vehicular homicide.

## Pedicabs launching in downtown Sioux Falls



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SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — There's another option for getting around downtown Sioux Falls. Besides ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft, environmentally friendly Pedicabs will soon hit the streets.

Pedicabs, sometimes called cycle rickshaws or bike taxis, are three-wheeled vehicles that have seating in the back and a driver in front who will peddle to your destination.

Emmett Reistroffer is the founder of the new Sioux Falls Pedicabs.

"I saw a lot of pedicabs when I lived in Denver, Colorado. That's where I first got the idea when I took my mom out for dinner on the 16th Street Mall. We took a pedicab, and she had such a great time we took another pedicab ride after dinner," Reistroffer said.

"Across the country and across the world, people are getting around in a lot of different ways," Reistroffer said.

Downtown Sioux Falls President Joe Batcheller tells KELO-TV that as the city continues to grow, so do options for travel.

"I think that it speaks to our cultural evolution as a community, that we're ready to try new things," Batcheller said.

The business will start with two pedicabs, then Reistroffer hopes to have up to four or five cycling the streets by next month. He said the drivers are also going to serve as tour guides.

"I want the drivers to really know Sioux Falls, love Sioux Falls," Reistroffer said.

Sioux Falls Pedicabs will officially launch on May 29.

## The Latest: Pakistan denounces Israel's airstrikes on Gaza

By The Associated Press undefined

ISLAMABAD-- Pakistan's foreign minister has denounced Israel's continued airstrikes against the Gaza Strip in a meeting with his Palestinian counterpart.

Shah Mahmood Qureshi made his comment during a meeting with Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki during a visit to Turkey. Qureshi will travel next to New York to address the U.N. General Assembly to demand an immediate halt to Israel's attacks on Palestinians.

According to a foreign ministry statement, Qureshi denounced Israel's attacks on Palestinians. The statement also quotes al-Maliki praising Pakistan's efforts aimed at mobilizing international support for the Palestinians.

TEL AVIV, Israel -- Israeli military officials say a mysterious explosion that killed eight members of a Palestinian family on the first day of the current round of fighting in the Gaza Strip was caused by a misfired Palestinian rocket, not an Israeli airstrike.

Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, a military spokesman, said the rocket was launched in Gaza and fell inside Gaza and killed "almost an entire family." Conricus added that "this wasn't an Israeli attack."

A senior military officer on Wednesday said the incident was investigated, and Israel did not strike the Beit Hanoun area where the family members were killed that night.

The officer said a total of 700 rockets — roughly one-fifth of the total launched by Palestinian militants — failed to reach Israel and landed inside Gaza. He provided no further estimates on how many Palestinians had been harmed by errant rocket fire. The officer spoke on condition of anonymity under military briefing guidelines.

At least 219 Palestinians have been killed in airstrikes, including 63 children and 36 women, with 1,530 people wounded, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. It does not break down how many militants are among the dead or whether people have died from misfired rockets.

Israel says Hamas is responsible for civilian deaths because the militant group uses residential areas for cover to fire rockets and carry out other military operations. Twelve people in Israel have also been killed, 10 by rocket fire aimed at Israeli towns and cities. Two people died in accidents while rushing for shelter.

TEL AVIV, Israel — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says Israel is pursuing "forceful deterrence"

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against Gaza's Hamas rulers and does not rule out a further escalation.

Meeting with foreign ambassadors on Wednesday, he said "you can either conquer them, and that's always an open possibility, or you can deter them."

"We are engaged right now in forceful deterrence, but I have to say, we don't rule out anything."

Israel has carried out hundreds of airstrikes against what it says are militant targets in Gaza since the fourth war between the two sides broke out earlier this month. Hamas and other militants have fired more than 3,700 rockets at Israel.

Netanyahu said Israel hopes to restore quiet "quickly" and is doing everything it can to avoid civilian casualties.

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — Israeli airstrikes have killed at least six people overnight across the Gaza Strip and destroyed the home of an extended family.

Despite growing international pressure for a cease-fire, the military said Wednesday it widened its strikes on militant targets in the Palestinian territory's south to blunt continuing rocket fire from Hamas.

Residents surveyed the piles of bricks, concrete and other debris that had once been the home of 40 members of al-Astal family. They said everyone escaped after a warning missile hit the house.

The Israeli military says it struck militant targets around the towns of Khan Younis and Rafah.

Gaza health officials say at least 219 Palestinians have been killed in airstrikes. Twelve people in Israel have been killed in rocket attacks.

## Grand day for the French: Cafe and bistro terraces reopen

By ELAINE GANLEY and THOMAS ADAMSON undefined

PARIS (AP) — It's a grand day for the French. Cafe and restaurant terraces reopened Wednesday after a six-month coronavirus shutdown deprived residents of the essence of French life — sipping coffee and wine with friends.

The French government is lifting restrictions incrementally to stave off a resurgence of COVID-19 and to give citizens back some of their signature "joie de vivre." As part of the plan's first stage, France's 7 p.m. nightly curfew was pushed back to 9 p.m. and museums, theaters and cinemas reopened along with outdoor cafe terraces.

President Emmanuel Macron, among the first to take a seat at a cafe terrace, was seen chatting with customers and with Prime Minister Jean Castex, projecting a mood of measured optimism.

"Let's get used to try and live together," Macron told reporters at the cafe. "If we manage to get well organized collectively and continue vaccinating, have a common discipline as citizens, there's no reason why we can't continue moving forward."

Castex planned to attend a cinema later Wednesday. Actress Emmanuel Beart, meanwhile, went to a movie theater opening in Paris where her latest film "L'Étreinte" ("The Embrace") was showing — among the scores of movies produced during the shutdown.

France is not the first European country to start getting back a semblance of social and cultural life. Italy, Belgium, Hungary and other nations already have started allowing outdoor dining, while drinking and eating indoors began Monday in Britain's pubs.

Eateries in France have been closed since the end of October, the longest time of any European country except Poland, where bars and restaurants reopened Saturday for outdoor service after being closed for seven months.

French cafe and restaurant owners spent days preparing for Wednesday's milestone, despite the rainy weather.

Still, the government has put limits on how much fun can be had. Restaurants are can fill only 50% of their outdoor seating areas and put no more than six people at a table. Movie theaters can only seat 35% of capacity, while museums must restrict entries to give more space between visitors.

Starting June 9, the French government plans to extend the curfew until 11 p.m. and to permit indoor

dining. The final phase of the three-stage reopening plan is scheduled for June 30, when the curfew will end and all other restrictions will be lifted, if pandemic conditions allow.

Macron's plan to bring France out of the pandemic aren't just about resuscitating long-closed restaurants, boutiques and museums, but also about preparing his possible campaign for a second term. Before next year's presidential election, Macron is focusing on saving jobs and reviving the pandemic-battered French economy.

France has recorded more than 108,000 deaths due to COVID-19, among the highest tolls in Europe. But virus deaths, admissions to critical care units and the coronavirus infection rate are now on the decline.

Dr. Michel Slama, chief of the Intensive Care Unit at Amiens Hospital, said his stance, like Macron's, was "optimistic but prudent."

"We are attentive about the reopening but worried is not the word," he told The Associated Press. "There has been a significant drop in emergency hospital admissions for the virus in France. That's good news. The high vaccine rate now we hope will help us avoid a new wave."

About 40% of France's adult population has received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose — but that rate is still well behind Britain's 70% and behind several other EU nations.

Tourists waited excitedly as the cordon around the world's most visited museum and home of the "Mona Lisa", the Louvre, was finally lifted.

"It means a lot, you know. It means COVID-19 is starting to finish, when it's the opening of all museums and public areas," said Walid Hneini, a Lebanese tourist.

Benoit Puez, a Parisian art lover, was more understated but still pleased about France opening up.

"Maybe I didn't really miss it, but we are happy it's reopening. It's a stage."

## Israeli airstrikes kill 6, level large family home in Gaza

By FARES AKRAM and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli airstrikes killed at least six people across the Gaza Strip and destroyed the home of an extended family early Wednesday. Despite growing international pressure for a cease-fire, the military said it widened its strikes on militant targets in the Palestinian territory's south to blunt continuing rocket fire from Hamas.

Residents surveyed the piles of bricks, concrete and other debris that had once been the home of 40 members of al-Astal family in the southern Gaza town of Khan Younis. They said a warning missile struck the building five minutes before the airstrike, allowing everyone to escape.

Ahmed al-Astal, a university professor, described a scene of panic before the airstrike hit, with men, women and children racing out of the building. Some of the women didn't even have time to cover their hair with Muslim headscarves, he said.

"We had just gotten down to the street, breathless, when the devastating bombardment came," he said. "They left nothing but destruction, the children's cries filling the street. ... This is happening, and there is no one to help us. We ask God to help us."

The Israeli military said it struck militant targets around the towns of Khan Younis and Rafah, with 52 aircraft hitting 40 underground targets. Gaza's Health Ministry said a woman was killed and eight people were wounded in those strikes.

Hamas-run Al-Aqsa radio said one of its reporters was killed in an airstrike in Gaza City. Among the six killed Wednesday were also two people who died when warning missiles crashed into their apartment.

The latest strikes came as diplomatic efforts aimed at a cease-fire gathered strength and Gaza's infrastructure, already weakened by a 14-year blockade, rapidly deteriorated. Medical supplies, water and fuel for electricity are running low in territory, on which Israel and Egypt imposed the blockade after the Islamic militant group Hamas seized power in 2007.

The Biden administration was privately encouraging Israel to wind down its bombardment of Gaza. Egyptian negotiators also were working to halt the fighting, and while they have not made progress with Israel, they were optimistic international pressure would force it to the table. Officials discussed the sensi-

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tive diplomacy on condition of anonymity.

But it was still unclear if or how soon those efforts would yield results. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel hopes to restore quiet "quickly" but did not exclude the possibility of further escalation.

"You can either conquer them, and that's always an open possibility, or you can deter them," he told foreign ambassadors. "We are engaged right now in forceful deterrence, but I have to say, we don't rule out anything."

The fighting began May 10 when Hamas fired long-range rockets toward Jerusalem after days of clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a flashpoint site sacred to Jews and Muslims. Heavy-handed police tactics at the compound and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers had inflamed tensions.

At least 219 Palestinians have been killed in airstrikes, including 63 children and 36 women, with 1,530 people wounded, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not break the numbers down into fighters and civilians. Hamas and Islamic Jihad say at least 20 of their fighters have been killed, while Israel says the number is at least 130. Some 58,000 Palestinians have fled their homes.

Twelve people in Israel, including a 5-year-old boy and a soldier, have been killed in rocket attacks.

The Israeli military has launched hundreds of airstrikes it says are targeting Hamas' militant infrastructure, while Palestinian militants have fired more than 3,700 rockets at Israel, with hundreds falling short and most of the rest intercepted. The rockets have reached a number of Israeli cities, including Tel Aviv, and have brought life to a standstill in areas near Gaza.

Israeli attacks have damaged at least 18 hospitals and clinics and destroyed one health facility, the World Health Organization said. Nearly half of all essential drugs have run out.

The Gaza Health Ministry said it had salvaged coronavirus vaccines after shrapnel from an Israeli airstrike damaged the territory's only testing facility, which also administered hundreds of vaccines. The operations were relocated to another clinic.

Dr. Majdi Dhair, head of preventive medicine at the ministry, said the territory was already struggling to recover from a coronavirus wave that hit in February, with more than 4,200 active cases. At least 986 people have died from COVID-19 in Gaza, which only has enough supplies to vaccinate some 55,000 people out of a population of 2 million.

Among the buildings leveled by Israeli airstrikes was one housing The Associated Press' Gaza office and those of other media outlets.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu alleged that Hamas military intelligence was operating in the building. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday that Israel had given the U.S. information about the bombing, without elaborating.

The AP has called for an independent investigation of the attack. The news organization's president, Gary Pruitt, has said the AP had no indication Hamas was present in the building and that "this is something we check as best we can."

The fighting — the worst since a 2014 war between Israel and Hamas — has ignited protests around the world and inspired Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories to call a general strike Tuesday. It was a rare collective action that spanned boundaries central to decades of failed peace efforts. Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza in the 1967 Mideast war, territories the Palestinians want for their future state.

Although the strike was peaceful in many places, with shops in east Jerusalem's usually bustling Old City markets shuttered, violence erupted in the occupied West Bank.

Hundreds of Palestinians burned tires in Ramallah, where the Palestinian Authority is headquartered, and hurled stones at an Israeli military checkpoint. Three protesters were killed and more than 140 wounded in clashes with Israeli troops in several cities, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. The Israeli army said two soldiers were wounded in Ramallah by gunshots to the leg.

**Countdown begins to discover where Columbus came from**



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MADRID (AP) — Was Christopher Columbus really from Genoa, in Italy? Or was he Spanish? Or, as some other theories have it, was he Portuguese or Croatian or even Polish?

A definitive answer to the question of where the famous explorer came from could be just five months away as international scientists on Wednesday launched an effort to read the DNA from his remains and identify his geographic origin.

Their findings are to be made public in October.

Knowledge of the 15th-century navigator's early life is scant.

A major breakthrough in establishing a fuller profile of the man who died 515 years ago came after DNA tests in 2003 established that bones in a tomb in the cathedral of Seville were those of Columbus.

But after that discovery, the research team from Spain's University of Granada that is leading the Columbus research decided to halt its investigation. The reason: DNA technology at the time was neither accurate nor reliable and required a significant amount of genetic material.

After leaps in the sophistication of DNA testing in recent years, gene geography may now ascertain the rough area of a European person's ancestry.

José Antonio Lorente, a professor of forensic medicine at Granada University, said there had been a "radical" improvement in DNA analysis, which now permits tests on very small fragments.

He said researchers are working with four small bone fragments from Columbus, seven bone fragments and a tooth from his son Hernando, and a dozen bone fragments in poor condition from his brother Diego.

The fragments are being sent to genetic identification laboratories in Rome and Florence in Italy, Mexico and the United States, Lorente told an online press conference.

Lorente said he believes the generally accepted theory that Columbus was from Genoa, but the project aims to resolve some "mysteries ... and contradictions" in the historical record and obtain "as much information as possible ... so that there is no argument."

Granada University on Wednesday was hosting what it called the first world meeting of Columbus researchers, who are presenting evidence for their different theories about the explorer's origins.

Columbus's four transatlantic voyages on behalf of the Spanish monarchs between 1492 and 1504 opened a door to Europe's colonization of the Americas, then known as the New World.

Columbus died on May 20, 1506 and was buried in the Spanish city of Valladolid, though he had asked to be buried in the Americas.

## House to vote on independent panel to probe Jan. 6 attack

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, ALAN FRAM and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House is poised to vote on a 9/11-style commission on the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, a first step toward creating an independent, bipartisan panel that would investigate the siege and try to prevent it from happening again.

While the measure is expected to be approved Wednesday by the House, a commission will likely be a more difficult sell in the Senate. Republicans there are signaling that they will try to block — or at least slow down — the effort.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said Tuesday that he is "pushing the pause button" on the legislation to form the commission. While controlling the Senate, Democrats would need at least 10 GOP votes to pass the measure under Senate rules.

McConnell told reporters that his caucus is "undecided" but willing to listen to arguments about "whether such a commission is needed." He questioned whether the panel's work would interfere with the hundreds of criminal cases stemming from the Jan. 6 attack, in which rioters brutally beat police, broke in through windows and doors and hunted for lawmakers as they fled. McConnell said he also wanted to read the "fine print" of the bill and ensure that both parties on the commission have an equal say.

McConnell also questioned a separate \$1.9 billion spending bill that the House is expected to pass this week for security upgrades. "We're not sure what to spend the money on yet," he said.

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McConnell's hesitancy came hours after House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy said he would oppose the bill. The two leaders' positions will almost certainly mean fewer Republicans will support the commission in both chambers, as most in the party are still loath to upset former President Donald Trump. He had encouraged his supporters to head to Capitol Hill that day to stop the counting of the electoral votes and overturn his defeat to Democrat Joe Biden.

Trump released a statement Tuesday night urging Republicans against approving what he called a "Democrat trap."

The votes in the House and Senate will also expose divisions in the party, as some Republicans have said they think an independent review is necessary.

In private GOP caucus meetings across the Capitol on Tuesday, members argued for and against the idea. Several Republican lawmakers joined McCarthy in speaking against the commission early Tuesday during a meeting of House Republicans, according to one Republican familiar with the private session who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss it. The Republican who negotiated the bill with Democrats, New York Rep. John Katko, argued in favor.

"I recognize there are differing views on this issue, which is an inherent part of the legislative process and not something I take personally," Katko said in a statement. "However, as the Republican Leader of the Homeland Security Committee, I feel a deep obligation to get the answers U.S. Capitol Police and Americans deserve and ensure an attack on the heart of our democracy never happens again."

McConnell said his caucus had "a good discussion" in their closed-door lunch.

Some Republicans, such as Missouri Sen. Roy Blunt, recommended that his colleagues oppose the commission. Blunt, the top Republican on the Senate Rules Committee, is working on a bipartisan report with his Democratic colleagues that will include some recommendations for security upgrades. He said an independent investigation would take too long and "frankly, I don't think there are that many gaps to be filled in on what happened on Jan. 6, as it relates to building security."

Other Senate Republicans have signaled support for the commission. Utah Sen. Mitt Romney said Tuesday that given the violent attack, "we should understand what mistakes were made and how we could prevent them from happening again."

Modeled after the investigation into the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, the bill would establish an independent, 10-member commission that would make recommendations for securing the Capitol and preventing another insurrection. The panel would have to issue a final report by Dec. 31.

The debate over the commission comes at a time when some Republicans have begun to downplay the severity of the Jan. 6 attack. And many Republicans say the commission should only be established if it can investigate other violent acts, including racial justice protests last summer following the killing of George Floyd by police. McConnell declined to answer a question about whether he agreed with that, despite advocating for a broader investigation earlier this year. On Tuesday, McConnell would say only that Republicans were "evaluating what is appropriate."

Some have suggested that McCarthy himself could be subpoenaed by the panel because he talked to Trump as the Capitol was breached. Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, who was booted out of GOP leadership last week for her criticism of Trump's false claims of a stolen election, suggested as much in an interview with ABC News, saying she "wouldn't be surprised" if McCarthy was questioned in the investigation. Cheney has backed the commission.

Cheney and Katko are two of 10 Republicans who voted to impeach Trump after the insurrection for telling his supporters that day to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat. The Senate later acquitted him.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., called McCarthy's opposition to the commission "cowardice" and said he doesn't want to find the truth. She released a February letter from the GOP leader in which he asked for an even split of Democrats and Republican commissioners, equal subpoena power and no predetermined findings or conclusions listed in the legislation. The bipartisan legislation accommodates all three of those requests, she said.

"Leader McCarthy won't take yes for an answer," she said.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., vowed to bring the House measure for a vote. "Re-

publicans can let their constituents know: Are they on the side for truth or are they going to cover up?" Schumer said.

He questioned why Republicans even negotiate with Democrats "if the Republican leaders are just going to throw their lead negotiators under the bus."

The Biden administration said that it supports the legislation and that the American people deserve "a full and fair accounting to prevent future violence and strengthen the security and resilience of our democratic institutions."

## Can monthly cash payments cut child poverty by nearly half?

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — The check won't arrive until mid-July, but Katrina Peters already knows what she'll do with her Child Tax Credit payments. The 20-year-old mother of three has applied to work as a driver with a food delivery app, and the extra cash is earmarked for repairing, registering and insuring her car.

"I just need to make sure it's 100% and then I can start working and get an income," Peters said, cradling her 3-week-old son, Armani. "That's where it starts."

The payments are a key part of Democrats' COVID-19 aid bill passed in March, but for policymakers they are more than just an attempt to help families recover from the pandemic. The monthly checks of up to \$300 per child for millions of families are part of an ambitious attempt to shrink child poverty and rethink the American social safety net in the process.

With an emphasis on direct, no-strings cash support, the payments are a deliberate departure from a system that for decades has tried to control how Americans spend their government assistance by funneling it to food, housing or child care. Peters is as free to use the cash on her car as she is to spend it on diapers.

"There's something huge happening with the idea that the lowest-income people need cash assistance the most," said Teague Gonzalez, public benefits director with the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty. "The pandemic opened up a connection to the idea of giving people cash and letting them decide how to use it."

The expanded CTC payments, which are due to begin going out July 15, are only meant to last a year, but architects and proponents aren't trying to hide the fact that they want to make this permanent. The coronavirus pandemic, they say, laid bare the inadequacies of America's support system and provided the political momentum to make lasting changes.

"If implemented well, this could be transformative," said Emma Mehrabi, director of poverty policy at the Children's Defense Fund. "This could cut child poverty in nearly half."

Part of the American Rescue Plan, the Child Tax Credit provisions will increase the payments and greatly expand the number of families eligible. The practical result will be direct payments for each child to families ranging from impoverished to solidly middle class — \$3,600 per year for children under age 6 and \$3,000 per year for older children. Roughly 39 million households will receive at least partial payments, covering an estimated 88 percent of American children.

Columbia University's Center on Poverty and Social Policy estimates the cash infusions could lift 45% of children living in poverty above the poverty line — cutting Black child poverty by 52%, Hispanic child poverty by 45% and Native American child poverty by 62%.

In places like New Mexico, a state with one of the highest rates of children living in poverty, this is a potential crossroads. One in 4 New Mexican children is considered impoverished, compared with 1 in 7 nationally.

With three kids under age 6, Peters is due to receive up to \$900 per month, and all of it is welcome. Her construction worker boyfriend has been out of work due to the pandemic, she said, her government subsidized housing voucher has expired and only the national eviction moratorium has protected her. Armani requires a special kind of baby formula that she can't buy with her government nutrition program benefits.

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"Sixteen dollars a can, and he goes through it in two or three days," she said.

Democratic New Mexico Sen. Martin Heinrich said the philosophy behind the payments is to treat child poverty as an avoidable traumatic event — one that has been proved to impact future academic performance, emotional stability, earning power and legal record.

"It affects your ability to have positive relationships, both professionally and in your home life. ... The more of these stack up, you're more likely to have problems with the legal system, unsuccessful relationships, lower lifetime income," Heinrich said.

Besides a basic acknowledgement by the government that raising children is expensive for almost anybody, advocates said the payments are an expression of faith in the judgment of struggling families.

"It's an issue of trust. We need to trust these families to do what's right," said Jeffrey Hoehn, executive director of Cuidando Los Ninos, an Albuquerque charity that provides housing, child care and financial counseling for mothers transitioning from homelessness. "We find that our single moms, they know where every single penny goes. It's just that they don't have enough pennies."

Hoehn said different families will have shifting needs and resources from month to month, putting the cash toward rent, utilities or even therapeutic leisure activities. In a sprawling town like Albuquerque, it's hard to find work without a car, and Hoehn said many families his group works with are looking to the extra cash to acquire or fix a vehicle.

For Margarita Mora, the money is earmarked to help cushion her family's transition to stability. The 36-year-old mother of three had been staying in an Albuquerque motel converted into a family shelter and would soon be getting her own subsidized apartment through Cuidando Los Ninos.

"I'll be able to pay my utilities and basic supplies, plus gas to go look for work," said Mora, an unemployed caregiver. "And I need to work on my debt. My credit score isn't so great."

The money isn't only going to the neediest. Carissa Oswald, a stay-at-home mom in Albuquerque whose partner works with the local railroad, counts herself as middle class. But having given up her work as a caregiver to raise her 11-month-old daughter, she finds that money is frequently tight.

"Kids are expensive, right? It would let us breathe a little bit easier," she said. "The tension is real. The stress is real."

New Mexico state Rep. Javier Martinez, a Democrat from Albuquerque, calls the CTC a "philosophical shift from mid-20th century programs" like Medicaid and food stamps.

"And I don't think we're going back," he said.

Martinez highlights the fact that CTC payments will be monthly, instead of some annual balloon payment, as a crucial distinction. The smaller monthly boosts, he said, are more likely to be incorporated into the household budget and "create certainty in a family."

The expanded CTC expires in 2022, although President Joe Biden has proposed extending it through 2025. Whether that happens may depend on whether advocates can demonstrate a positive impact — and whether opponents, primarily Republicans, find evidence of waste.

Heinrich said he expects that opponents will have no problem gathering examples of parents spending money on things deemed unnecessary and he is braced for a revival of the Ronald Reagan-era "welfare queen" trope. The future of the program may well be riding on the outcome of the 2022 congressional elections, when Democrats will seek to retain their slim majorities in both the House and the Senate.

For now, CTC supporters are counting on enough positive examples to counter the criticisms, plus the fact that monthly cash should be popular with both Democratic and Republican families up and down the income ladder.

"There will be plenty of compelling anecdotes on either side of it," Heinrich said. "At the same time we will have the data by then to show what a difference it has made. I want to see the data, and I suspect that in New Mexico, this will have an enormous impact."

## Indian navy recovers 22 bodies from barge that sank in storm

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press



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NEW DELHI (AP) — Indian navy ships recovered 22 bodies of people who were aboard a barge that sank off Mumbai as a cyclone blew ashore this week, officials said Wednesday.

The search is continuing for 55 more missing people, navy spokesman Mehul Karnik said.

He said the three ships and helicopters involved in the search had rescued 184 people in rough seas with waves of up to seven meters (25 feet).

Cyclone Tauktae, the most powerful storm to hit the region in more than two decades, packed sustained winds of up to 210 kilometers (130 miles) per hour when it came ashore in Gujarat state late Monday. The storm left more than 50 dead in Gujarat and Maharashtra states.

The weather has since improved and the search operation for the missing people has been intensified, navy Cdr. Alok Anand said.

A survivor told the New Delhi Television news channel that he jumped into the sea with his life jacket and was later picked up by the navy.

In another operation, a navy helicopter rescued 35 crewmembers of another barge, GAL Constructor, which ran aground north of Mumbai, a government statement said.

Both barges were working for Oil and Natural Gas Corp., the largest crude oil and natural gas company in India.

The company said the barges were carrying personnel deployed for offshore drilling and their anchors gave away during the storm. India's biggest offshore oil rigs are located off Mumbai.

The Hindu newspaper reported that more than 16,000 houses were damaged by the cyclone in Gujarat state.

The storm has weakened into a depression centered over the south of Rajasthan state and adjoining Gujarat region, the Indian Meteorological Department said Wednesday.

In neighboring Nepal, authorities asked mountaineers to descend from high altitudes because the storm might bring severe weather.

Hundreds of climbers, guides and staff are attempting to climb various mountains in Nepal this month, when weather is usually the most favorable in the high altitudes. Nepal has eight of the world's 14 highest peaks, including Mount Everest.

Nepal's Department of Tourism on Tuesday asked climbers and outfitting agencies to monitor the weather and stay safe.

In 2014, snowstorms and avalanches triggered by a cyclone in India killed 43 people in Nepal's mountains in the worst hiking disaster in the Himalayan nation.

The snowstorms were believed to be whipped by the tail end of a cyclone that hit the Indian coast a few days earlier.

The blizzards swept through the popular Annapurna trekking route and hikers were caught off-guard when the weather changed quickly.

## **GOP seeks political opening amid tense Israel-Hamas fighting**

By ALAN FRAM and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans trying to drive a wedge between Democrats and chip away at President Joe Biden's support are zeroing in on the violence in the Middle East, laying blame on his administration and aiming to make his liberal critics the face of the party heading into the midterm elections.

GOP Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas and Tom Cotton of Arkansas, both potential White House hopefuls in 2024, have focused in particular on Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and other progressives for criticizing Israel amid an escalating volley of missiles and airstrikes in Hamas-controlled Gaza that has killed hundreds of civilians over the last week.

The approach represents a new strategy for Republicans who have struggled to land consistent and effective criticism of Biden and his fellow Democrats during the opening months of his presidency. In focusing on the fighting in Gaza, the GOP is aiming to demonstrate staunch support for Israel, an issue of deep importance to many in the party's base. At the same time, Republicans are hoping to draw a

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contrast with Democrats and leave them appearing divided.

Cruz on Tuesday accused Ocasio-Cortez and other "hard-left Democrats" of "regularly engaging in hateful antisemitic and anti-Israel rhetoric, and what they're saying right now sounds more like they're acting as press secretaries for Hamas terrorists than as members of the United States Congress defending American national security and the security of our allies."

The violence in the Middle East is unfolding at a time when Democratic views on key foreign policy issues are shifting.

Beyond Ocasio-Cortez, who has called Israel an "apartheid state," and Democratic Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, who has labeled Israeli airstrikes "terrorism," moderate Democrats have notably grown more willing to question Israeli policy, reflecting the changing views of the party's voters.

A Pew Research Center poll from 2018 showed a widening partisan gap in Middle East sympathies, with an overwhelming percentage of Republicans, 79%, saying they sympathized more with Israel than Palestinians, versus just 6% who said they sympathized more with Palestinians. Among Democrats, 27% said they sympathized more with Israel, while 25% sympathized more with the Palestinians.

It was a dramatic change from 2001, when 50% of Republicans and 38% of Democrats sympathized more with Israel.

So far, Biden has taken a careful approach to the crisis, publicly expressing support for a cease-fire while privately encouraging Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other top Israeli officials to wind down the bombardment of Gaza as the Israeli and Palestinian death tolls have mounted.

While he faced pressure from his left to take a more aggressive stance — including from Democrats on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, who sought to delay a \$735 million arms sale to Israel — that pressure appeared to have subsided somewhat Tuesday. Among those who declined to criticize Biden were Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who said the administration was conducting "robust" behind-the-scenes diplomacy.

"I trust their diplomacy will yield effective" results, Menendez said.

The divisions have nonetheless caused headaches. In Nevada, the state party's treasurer resigned after its chairperson released a statement that accused the U.S. of "too long turn(ing) a blind eye to injustice and violence committed by the Israeli government," the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported.

"I have been taking a stand my entire life to stand with the people of Israel to live in peace and to be free of the constant and ongoing terrorism practiced by those who seek its destruction and the annihilation of the Jewish people," Howard Beckerman reportedly wrote in a letter to state party leaders.

Former Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., a moderate, said progressives calling for a tougher line against Israel are "by far a minority voice" in the Democratic Party.

"Republicans are trying to exploit a minority position expressed by a minority number of Democrats," she said.

Rep. Josh Gottheimer, D-N.J., another moderate, said strong support for Israel remains the position of an overwhelming number of Democrats and called it "shocking" that some have been calling Israel a terrorist nation.

"I find that particularly appalling," he said. In "normal times," he added, their comments might have led to a censure resolution, but that's not happening because Democrats "don't want to give more attention to the bomb throwers here in Congress."

Still, with the 2022 midterms well over a year away and the U.S. beginning to emerge from the pandemic, the long-term political implications of the violence are unclear. GOP pollster Glen Bolger noted that foreign policy issues rarely sway voters, especially so long before an election.

While Republicans have tried to paint Democrats as out of the mainstream, "there are likely to be 20 more examples of things Republicans will be able to point to and say, 'They're too extreme,'" including domestic issues that voters tend to care more about, he said.

But David Winston, a pollster who advises congressional GOP leaders, said that with Democrats' thin House and Senate majorities, their disagreements on this issue "could potentially stop the policies their own president wants to put in place. It raises the question, 'Can you effectively govern?'"

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Still, Winston argued the issue wasn't an effective one to use to attack Democrats, especially when it comes to gaining support from independents who are pivotal to winning congressional control and tend to care less about partisan finger-pointing than solutions.

"They want to know how you're dealing with it, how you're going to make this work," he said.

Republicans, meanwhile, have tried to present a united front, echoing Trump's campaign trail attacks that Democrats "hate" Jews and have become the "anti-Israel party."

On Monday, more than a dozen GOP senators announced a resolution "reaffirming the United States' unwavering commitment to our ally Israel and its right to take whatever means are necessary to stop the murder of its citizens and foreign nationals residing in Israel."

And Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., took to the Senate floor to call on Biden to "remain strong against the growing voices within his own party that create false equivalence between terrorist aggressors and a responsible state defending itself."

"The hand-wringing calls for a cease-fire are tantamount to Hamas propaganda. Both sides are not the same in this conflict, no matter what the Democrats naively imply," echoed Cotton.

Former Vice President Mike Pence, another Republican eyeing a presidential run in 2024, also focused on the issue, recording a video and penning an op-ed in the conservative *National Review* in which he blamed Biden for the violence, calling it "a direct result of the weakness shown by the Biden administration from its first day in office."

The fighting is the most intense since a 2014 war between Israel and Hamas. At least 213 Palestinians have been killed in airstrikes, including 61 children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, and 12 people in Israel, including a 5-year-old boy, have been killed.

Rep. Brad Schneider, D-Ill., a moderate who voiced his support for Israel on the House floor last week, deflected questions Tuesday about whether Republicans could use progressives' criticism to characterize Democrats as extremists.

"The majority of Democrats in Congress and across the country continue to support Israel as a strong ally," he said. Schneider said Israel benefits "when we have bipartisan support for Israel, and neither party is trying to use Israel as a wedge against the other party."

## 'City in transition': New York vies to turn page on pandemic

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — More than a year after coronavirus shutdowns sent "the city that never sleeps" into a fitful slumber, New York could be wide awake again this summer.

Starting Wednesday, vaccinated New Yorkers can shed their masks in most situations, and restaurants, stores, gyms and many other businesses can go back to full capacity if they check vaccination cards or apps for proof that all patrons have been inoculated.

Subways resumed running round-the-clock this week. Midnight curfews for bars and restaurants will be gone by month's end. Broadway tickets are on sale again, though the curtain won't rise on any shows until September.

Officials say now is New York's moment to shake off the image of a city brought to its knees by the virus last spring — a recovery poignantly rendered on the latest cover of *The New Yorker* magazine. It shows a giant door part-open to the city skyline, letting in a ray of light.

Is the Big Apple back to its old, brash self?

"Maybe 75%. ... It's definitely coming back to life," said Mark Kumar, 24, a personal trainer.

But Ameen Deen, 63, said: "A full sense of normalcy is not going to come any time soon. There's far too many deaths. There's too much suffering. There's too much inequality."

Last spring, the biggest city in America was also the nation's deadliest coronavirus hotspot, the site of over 21,000 deaths in just two months. Black and Hispanic patients have died at markedly higher rates than whites and Asian Americans.

Hospitals overflowed with patients and corpses. Refrigerated trailers served as temporary morgues,

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and tents were set up in Central Park as a COVID-19 ward. New York's hectic streets fell quiet, save for ambulance sirens and nightly bursts of cheering from apartment windows for health care workers.

After a year of ebbs, surges, reopenings and closings, the city hopes vaccinations are turning the tide for good. About 47% of residents have had at least one dose so far. Deaths have amounted to about two dozen a day in recent weeks, and new cases and hospitalizations have plummeted from a wintertime wave.

Large swaths of the country and world are also starting to get back to normal after a crisis blamed for 3.4 million deaths globally, including more than 587,000 in the U.S.

Las Vegas casinos are returning to 100% capacity and no social distancing requirements. Disneyland in California opened up late last month after being shuttered for more than 400 days. Massachusetts this week announced that all virus restrictions will expire Memorial Day weekend.

Summer music festivals like Lollapalooza are back on, the Indy 500 is bracing for more than 100,000 fans, and the federal government says fully vaccinated adults no longer need to wear masks.

France is opening back up on Wednesday as well, with the Eiffel Tower, Parisian cafes and cinemas and the Louvre bringing back visitors for the first time in months.

In New York, Mayor Bill de Blasio has declared it the "summer of New York City."

There are other signs New York is regaining its bustle. Some 80,000 city employees returned to their offices at least part time this month, joining the many municipal workers whose jobs never were done remotely.

Subway and commuter rail ridership is averaging about 40% of normal after plunging to 10% last spring, when the subway system began closing for several hours overnight for the first time in its more than 115-year history.

Shakeem Brown, an artist and delivery person who works late in Manhattan, spent up to three hours a night commuting back to his Queens apartment before 24/7 service resumed Monday. Brown, 26, said it's "refreshing" to see things opening up.

At e's Bar on Manhattan's Upper West Side, "we feel the energy" of social life ramping up, co-owner Erin Bellard said. "People are so excited to be out."

Still, receipts at the bar and grill have been down about 35% because of pandemic restrictions on hours and capacity, she said. The impending end of the midnight curfew will give the bar two more crucial hours, and the owners are planning to survey patrons to determine whether to regain full capacity by requiring vaccinations.

From other vantage points, "normal" looks farther off.

The sidewalks and skyscrapers of midtown Manhattan, for instance, are still noticeably empty. Big corporate employers largely aren't looking to bring more workers back until fall, and only if they feel it's safe, said Kathryn Wylde, CEO of the Partnership for New York City, a major employers group.

"Shutting down was easy. Reopening is hard," Wylde said after a meeting last week with a group of CEOs. "All the employers say that there still is fear and some resistance to coming back."

Besides virus fears, companies and workers are wondering about safety, she said.

Crime in the city has become a growing source of concern, but it's a complicated picture. Murders, shootings, felony assaults and auto thefts rose in the first four months of this year compared with the same period in pre-pandemic 2019, but robberies and grand larcenies fell. So did crime in the transit system, probably because of the drop in ridership.

Brandon Goldgrub has been back at his midtown office since July, but it's just in the last few weeks that he has noticed the sidewalks seem a bit crowded again.

"Now I feel it's a lot more normal," said Goldgrub, 30, a property manager.

Visiting from Tallahassee, Florida, Jessica Souva looked around midtown and felt hopeful about the city where she used to live.

"All we heard, elsewhere in the country, was that New York was a ghost town, and this doesn't feel like that," said Souva, 47. "It feels like a city in transition."



## Focus on local: London pub emerges from lockdown with gusto

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — “You come here often?”

There may be more creative chat-up lines, but surely few as universal. There is little doubt that after months of lockdown across the U.K., those looking to make an early impression may have become a little rusty.

So, the Prince of Peckham pub in a hugely diverse district in southeast London decided, as part of its four-year birthday week, to take the pressure off its patrons. A speed-dating night would kick off its festivities.

Pubs were allowed to welcome guests inside this week, part of the British government’s plan to gradually reopen society following a sharp fall in new coronavirus infections.

To get to the speed dating, around a dozen men and a dozen women braced one of the most torrential downpours London has seen in years. They had three minutes to do their thing.

“This is my local pub and I’m a bit bored of dating apps,” said 32-year-old marketing manager Helen Waller. “This pub brings people together. It’s a nice mix of the community in an unforced way.”

Other events planned this week are drag brunches and neon naked life drawing — don’t ask. They’re the latest innovations by a pub that had been bucking the trend even before the pandemic, as a slew of hostelrys closed their doors for good in recent years, partly because they didn’t beat to the rhythm of the local scene.

Around half the local population is Black, with many more from other ethnic groups, so it stands to reason that one of the few local boozers remaining should tap its neighborhood as much as possible.

It wasn’t always so.

The Prince of Peckham is a symbol of change, fusing the new young professional crowd that’s made its way to Peckham with its long-established population. The pub is far removed from its former incarnation as the Clayton Arms, which was ransacked a decade ago during riots that swept the capital.

Local resident Clement Ogbonnaya bought the premises on a busy intersection near a supermarket parking lot and a police station with the intention of making the business “representative” of the community, of “reinventing pub culture.” His doctor wife thought he was “nuts” going into the pub industry.

The 39-year-old father of one grew up nearby, a second generation Nigerian. He found that many of the pubs around the area had few, if any, connections with the local community.

“I needed a space that’s representative of the community, a homecoming,” he said. “The pub is clearly Black-owned but it’s not a Black pub. Everybody is welcome, the marginalized and under-represented are welcome here. We want to be that home from home in Peckham.”

The pub’s customers are clearly mixed, across any metric. It takes pride in its varied selection — from trendy craft beers to a Peckham Negroni. Its Caribbean-inspired food offering, “White Men Can’t Jerk,” says it all. And the murals on display strike a note for the community the pub is at the heart of.

Like everyone else in the pub trade, the past 14 months have been tough for Ogbonnaya, who employed 21 people when lockdown was first imposed in March 2020. He was able to furlough 15 of them as part of Britain’s coronavirus job retention program, whereby the government paid the majority of salaries of those who weren’t able to work.

“A godsend,” he explains.

Despite the reopening of indoor spaces, social distancing curbs remain that will make life difficult for many pubs to survive the coming months, especially if the virus variant first found in India prompts the government to delay its next lockdown easing on June 21, when many curbs on social contact are expected to be lifted.

“Do I think June 21 is going to happen? Probably not,” Ogbonnaya said. “But we are here today and all we can do is follow the guidelines and try and stay safe.”

For now, social distancing remains, which keeps a lid on how much a pub can make. Required table service means the bar is a no-go area for customers. The Beer and Pub Association has estimated that 2,000 pubs, or around 5% of all the pubs in the U.K., will still remain closed despite indoor reopening.

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"We need pubs fully reopened without any restrictions at all on June 21 if they are to survive," said Emma McClarkin, the organization's chief executive.

Pubs will hopefully return to normal very soon. They are a home away from home for drinkers and non-drinkers alike, the go-to arena for friends and family in good times and bad, for everything from first dates to breakups.

"It's an area where you can celebrate. Where you can mourn, you can laugh, you can cry, you can break up, you can make up, you can be Black, you can be white, you can be old ... you should be able to be anything within that community that the pub is in," Ogonnaya said.

Dami Ayode turned up for the speed dating night after having had enough of dating apps during lockdown, and hopes that he managed to strike gold.

"I've met a few that I potentially like," the 25-year-old said. "Hopefully the same energy gets back with me. With them with me as well."

Here's hoping.

## EXPLAINER: Spain's migrant crisis in North Africa

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

About 8,000 people have streamed into the Spanish city of Ceuta from Morocco in the past two days in an unprecedented influx, most of them swimming around breakwaters and across the border to reach the Spanish enclave in North Africa.

The surge has strained relations between Morocco and Spain, with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez canceling a trip to Paris to make an unscheduled visit to Ceuta, where Spain has deployed military reinforcements and police along the border. Here's a look at what's going on:

### WHERE IS CEUTA?

Ceuta is a coastal city in North Africa that has belonged to Spain since the 16th century. Like Melilla, another Spanish possession on the Moroccan coast, Ceuta in recent decades has become a flashpoint for migrants from Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa seeking to enter Europe. Last year about 2,200 people crossed into Ceuta and Melilla by scaling border fences or swimming from the Moroccan side. Ceuta has a population of 85,000 and is connected to mainland Spain by ferry services across the narrow Strait of Gibraltar.

### WHAT IS HAPPENING IN CEUTA?

Migrants regularly make it across the border in small numbers, but the scale of the crossings this week is exceptional. Thousands of people were able to reach the border area without being stopped by Moroccan authorities. About 8,000, including 2,000 believed to be minors, reached Ceuta in the past two days by swimming or paddling in small boats around breakwaters separating the two countries. Spain deployed troops and armored vehicles to the border on Tuesday, rounding up migrants on a beach and sending many of them back to Morocco through a gate in the border fence. The Red Cross says one young man died and dozens were treated for hypothermia.

### WHAT IS BEHIND THE SURGE?

Morocco has said little about why it relaxed the border controls. Many suspect it is retaliation against Spain for having allowed the leader of a militant group, Brahim Ghali, to receive medical treatment in a Spanish hospital. Ghali heads the Polisario Front, which is fighting for an independent Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony that Morocco annexed in the 1970s. He was hospitalized in the Spanish city of Logrono last month in a move that angered Morocco's government, which warned there would be "consequences." Some experts say the issue goes beyond Ghali and that Morocco wants Spain to support Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara, like the U.S. did under the Trump administration last year.

### WHAT HAPPENS TO THE MIGRANTS NOW?

Spain's Interior Ministry said about half of those who made it across have already been sent back to Morocco. Under a three-decade-old agreement between the two countries, Spanish authorities can return adults who cross the border irregularly. On Tuesday, Spanish soldiers could be seen directing migrants

toward a border gate, in some cases hitting them with batons to make them hurry up. An AP reporter saw several children among those being pushed back, even though the Spanish government claimed that no unaccompanied minors were being returned. Many of the unaccompanied minors were being held in quarantine in warehouse shelters run by the Red Cross.

WHAT ARE THE WIDER IMPLICATIONS FOR SPAIN?

The developments in Ceuta have become one of the biggest crisis in relations between Spain and Morocco since 2002, when a territorial dispute erupted over an uninhabited island off the Moroccan coast. It represents a humanitarian, diplomatic and political challenge for Sánchez's government. In recent years Spain has seen spikes in migrant arrivals on its southern coast as well as in the Canary Islands, sparking concerns over migration that have helped fuel the rise of Vox, a far-right party that entered Parliament in 2019. Vox was quick to blame the situation in Ceuta on the government's "inaction" and its leader visited the city on Tuesday.

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT MIGRATION ACROSS EUROPE?

Other European Union nations are watching the developments in Ceuta carefully. Since Europe's migrant crisis in 2015, the bloc has tried to reduce the flow of irregular migrants to Europe in part by seeking agreements with transit countries — including Morocco, Turkey and Libya — to hold back migrants. The situation in Ceuta and a similar crisis on Turkey's land border with Greece last year show how such deals can give transit countries plenty of leverage over the 27-nation EU. The bloc's Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson called the Ceuta influx "worrying" and noted that Spain's border with Morocco is also the EU's external border. She urged Morocco to prevent more people from crossing it irregularly.

## No longer silent, Gulf Arab citizens express anger at Israel

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The ongoing bloodshed in the Gaza Strip has unleashed a chorus of voices across Gulf Arab states that are fiercely critical of Israel and emphatically supportive of Palestinians.

The vocal opposition to Israel, expressed in street protests, on social media and in newspaper columns, comes just months after pacts were signed to establish ties with Israel — and complicates government efforts to rally Arab citizens around full-throttle acceptance of the deals.

Analysts said the conflict will also set back Israeli efforts to secure more normalization deals with other Arab states, like Saudi Arabia.

The criticism has not only put Arab governments that signed the diplomatic accords with Israel in a difficult position with their citizens, it also affirms that the Palestinian cause continues to resonate deeply with people across the Middle East.

"No matter what your national priorities are at the moment or regional priorities are at the moment, when stuff like this happens, the Palestinian issue comes back and hits you," Emirati political analyst Abdulkhaleq Abdulla said.

Still, the open calls for Palestinian rights and condemnation of Israel voiced by countless Gulf Arab citizens have largely mirrored official statements from their governments, all of which have condemned the violence in some form. Some have gone further, and Abdulla said he'd hoped the United Arab Emirates' most recent statement calling "on all parties" to cease fighting had been bolder and named Israel as the aggressor.

In speaking out, Gulf citizens are challenging the official narratives around normalization with Israel.

In Bahrain, civil society groups signed a letter urging the government to expel the Israeli ambassador. In Kuwait, protesters held two rallies and are demanding permission to hold more. In Qatar, the government allowed hundreds to protest over the weekend as Hamas' top leader delivered a speech. In the UAE, some have openly donned the black-and-white checkered Palestinian keffiyeh on Instagram while others have tweeted under hashtags supportive of Palestinians.

Last year, the UAE became the first Arab country in over two decades to establish ties with Israel, after Egypt and Jordan in 1979 and 1994, respectively. It was a brazen move that bypassed the Palestinians,

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who slammed it as treason and a stab in the back.

The UAE's move paved the way for three other countries — Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco — to announce similar pacts with Israel in rapid succession.

Immediately after the UAE formalized ties with Israel in September, a tsunami of state propaganda framed it as a new era of peace, religious tolerance and security for the region.

Among the general Emirati public, there was little to no visible pushback from citizens when their government announced ties with Israel. Fiery nationalistic figures on Twitter with tens of thousands of followers aggressively cheered the pact, and throughout the current conflict have both defended ties with Israel and made posts mocking Palestinian protesters.

But unlike in Western democracies, a lack of protest in the Gulf does not mean acceptance. In the UAE, political parties are banned and political expression is heavily suppressed.

"The show of support that we saw during the early days of normalization, I think it represents something deeper in Emirati society ... and that is that the vast majority support their government," Abdulla said. "It was a show of support for the government rather than a show of support for 'normalization' as such."

Mira Al-Hussein, an Emirati PhD candidate at Cambridge University, said Emiratis feel taken care of and valued by their government, which provides citizens with strong social safety nets.

"But that doesn't mean we feel comfortable by what's happening around us," she said.

She changed her Twitter handle in support of Palestinians since the fighting broke out, and has used the platform to slam Israel's policies and highlight the atrocities of the war.

"You don't sign papers and expect a human catastrophe to go away," she said of the accord with Israel.

Over the years, there have been changes to school curricula across Gulf Arab states to replace pan-Arab and pan-Islamic ideals with a nationalistic identity that unites people around the flag.

The UAE has been trying to mold public discourse around nationalism and a rejection of youth or Islamic movements, said Kristin Smith Diwan, a scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.

"I think the relation with Israel was seen as a way to even cement that further. I don't know how that's going to work now," she said.

Al-Hussein said her younger brother, who is in his 20's, never studied the Arab-Israeli conflict in school. But he "just learned about it today from social media," she said.

For millions of Arabs, social media is the only space where limited freedom of expression is possible. Since the war began, users have been flooded by images of dead Palestinian children being pulled from the rubble of Israeli airstrikes in Gaza.

These platforms have also been awash with images of Israeli security forces firing stun grenades and tear gas at worshippers and protesters in Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, of Palestinian families fighting eviction from their homes and of deadly protests across the occupied West Bank.

At least 217 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, including 61 children and 36 women. More than 1,440 people have been wounded. Twelve people in Israel, including a young boy and a soldier, have been killed in Hamas rocket attacks.

Bader al-Saif, a Kuwait University professor, said "the sheer un-proportionality" of the conflict has pushed many people to speak out across the Gulf.

"For Israelis to feel secure, they need to feel that they are accepted," al-Saif said. "That feeling of acceptance cannot be complete without them dealing with the Palestinian issue."

U.K.-based Saudi scholar Madawi Al-Rasheed, a fierce critic of the Saudi government, said despite the kingdom's widespread crackdown on activists — most of whom are steadfast supporters of Palestinian rights — the outrage expressed by many online reveals the gap between the cautious push by the Saudi leadership to inch closer to Israel and public sentiment in the streets.

"It shows that despite several years of adopting a normalization discourse in official Saudi media, the pulse of the people is actually not diverted from the Palestinian cause," she said.

**IOC offers Tokyo medical help amid call for cancellation**



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By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Confronted in Japan with some of the strongest medical-community opposition yet to the Tokyo Olympics, IOC President Thomas Bach offered Wednesday to have added medical personnel available to help out when the games open in just over nine weeks.

Bach gave few details, speaking remotely at the opening of three days of meetings between the International Olympic Committee and local organizers. He said the help would come from various national Olympic committees and be available in the Olympic village and sports venues.

In his 12-minute address, Bach attempted to assure the Japanese public and athletes coming to Tokyo that the IOC will hold "safe and secure" Olympics in the midst of the pandemic.

"For obvious reasons we cannot give them (athletes) every detail yet, but the most important principle is very clear: the Olympic Village is a safe place and the Olympic and Paralympic Games will be organized in a safe way," Bach said.

Bach said he anticipated more than 80% of those staying in the Olympic Village would be vaccinated. Reports locally say that Japan's Olympic delegation will begin getting vaccinated in June.

Between 1-2% of Japanese are fully vaccinated, and it's unlikely that even the elderly population will be fully vaccinated before the Olympics end on Aug. 8.

Bach appeared to be responding to one of the strongest demands so far to call off the postponed Olympics.

The 6,000-member Tokyo Medical Practitioners' Association called for the Olympics to be canceled in a letter sent last week to Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike, Olympic Minister Tamayo Marukawa, and Seiko Hashimoto, the head of the organizing committee.

The letter was made public this week on the group's website.

"We believe the correct choice is to cancel an event that has the possibility of increasing the numbers of infected people and deaths," the letter said.

"Viruses are spread by people's movements. Japan will hold a heavy responsibility if the Olympics and Paralympics work to worsen the pandemic, increasing the number of those who must suffer and die."

Much of Japan, including Tokyo and Osaka, is under a state of emergency, which forced Bach to cancel a trip to Japan this month. Opposition to the Olympics is running at 60-80% in numerous polls, depending on how the question is phrased.

The Olympics are to open on July 23. The Paralympics follow on Aug. 24. They are a financial imperative for the IOC, which derives about 75% of its incomes from selling television rights and another 18% from sponsorship.

Japan has officially spent \$15.4 billion to organize the Olympics, although government audits suggest the figure is much higher.

There is no indication the games will be canceled, though opposition continues with small street protests and online petition drives. Last month the British Medical Journal came out against holding the Olympics and many local scientists have voiced their opposition.

Japan has attributed more than 11,500 deaths to COVID-19, good by some standards but worse than most Asian neighbors.

The Tokyo Medical Practitioners' Association warned of a possible collapse of Japan's medical system, which could come under more pressure with Tokyo's hot and humid summer months approaching as the Olympics open.

"Our nation is now undergoing a surge in coronavirus patients in a fourth wave, the worst so far," the letter said. "The medical systems responding to COVID-19 are stretched thin, almost to their limits. The reality is that the entire medical system faces an almost insurmountable hardship in trying our best to respond with coronavirus measures."

Bach said hundreds of sports events have been held safely during the pandemic, and cited recent test events in Tokyo that came off without many problems.

"None of these test events was a virus spreader for the Japanese people or the people of Tokyo," he said.

Tokyo organizers have said about 10,000 medical personnel will be needed during the Olympics. They

have also asked for 500 extra nurses, and 200 sports medicine specialists.

Several prefectures near Tokyo have said they will not give priority to treating Olympic athletes, and many towns in Japan have canceled plans to host foreign delegations.

"The doctors and nurses of the medical system who are being asked to respond are already at this point exhausted, and there is absolutely no extra manpower or facility for treatment," the letter added.

Fans from abroad have already been banned, and Olympic organizers are expected to announce next month if local fans can attend in limited numbers — or not at all.

The Olympics and Paralympics will involve 15,000 athletes and tens of thousands of others entering Japan, which has had its borders virtually sealed for more than a year.

## Restrictions reimposed as virus resurges in much of Asia

By HUIZHONG WU and ZEN SOO Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Taxi drivers are starved for customers, weddings are suddenly canceled, schools are closed, and restaurant service is restricted across much of Asia as the coronavirus makes a resurgence in countries where it had seemed to be well under control.

Sparsely populated Mongolia has seen its death toll soar from 15 to 233, while Taiwan, considered a major success in battling the virus, has recorded more than 1,000 cases since last week and placed over 600,000 people in two-week medical isolation.

Hong Kong and Singapore have postponed a quarantine-free travel bubble for a second time after an outbreak in Singapore of uncertain origin. China, which has all but stamped out local infections, has seen new cases apparently linked to contact with people arriving from abroad.

The resurgence hasn't come close to the carnage wrought in India and parts of Europe, but it is a keen reminder that the virus remains resilient, despite mask mandates, case tracing, mass testing and wider deployment of the newest weapon against it — vaccinations.

That's setting back efforts to get social and economic life back to normal, particularly in schools and sectors like the hospitality industry that are built on public contact.

In Taiwan, the surge is being driven by the more easily transmissible variant first identified in Britain, according to Chen Chien-jen, an epidemiologist and the island's former vice president, who led the highly praised pandemic response last year.

Complicating matters are some senior citizens who frequent slightly racy "tea salons" in Taipei's Wanhua neighborhood. They accounted for about 375 of the new cases as of Tuesday, Chen said. The tea shops are known for providing adult entertainment with singing and dancing.

"These seniors, when they go to these places, want to keep it veiled," Chen said. "When we are conducting the investigation, they may not be honest."

In Wanhua, normally a bustling area with food stalls, shops and entertainment venues, the Huaxi night market and historic Longshan Buddhist temple are closed.

Kao Yu-chieh, who runs a breakfast shop in the area, said business is down at least 50% since last week.

Cab driver Wang Hsian Zhong said he hasn't had a customer in three days. "Everyone is affected. This is a Taiwan-wide problem. We have to get through it," he said, puffing on a cigarette on a street in Wanhua.

The island has shut all schools and restrictions previously only in the Taipei area were expanded island-wide Wednesday: Restaurants, gyms and other public venues were closed, and gatherings of more than five people indoors and more than 10 people outdoors are banned.

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen has sought to reassure a public that is reverting to panic-buying and shunning public places.

"We will continue to strengthen our medical capacity," Tsai said, adding that vaccines are arriving from abroad.

Malaysia unexpectedly imposed a one-month lockdown through June 7, spooked by a sharp rise in cases, more-infectious variants and weak public compliance with health measures.

It was the second nationwide lockdown in just over a year and came after the country's cases shot up

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fourfold since January; it's now more than 485,000 and 2,040 people have died, a sum also up by four times from January. Interstate travel and social activities are banned, schools are shut, and restaurants can provide only takeout service. The government has warned that hospitals have almost maxed out their capacity to take new coronavirus cases.

Singapore has imposed stringent social distancing measures until June 13, restricting public gatherings to two people and banning dine-in service at restaurants.

That came after the number of coronavirus infections of untraceable origin rose to 48 cases in the past week, from 10 cases the week before. Singapore had previously been held up as a role model after keeping the virus at bay for months.

Schools moved online after students in several institutions tested positive. Wedding receptions are no longer allowed, and funerals are capped at 20 people.

For wedding planner Michelle Lau, at least seven clients either canceled or postponed weddings meant to take place over the next month. Other couples have opted for a simple ceremony without a reception, she said.

Janey Chang, who runs two Latin dance studios in Singapore, says that the tougher restrictions have drastically reduced class size.

"We are taking on fewer students, but the costs such as rent remain the same," Chang said. "Whether we can continue to operate is highly dependent on the number of coronavirus cases."

Hong Kong has responded to fresh outbreaks by increasing the quarantine requirement from 14 to 21 days for unvaccinated travelers arriving from "high-risk" countries, including Singapore, Malaysia and Japan, and, farther afield, Argentina, Italy, the Netherlands and Kenya.

China has set up checkpoints at toll booths, airports and railway stations in Liaoning province, where new cases were reported this week. Travelers must have proof of a recent negative virus test, and mass testing was ordered in part of Yingkou, a port city with shipping connections to more than 40 countries.

Thailand reported 35 deaths, the highest since the outbreak started, on Tuesday, and an additional 29 on Wednesday. That brought its number of fatalities to 678, of which 584 have been reported in the latest wave. About three-quarters of Thailand's more than 116,000 cases have been recorded since the beginning of April.

Thailand had about 7,100 cases in all of last year in what was regarded as a success story.

The resurgence has posed difficult choices for governments, particularly in poorer nations where lockdown restrictions can increase financial suffering for those already living on the edge of starvation.

In the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte has eased a lockdown in the bustling capital and adjacent provinces to fight economic recession and hunger but has still barred public gatherings this month, when many Roman Catholic festivals are held.

COVID-19 infections started to spike in March to some of the worst levels in Asia, surging beyond 10,000 a day and prompting Duterte to impose the lockdown in and around Manila in April. The Philippines has reported more than 1.1 million infections with 19,372 deaths, though the surge has begun to ease.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said the partial resumption of economic activities, increased non-compliance with restrictions and inadequate tracing of people exposed to the virus combined to spark the steep rise in infections.

Experts said the delivery of vaccines, however delayed and small in amount, also fostered false confidence the pandemic might be ending.

## AP Interview: Disinformation concerns mail voting expert

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Amber McReynolds, CEO of The National Vote at Home Institute, helped state and local election officials prepare for the record number of mailed ballots cast during last year's presidential election. She also was recently confirmed by the Senate to serve on the Board of Governors of the U.S. Postal Service.

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Former President Donald Trump and his allies complained that mail voting rules were eased during the pandemic by governors, state election officials and judges without the involvement of state lawmakers. That was true in a few cases, while lawmakers in nine states opted to expand eligibility requirements for mail voting and in two others agreed to mail ballots automatically to registered voters, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The Associated Press interviewed McReynolds, who lives in Denver, about an election held amid the coronavirus outbreak, the attacks on election officials, the efforts in some states to enact new limits on mail voting and her views on the future of the Postal Service. The interview, held May 14, has been condensed.

AP: Tell us what you did to help state and local election officials prepare for holding a presidential election amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

McREYNOLDS: We worked with a lot of state legislatures last year as they were enacting emergency legislation. And then we worked directly with local and state officials on implementing new communication methods to educate voters about vote-by-mail, new processes, new procedures within the offices. We helped advise on how to do ballot box installation and what vendors to use. ... And I just continue to commend the election officials for getting this done in the way that they did.

AP: You helped both Republican and Democratic states, correct?

McREYNOLDS: We did.

AP: Fast forward to today and we are seeing several Republican-led states overhauling voting rules, citing a lack of public confidence in the 2020 election. Do you believe that lack of confidence is warranted?

McREYNOLDS: The 2020 election was the most secure election that we've ever had. ... The biggest challenge in 2020 was the disinformation and misinformation that occurred and frankly, the lies about the election process that were pervasive and planned all throughout the year. ... It's not truthful that there was massive fraud or voting system conspiracies or irregularities. ... I think the public's lack of understanding of the elections process is really how these bad actors were able to take advantage of the public, create this distrust — and now after they've created all this distrust, go back and make the case for restrictions on voting access and point to the lack of trust that was created by a certain set of bad actors. It's sort of this vicious cycle that has happened, and we really need to break that.

AP: What are the consequences of these various proposals, these new limits on mail voting?

McREYNOLDS: A lot of these laws are aimed at restricting election officials from doing their jobs. ... Ultimately voters are hurt the most. Our democracy, by extension, suffers and is weakened. And frankly, the disinformation bad-actor types are the ones that win because this is what they want. They want less people to be able to participate and the disinformation to continue to spread.

AP: You mentioned the challenges facing local election officials. How concerned are you that the personal attacks and threats that surfaced after the election will drive people from the profession?

McREYNOLDS: Well, I'm very concerned about that. And I think we've already even seen indicators of that. We've seen a lot more retirements or moves to other fields. ... Many of my friends around the country experienced death threats and have had security challenges and have had their families harassed and attacked.

AP: Are you concerned partisan actors could see these positions of county clerks and election supervisors as an opportunity to potentially put their thumb on the scale? Do you think these positions, secretaries of state for that matter, should be nonpartisan?

McREYNOLDS: I am concerned that those positions are now going to be targeted by partisan actors to, frankly, play games and try to tip the scale in the election process. ... I get concerned if we have a system that kind of relies on people doing the right thing. So I do think we have to build some additional accountability measures or ethical standards around some of these positions to protect and insulate the conduct of elections from partisan actors that could try to use those positions in a negative way.

AP: Let's talk about your new role with the USPS Board of Governors. Do you think the postmaster general is taking the Postal Service in the right direction with the current 10-year plan and the easing of existing delivery standards?

McREYNOLDS: I have not been in a board meeting yet, so I have not had access to the data and the



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performance measures and things like that for the postmaster general. So I have no judgment about his performance at this point in time. ... What I would say is, as I've reviewed the 10-year plan, the postmaster general and the board laid out many of the very important issues facing the Postal Service and, I think, put a plan out that includes many positive reform suggestions and recommendations. ... The one area of the plan that I have concerns about is the service aspect of things, the service standards and even some of the plans around consolidation. ... I want to know more about the impacts on service, because I truly believe we have to restore service. We have to restore confidence in the Postal Service.

AP: Finally, various election officials have raised concerns about the health of our democracy. Do you share those concerns? And if so, what are some steps that we should be taking to strengthen our democracy?

McREYNOLDS: I do share that concern. As I mentioned earlier, I think that disinformation is the biggest threat that we face with regards to the security of our elections. It is just not true that the election was fraudulent in any way. It is not true that there were issues with the Dominion voting system. It is not true that there was massive vote-by-mail fraud or activities that were nefarious. ... And so I think we need to confront disinformation in a very big way and we need to protect our infrastructure. ... The second piece is we have to protect election officials. And I do think lawmakers at the federal level need to step in and make it a federal crime to interfere with the conduct of an election, an election official and their official duties. ... And then I think on the policy front, part of the reason the disinformation spreads as it does around this country is that there are not many federal standards, if you will, where there's consistency by state for how the election occurs. And so in one state, you might have a 30-day registration deadline. In another state, you might be able to go in and register to vote on Election Day and vote right there. ... We need to think about some federal standards because it's easy for bad actors to spread the wrong information because the rules vary so much by state.

## Gaza children bearing the brunt in Israel-Hamas conflict

By FARES AKRAM Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza (AP) — Suzy Ishkontana hardly speaks or eats. It's been two days since the 7-year-old girl was pulled from the rubble of what was once her family's home, destroyed amid a barrage of Israeli airstrikes. She spent hours buried in the wreckage as her siblings and mother died around her.

Children are being subjected to extensive trauma in Israel's bombardment of the Gaza Strip. For some, it's trauma they've seen repeatedly throughout their short lives.

This is the fourth time in 12 years Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers have gone to war. Each time, Israel has unleashed heavy airstrikes at the densely populated Gaza Strip as it vows to stop Hamas rocket barrages launched toward Israel.

According to Gaza health officials, at least 63 children are among the 217 Palestinians who have been killed in Gaza since the latest conflict between Israel and Hamas began on May 10. On the Israeli side, 12 people have been killed by Hamas rockets, all but one of them civilians, including a 5-year-old boy.

Israel says it does everything it can to prevent civilian casualties, including issuing warnings for people to evacuate buildings about to be struck. As Hamas has fired hundreds of rockets into Israel, most of them intercepted by anti-missile defenses, Israel's military has pounded hundreds of sites in Gaza, where some 2 million people live squeezed into a tight urban fabric.

Videos on social media from Gaza have shown the grief of survivors from families wiped out in an instant.

"They were four! Where are they? Four!" wailed one father outside a hospital after learning all four of his children had been killed. Another showed a young boy screaming "Baba," as he ran to the front of the funeral procession where men were carrying his father's body to burial.

The Ishkontana family was buried under the rubble of their home early Sunday, after massive bombing raids of downtown Gaza City that Israel said were targeting a Hamas tunnel network. The strikes came without warning.

Riad Ishkontana recounted to The Associated Press how he was buried for five hours under the wreckage, pinned under a chunk of concrete, unable to reach his wife and five children.

"I was listening to their voices beneath the rubble. I heard Dana and Zain calling, 'Dad! Dad!' before their

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voices faded and then I realized they had died," he said, referring to two of his children.

After he was rescued and taken to the hospital, he said, family and staff hid the truth from him as long as they could. "I learned about their deaths one after another," he said. Finally, Suzy was brought in alive, the second-oldest of his three daughters and two sons, and the only survivor.

Though she had only limited physical bruising from her seven hours under the rubble, the young girl was in "severe trauma and shock," said pediatrician Dr. Zuhair Al-Jaro. The hospital was unable to get her the psychological treatment she needs because of the ongoing fighting, he said.

"She has entered into a deep depression," he said. Only today, he said Tuesday, did she eat something after she was allowed briefly outside the hospital and saw her cousins.

As her father spoke to the AP, Suzy sat on the bed next to him, silent and studying the faces of the people in the room but rarely making eye contact. When asked what she wanted to be when she grew up, she turned away. When her father started to answer for her, saying she wanted to become a doctor, the girl began sobbing loudly.

Ishkontana, 42, who recently stopped working as a waiter because of coronavirus lockdowns, said Suzy is smart and tech-savvy and loves smartphones and tablets. "She explores them, she has more experience dealing with them than I do," he said. She also loves studying and would gather all her siblings into a play "class," taking the role of their teacher, he said.

The Ishkontanas were just one family destroyed that day.

The strikes Sunday targeted Hamas tunnels running under Gaza City, the Israeli military said. The warplanes pounded al-Wahda Street, one of the city's busiest commercial avenues, lined with apartment buildings with stores, bakeries, cafes and electronics shops on the ground floors.

Three buildings collapsed, and multiple people from at least three families were killed. In all 42 people died, including 10 children and 16 women.

Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, an Israeli military spokesman, called the situation that led to the deaths "abnormal." He said in one location the airstrikes caused a tunnel to collapse, bringing houses down with it, "and that caused a large amount of civilian casualties, which were not the aim."

He said the military was analyzing what happened and "attempting to recalibrate" its ordnance to prevent a reoccurrence.

He said the bombing campaign targeting tunnel networks would be expanded to more areas of Gaza and that the military tries when possible to hit tunnels under roads rather than under houses.

Israel and Hamas have fought similar conflicts in 2009, 2012 and 2014, each time wreaking heavy destruction

The Norwegian Refugee Council said that 11 of the children killed so far in this war had been going through its psycho-social programs helping children deal with trauma — a sign of how children repeatedly are victimized by the violence. Among them was 8-year-old Dana, Suzy's sister.

"It's the fourth time for many of them to experience" bombardment around their homes, said Hozayfa Yazji, the refugee council area field manager.

Parents in Gaza desperately try to calm their terrified children, as bombs rain down, telling the youngest ones it's just fireworks or trying to put up a cheerful front.

The violence "will of course affect the psychology of these kids," he said. "We are expecting that ... the situation will be much worse and more children will need more support."

The refugee council works with 118 schools in Gaza, reaching more than 75,000 students through its Better Learning Program. The program trains teachers to deal with traumatized children and organizes fun exercises to relieve stress. It also does home-checks on children to provide help.

The council's secretary-general, Jan Egeland, called for an immediate cease-fire, saying, "Spare these children and their families. Stop bombing them now."

But he said, longer term, an end to the blockade on Gaza and occupation of Palestinian territory is necessary "if we are to avoid more trauma and death among children."

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## AP FACT CHECK: Hyperbole from Biden, GOP on state of economy

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER, HOPE YEN and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and House Republicans alike are revising history when asserting that the new administration set records in U.S. job creation — either the best ever or among the worst, depending on the vantage point. The truth is in between.

While jobs are steadily being added as the nation digs out from the coronavirus pandemic, the pace is far from being No. 1 among presidents, as Biden describes it. But neither is it the worst in decades, as Rep. Elise Stefanik, the newly elected no. 3 leader of House Republicans, asserted twice in recent days.

A look at the claims:

**BIDEN:** “As a result of our prompt action to roll out the vaccine and boost the economy, we’ve gone from stagnation to an economy that is growing faster than it has in nearly 40 years. We’ve gone from anemic job creation to a record of creation for more — for a new administration. None has ever created this many jobs in this timeframe.” — remarks Monday.

**THE FACTS:** Not so fast.

He has created the most jobs in his first three months than any other president — about 1.5 million — but that’s partly because the U.S. population is larger than in the past. When calculated as a percentage of the workforce, job growth under President Jimmy Carter increased more quickly from February through April 1977 than the same three months this year.

Since the late 1970s, the U.S. population has grown by more than 100 million people. In ignoring that, Biden picked up on a trait of his predecessor, Donald Trump, who bragged that the U.S. had the largest workforce ever under his presidency and glossed over the simple fact that there are far more people.

It’s true, though, that the economy is growing rapidly — it expanded at a 6.4% annual rate in the first three months of the year — and is expected to grow this year at the fastest pace since 1984.

Biden’s \$1.9 trillion rescue package contributed to the vigorous growth but much of the expansion reflects a broader bounce-back from the unusually sharp pandemic recession, the deepest downturn since the 1930s. Even before Biden’s package, for example, the International Monetary Fund was projecting U.S. growth of over 5% for this year.

Biden is also ignoring a disappointing jobs report for April, when just 266,000 jobs were gained, far fewer than expected. At that pace, it would take more than two years to regain the 8 million jobs that are still lost to the pandemic.

**STEFANIK:** “In just over 100 days, we have an economic crisis ... we see the worst jobs report in over 20 years. Unemployment is up.” — remarks Friday after being elected to the No. 3 House GOP leadership post that had belonged to Rep. Liz Cheney, who was stripped of the post after criticizing former President Donald Trump.

**THE FACTS:** Stefanik, R-N.Y., is way off in asserting that last month’s job report was the worst in decades. It actually showed job gains, just not as many as were expected. And her suggestion that Biden’s first 100 days produced an economic crisis is baseless.

In April 2020, the country lost 20.5 million jobs after much of the economy shuttered due to the coronavirus pandemic. That was by far the worst monthly loss on record.

In last month’s report, economists had predicted that about 1 million jobs would be added, compared with the actual 266,000 figure. Oxford Economics, a forecasting firm, called the miss in predictions for April “one of the largest on record.”

That’s clearly not the same as being the “worst jobs report,” as she put it. In fact, companies have added jobs for four straight months, according to the Labor Department.

Nor is it an “economic crisis” that the unemployment rate ticked up last month from 6% to 6.1%. April’s increase is a sign that resumption of U.S. hiring has encouraged some Americans to look for jobs and seek a return to the workforce.

Most economists actually expect job growth to strengthen as more vaccinations are administered and

trillions in government aid spread through the economy.

## Asian shares drop, tracking Wall Street decline led by tech

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares fell Wednesday, tracking a decline on Wall Street that was led by big technology stocks. Investors are awaiting the release of minutes from the latest Federal Reserve policy setting meeting.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 fell 1.4% in morning trading to 28,008.09. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 slipped 1.9% to 6,936.00. The Shanghai Composite slipped 0.4% to 3,513.61. Markets were closed in Hong Kong and South Korea.

"Major U.S. markets ended the day lower, as investors took some risk off the markets ahead of the Fed minutes release later today," said Yeap Jun Rong, market strategist at IG in Singapore. "Asia markets are set to track the U.S. indexes lower."

A day after Japan reported its economy contracted at a 5.1% annual rate in the first quarter of this year, Fitch Solutions forecast the economy will grow 2.5% this year, highlighting the challenge as the country battles surging coronavirus infections.

"The slow vaccination roll-out in the country means that the country continues to face risks from sporadic movement restrictions and other tightening measures that will disrupt a healthy recovery in activity," the report said.

The Tokyo Olympics, due to start in late July, will be held in such a reduced capacity, "the positive economic gains from the event will likely be negligible," it said.

Stocks closed lower on Wall Street as a late-afternoon sell-off in technology companies helped nudge stock indexes into the red for a second straight day.

The S&P 500 lost 0.9% to 4,127.83, with most of the pullback coming in the last hour of trading. Apple, Facebook and Google's parent company all lost 1% or more as technology stocks fell broadly. While they powered the market rebound last year, tech stocks are up only 2.6% this year, the lowest gain among the S&P 500's 11 sectors.

Banks, industrial and communication companies also helped drag the market lower, easily outweighing small gains by health care stocks, among others. Investors continued to size up the latest batch of company earnings reports, including quarterly snapshots from Walmart and Home Depot.

"Stocks appear to be in consolidation mode, digesting strong year-to-date gains on the heels of a superb first-quarter reporting period," said Terry Sandven, chief equity strategist at U.S. Bank Wealth Management.

"We view this pullback that we're experiencing over the last week or so as within the normal ebb and flow of a broad market that still has legs to trend higher."

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.8% to 34,060.66. The tech-heavy Nasdaq dropped 0.6% to 13,303.64. The Russell 2000 index of small company stocks gave up 0.7% to 2,210.88.

The broader market made solid gains early in the year as investors bet on an economic recovery fueled by widespread vaccinations. Expectations were high for corporate earnings and the latest round of results has been surprisingly good. Wall Street is now digesting that growth and shifting to a more cautious view.

"Some sort of pause was always inevitable," said Ross Mayfield, investment strategist at Baird. "Eventually markets see a more challenging landscape ahead and general uncertainty."

A big question is whether rising inflation will be temporary or whether it will endure. Prices are rising for everything from gasoline to food as the economy recovers from its more than year-long malaise.

The fear is that the Federal Reserve will have to dial back its extensive support if inflation persists. That includes record-low interest rates and the monthly purchase of \$120 billion in bonds meant to goose the job market and economy. For all the worries about inflation, however, many professional investors are echoing the Federal Reserve in saying that they expect rising prices to be "transitory."

Higher interest rates drag on most of the stock market, but they are particularly painful for stocks, especially technology shares, considered the most expensive and those bid up for profits expected far into



the future.

Retailers are among the last companies due to report first-quarter results, with several of them set to do so this week, including Target and Lowe's.

On Tuesday, Walmart rose 2.2% after the giant retailer's results beat estimates as online shopping surged from a year earlier.

AT&T fell 5.8% for the biggest decline in the S&P 500 and continued a two-day slide after the company announced it would spin off its Warner media assets into a new company with Discovery Communications.

In energy trading, U.S. benchmark crude fell 79 cents to \$64.70 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It lost 78 cents to \$65.49 on Tuesday. Brent crude, the international standard, lost 67 cents to \$68.04 a barrel.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar inched up to 108.97 Japanese yen from 108.89 yen. The euro slipped to \$1.2224 from \$1.2226.

## NY attorney general says Trump Org probe is now criminal

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The New York attorney general's office said Tuesday that it is conducting a criminal investigation into former President Donald Trump's business empire, expanding what had previously been a civil probe.

"We have informed the Trump Organization that our investigation into the company is no longer purely civil in nature," Fabien Levy, a spokesperson for Attorney General Letitia James, said in a statement.

"We are now actively investigating the Trump Organization in a criminal capacity, along with the Manhattan DA," Levy said.

James' investigators are working with the Manhattan district attorney's office, which has been conducting a criminal investigation into Trump and his company, the Trump Organization, for two years. James and District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. are both Democrats.

James' office offered no explanation for what prompted the change in its approach to the investigation or why it chose to announce it publicly. CNN was first to report the development.

Levy declined further comment. A spokesperson for Vance declined comment. A message seeking comment was left with a lawyer for Trump and spokespeople for the former president and his company.

In the past, the Republican ex-president has decried the investigations as part of a Democratic "witch hunt."

James' disclosure of a widening investigation is not necessarily an indication that she is planning to bring criminal charges. In New York, if that were to happen, the state attorney general can do so through a county district attorney, like Vance, or with a referral from Gov. Andrew Cuomo or a state agency.

James' civil investigation and Vance's criminal probe had overlapped in some areas, including examining whether Trump or his businesses manipulated the value of assets — inflating them in some cases and minimizing them in others — to gain favorable loan terms and tax benefits.

Vance's investigation also included a look at hush-money payments paid to women on Trump's behalf and the propriety of tax write-offs the Trump Organization claimed on millions of dollars in consulting fees it paid, including money that went to Trump's daughter, Ivanka.

Vance's office hasn't publicly said what it is investigating, citing grand jury secrecy rules, but some details have come out during a legal battle to get access to Trump's tax records, which it finally obtained in February.

As part of her civil investigation, James' office issued subpoenas to local governments in November 2019 for records pertaining to Trump's estate north of Manhattan, Seven Springs and a tax benefit Trump received for placing land there into a conservation trust.

James was also looking at similar issues relating to a Trump office building in New York City, a hotel in Chicago and a golf course near Los Angeles. Her office also won a series of court rulings forcing Trump's company and a law firm it hired to turn over troves of records.

Vance's investigation has also appeared to focus in recent weeks on the Trump Organization's longtime finance chief, Allen Weisselberg.

His former daughter-in-law, Jen Weisselberg, has given investigators reams of documents as they look into how some Trump employees were compensated with apartments or school tuition.

Weisselberg was subpoenaed in James' civil investigation and testified twice in 2020. His lawyer didn't immediately respond to an email Tuesday night.

## McConnell hits 'pause' on Dems effort to create Jan. 6 panel

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, ALAN FRAM and LISA MASCARO undefined

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republicans are signaling that they will try to block — or at least slow down — a Democratic effort to create a 9/11-style commission on the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, threatening the chances of a deeper, independent look at the siege and how it could be prevented from happening again.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said Tuesday he is "pushing the pause button," on the legislation to form the commission, which is expected to pass the House this week despite the opposition of House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy. That means the bill is likely to have a more difficult path when it reaches the Senate, where majority Democrats will need at least 10 GOP votes to pass it.

McConnell told reporters that his caucus is "undecided" but willing to listen to the arguments about "whether such a commission is needed." He questioned whether the panel's work would interfere with the hundreds of criminal cases stemming from the Jan. 6 attack and whether the "fine print" of the bill would ensure that both parties on the commission have an equal say.

He also questioned a separate, \$1.9 billion spending bill that the House is expected to pass this week for security upgrades. "We're not sure what to spend the money on yet," McConnell said.

McCarthy's opposition and McConnell's hesitancy will almost certainly mean fewer Republicans will support the commission in both chambers. Most in the party are still loath to upset former President Donald Trump, who had encouraged his supporters to head to Capitol Hill that day to stop the counting of the electoral votes and overturn his defeat to Democrat Joe Biden.

Trump released a statement Tuesday night urging Republicans against approving what he called a "Democrat trap."

The commission will also expose divisions in the party, as some Republicans have said they think an independent review is necessary. In private GOP caucus meetings across the Capitol on Tuesday, members argued for and against the idea.

Several Republican lawmakers joined McCarthy in speaking against the commission early Tuesday during a meeting of House Republicans, according to one Republican familiar with the private session who was granted anonymity to discuss it. The Republican who negotiated the bill with Democrats, New York Rep. John Katko, argued in favor.

"I recognize there are differing views on this issue, which is an inherent part of the legislative process and not something I take personally," Katko said in a statement. "However, as the Republican Leader of the Homeland Security Committee, I feel a deep obligation to get the answers U.S. Capitol Police and Americans deserve and ensure an attack on the heart of our democracy never happens again."

McConnell said his caucus had "a good discussion" in their closed-door lunch.

Some Republicans, such as Missouri Sen. Roy Blunt, recommended that his colleagues oppose the commission. Blunt, the top Republican on the Senate Rules Committee, is working on a bipartisan report with his Democratic colleagues that will include some recommendations for security upgrades. He said an independent investigation would take too long and "frankly, I don't think there are that many gaps to be filled in on what happened on January 6th, as it relates to building security."

Other Senate Republicans have signaled support for the commission. Utah Sen. Mitt Romney said earlier Tuesday that given the violent attack, "we should understand what mistakes were made and how we could prevent them from happening again."

Modeled after the investigation into the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the bill would establish an independent 10-member commission that would make recommendations for securing the Capitol and preventing another insurrection. The panel would have to issue a final report by Dec. 31.

The debate over the commission comes at a time when some Republicans have begun to downplay the severity of the Jan. 6 attack. And many Republicans say the commission should only be established if it can investigate other violent acts, including protests last summer in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd. McConnell declined to answer a question about whether he agreed with that, saying only that Republicans were "evaluating what is appropriate."

Some have suggested that McCarthy himself could be subpoenaed by the panel because he talked to Trump as the Capitol was breached. Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, who was booted out of GOP leadership last week for her criticism of Trump's false claims of a stolen election, suggested as much in an interview with ABC News, saying she "wouldn't be surprised" if McCarthy was questioned in the investigation. Cheney has backed the commission.

Cheney and Katko are two of 10 Republicans who voted to impeach Trump after the insurrection for telling his supporters that day to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat. The Senate later acquitted him.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called McCarthy's opposition to the commission "cowardice" and said he doesn't want to find the truth. She released a February letter from the GOP leader in which he asked for an even split of Democrats and Republican commissioners, equal subpoena power and no predetermined findings or conclusions listed in the legislation. The bipartisan legislation accommodates all three of those requests, she said.

"Leader McCarthy won't take yes for an answer," she said.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer vowed to bring the House measure for a vote. "Republicans can let their constituents know: Are they on the side for truth or are they going to cover up?" Schumer said.

He questioned why Republicans even negotiate with Democrats "if the Republican leaders are just going to throw their lead negotiators under the bus."

The Biden administration said it supports the legislation and that the American people deserve "such a full and fair accounting to prevent future violence and strengthen the security and resilience of our democratic institutions."

## Prosecutor says Durst's own words show his guilt in killings

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Multimillionaire Robert Durst lived a life of such privilege and ease that he didn't bother keeping track of the many lies he told over the years and it could be his downfall, a prosecutor said Tuesday during a new round of opening statements at his murder trial.

Deputy District Attorney John Lewin wove a combination of Durst's statements — what he said were truth and lies — to outline evidence that will show the New York real estate heir killed his best friend and a neighbor to cover up the mystery of his wife's disappearance.

"One of the hallmarks of Bob Durst is that despite all the lies he tells, he doesn't take or use the mental energy to even remember them because his life has been spent privileged in getting away with whatever he wants," Lewin said. "The evidence is going to show that's going to be his undoing in a lot of ways in all three of these cases."

Durst, 78, is only charged with one count of murder — in the killing of his best friend, Susan Berman, in 2000 in her Los Angeles home.

Durst has pleaded not guilty and his lawyer said he doesn't know who killed Berman, who was his long-time confidante and once an unofficial spokeswoman when Kathie Durst vanished in New York in 1982.

But Lewin said the killing of Berman, who was shot in the back of the head at close range, and Durst's admission that he fatally shot and dismembered a drifter in Texas in 2001 are both tied to the mystery of Kathie Durst.

"Everything starts with Kathie Durst's disappearance and death at the hands of Mr. Durst," Lewin said.

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Durst, who suffers from myriad maladies, was slumped in a wheelchair dressed in a blue sportcoat, white dress shirt and tan pants. His gray hair was disheveled and he appeared to show no emotion behind a white mask as he followed the proceedings on a tablet computer that provided a real-time transcript because he has impaired hearing.

Lewin provided an abbreviated opening statement to refresh jurors on what they last heard over six days in March 2020 before the case was recessed an unprecedented 14 months because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Defense lawyers will present their own summary of the evidence on Wednesday. Last year, they stunned the audience when they said they would put Durst on the witness stand.

Durst was acquitted of murder in a Texas court after testifying he killed Morris Black when the man pulled a gun on him and they wrestled for the weapon in the Galveston rooming house where they both lived.

Durst had gone into hiding in Texas after New York prosecutors reopened the investigation into Kathie Durst's suspected death. He killed Black because he had discovered Durst's identity and was trying to leverage the wealthy scion to buy a house for the two of them, Lewin said.

Durst killed Black about nine months after Berman was found dead in her Benedict Canyon home in December 2000. Police were directed to the home by a note with only her address and the word, "CA-DAVER" written in block letters.

Durst told the makers of "The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst" in 2010 and 2012 that he didn't write the note. He told the filmmakers and investigators in 2015 that whoever wrote the note had to have been Berman's killer.

"You're writing a note to the police that only the killer could have written," Durst said.

Lewin said that now amounts to a confession after defense lawyers conceded before trial that Durst wrote the note. Evidence had shown he once penned a note to Berman in identical handwriting, with her address similarly misspelled "Beverley" Hills instead of Beverly.

The defense argues Durst found Berman's body, panicked and ran. He sent the note to police so she'd be found, though her body was discovered before police got the note.

Durst killed Berman to keep her from talking to police about how she helped him cover up his wife's disappearance, Lewin said.

Lewin played a clip of testimony from Nick Chavin, a mutually close friend of the defendant and victim, who said Berman once told him that Durst had killed Kathie. He said Durst told him he killed Berman after the two had dinner in New York in 2014.

"I had to," Durst said on the sidewalk, according to Chavin. "It was her or me, I had no choice."

Lewin said Berman, the daughter of a Las Vegas mobster who never would have turned her back on a stranger, had no idea Durst had come to kill her when she let him in her home just before Christmas.

"She turned around because because she trusted him, because he was her close friend, because he was not somebody to fear," Lewin said. "She turned around, she took a few steps and he basically blew her brains out."

Lewin showed a photo of Berman lying on her back, her raven hair spread out on the floor and dark blood pooled under her head.

## **AP source: US encouraging Israel to wind down Gaza offensive**

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER, AAMER MADHANI and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and administration officials have encouraged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other top Israeli officials to wind down the bombardment of Gaza, a person with knowledge of the discussions said Tuesday, as the Israeli and Palestinian death tolls mounted and pressure grew on Biden to move more forcefully to stop the fighting.

Top Biden administration officials underscored to the Israelis on Monday and Tuesday that time is not on their side in terms of international objections to nine days of Israeli airstrikes and Hamas rockets, and that it is in their interest to wind down the operations soon, according to the official, who was not authorized



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to comment publicly on the private talks and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The account shows Biden administration officials going further privately in messaging to Netanyahu than they have previously revealed. A White House readout of a Biden call to Netanyahu on Monday said Biden had expressed support for a cease-fire, but said nothing about the U.S. urging Israel to bring fighting to a close.

The fighting has killed at least 213 Palestinians and 12 people in Israel, and tested both Biden's reluctance to publicly criticize Israel and his administration's determination not to bog down its foreign policy focus in Middle East hot spots.

The Palestinian ambassador to the United Nations on Tuesday challenged the Biden administration to show any results from what it is calling its quiet diplomacy to stop the new Israeli-Hamas battles. Ambassador Riyad Mansour pointed to the U.S. repeatedly blocking a U.N. Security Council action on the conflict, and he urged the Biden administration to do more.

"If the Biden administration can exert all of their pressure to bring an end to the aggression against our people, nobody is going to stand in their way," Mansour said.

France, in consultation with Egypt and Jordan, on Tuesday was preparing a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for a cease-fire, Zhang Jun, China's U.N. ambassador, and other diplomats told reporters. The move to put the U.N.'s most powerful body behind a demand for Israel and Hamas to stop hostilities came after the U.S. repeatedly blocked what would have been a unanimous Security Council statement expressing concern about the fighting.

The White House has so far resisted the calls for ramping up public pressure on Netanyahu. It has made the calculation that Israelis will not respond to international resolutions or public demands by the U.S. and that its greatest leverage is behind-the-scenes pressure, according to the person familiar with the administration's discussions.

The person said that the Israelis have signaled that it is possible their military campaign could end in a matter of days.

The effort to press U.S. ally Israel to find an endgame to the military campaign in Gaza came amid a split this week among House Democrats on whether to step up pressure for a cease-fire and call for more forceful U.S. diplomacy to end the fighting.

Democrats on the House Foreign Affairs Committee weighed — but on Tuesday shelved — writing Biden to demand that he delay a pending \$735 million sale of precision-guided missiles to Israel.

Dozens of progressive and mainstream Democratic lawmakers already have called for a cease-fire between Israel and Gaza's Hamas militants, and some Democrats are demanding Biden push harder for an end to fighting.

Committee member Rep. Joaquin Castro, D-Texas, was among the Democrats seeking a harder line, saying he has "serious concerns about the timing of this weapons sale, the message it will send to Israel and the world about the urgency of a cease fire." He said late Monday that the Biden administration "must use every diplomatic tool to de-escalate this conflict and bring about peace."

Committee chair Rep. Gregory Meeks, D-N.Y. said the lawmakers expect an administration briefing Wednesday on the crisis. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer on Tuesday acknowledged the difference between a growing number of progressive Democrats and the Biden administration on the U.S. approach to the conflict, but played it down.

"Every Democrat, and I think every Republican, wants to minimize the exposure of both sides in Gaza and in Israel," Hoyer told reporters. "There's a difference about how that can be done."

Biden did not join in the calls by some of his party's lawmakers and by many foreign governments to demand a cease-fire, however.

In talks with the Israelis, administration officials have pointed to Hezbollah's stature rising in the region after their 34-day war with Israel in 2006 to make the case for limiting the time of the military action. But Israeli officials have argued to the administration that a slightly prolonged campaign to degrade Hamas' military capabilities is necessary and in their interest, according to the person familiar with the talks. Hamas

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operates in the crowded Gaza Strip, a 25-by-6-mile (40-by-10-kilometer) territory crowded with more than 2 million people.

Hamas has sought to portray their rocket barrages as a defense of Jerusalem. The Israelis have made the case to Biden administration officials that that message is losing resonance as mob violence against Arabs in mixed Israeli cities, including Lod, has been tamped down.

Administration officials are defending Biden's decision to avoid ratcheting up public pressure on Israel for its role in the fighting. The U.S. this week killed a proposed U.N. Security Council statement that would have expressed concern for civilian deaths and raised the issue of a cease-fire.

"The president has been doing this long enough ... to know sometimes diplomacy has to happen behind the scenes," White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters Tuesday.

She spoke as Biden headed to a Ford electric vehicle site in Michigan to promote a green infrastructure plan.

Pressure on the White House to do more in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dogged the trip, with protesters in communities with large populations of Arab Americans shouting condemnation of Biden.

## Israel, Gaza violence overshadows Biden's domestic plans

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, DARLENE SUPERVILLE and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) — President Joe Biden's efforts to spotlight his big infrastructure plans are suddenly being overshadowed by the escalating violence between Israel and the Palestinians, the conflict sparking protests during his visit to a Ford electric vehicle center in Michigan on Tuesday as the White House faced growing pressure to intervene.

Biden, who planned to use the two week-stretch before Memorial Day to build Republican support for his \$2.3 trillion package, visited a Ford plant in Dearborn to make his case that his plans could help steer the country toward a bright electric-car future.

But any presidential script is subject to real-world rewrites, and Biden faces rising pressure to weigh in more forcefully to stop the Middle East violence — as, by a scheduling quirk, he visited a city that is almost half Arab American.

In a speech at the plant, Biden made only passing mention of the conflict, warmly addressing Democratic Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Michigan as she sat in the audience, saying he would pray that her grandmother and other relatives were well in the West Bank.

"I promise you I'm going to do everything to see that they are," Biden said.

Biden also met Tlaib and fellow Michigan Democratic Rep. Debbie Dingell earlier at the Detroit airport, where all three huddled on the tarmac for several minutes in what appeared to be an animated conversation. Tlaib has publicly pressed Biden to get behind a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for a cease-fire — a measure that the U.S. has blocked from moving forward.

"He was very compassionate — he listened," Dingell said of Biden. "He's deeply concerned."

The Biden administration has been conducting what it calls quiet diplomacy while declining to press for an immediate cease-fire by close ally Israel and Hamas. But privately, Biden administration officials have encouraged the Israelis to wind down their bombardment of Gaza.

Officials have been told by the Israelis that the operations could conclude in a matter of days.

The White House has made the calculation that the Israelis will not respond to international resolutions or public demands by the U.S. and that the greatest leverage is behind-the-scenes pressure, officials said. At the same time, the White House is mindful that the longer the conflict goes, the greater chance of a very-high-casualty event or other provocative action by either side that could make reaching a cease-fire more difficult.

All the while, Hamas rockets and Israeli airstrikes continued for a ninth day. At least 213 Palestinians and 12 people in Israel have died.

To this point in Biden's young term, foreign policy has taken a back seat. The president has stressed the need to first focus on domestic matters — taming the COVID-19 pandemic and reshaping the economy

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— to prove that democracies can still compete with global autocracies, namely China.

But the intractable conflict in Gaza has derailed that narrative.

Aboard Air Force One for the flight to Michigan, White House press secretary Jen Psaki was peppered with questions about the administration's response to the violence before she was asked about electric cars. She defended Biden's cautious approach to this point.

"He's been doing this long enough to know that the best way to end an international conflict is typically not to debate it in public," she said.

During his tour of the Dearborn facilities, Biden kept the focus on jobs. The president, a car enthusiast, marveled at the new technology — he even took a truck for a quick test drive — while stressing the importance of his infrastructure plan.

"The future of the auto industry is electric. There's no turning back," Biden said. "The real question is whether we'll lead or we'll fall behind in the race to the future."

There were protests outside in Dearborn, which is 47% Arab American, most of them Muslim, the highest percentage among cities in the U.S. Outside the local police department, about 3 miles (4.8 kilometers) from where Biden spoke, hundreds of people of Arab descent chanted, "Free, Free Palestine!" and waved Palestine flags. Amer Zahr, leader of a group called New Generation for Palestine, said Biden is "not welcome in Dearborn today."

"He is funding the murder of our families," Zahr said. "It's ethnic cleansing. It's that simple. This is not very complicated."

Biden wanted to orient his foreign policy around American workers, but the Israel conflict has underscored the challenges of combining his domestic and international agendas. The violence has not just been a disrupter of his messaging but also of his policy foundations.

The Biden White House has prided itself on message control and carefully scripting its approach to legislation. The first two months of his term were focused on passing the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill and dramatically increasing the nation's vaccination program.

The pivot was then to Biden's two-part infrastructure and family plan, which totals roughly \$4 trillion. The president has set a soft deadline of Memorial Day to gauge whether there is Republican support. Not one GOP lawmaker backed the COVID-19 bill, though it had strong public support. There have been a few, if fleeting, signs of possible Republican support for the infrastructure plan.

Last week, a group of Republican senators met with Biden and were set to again sit down with White House officials and Cabinet members on Tuesday. There are some hopes for bipartisan agreement on hard infrastructure — like highways and broadband — before Democrats push forward their family plan on a party-line vote. At minimum, aides have said, they want to make a show of reaching across the aisle to reassure moderate Democrats leery of pushing through massive spending bills using a legislative strategy that bypasses Republicans entirely.

Biden's plan would help transform the automotive sector by making vehicles more mainstream that don't burn gasoline. He also sees a shift toward electric vehicles as a major part of his plan to fight climate change, and his visit came the day before Ford was expected to release details of an all-electric version of its F-150 pickup truck called the Lightning.

The president also has to overcome a major hurdle before his electric vehicle, zero emission future becomes reality: the lack of stations where people can plug in and juice up their engines. To that end, Biden has proposed \$174 billion for electric vehicles. That money includes rebates and incentives for consumer purchases, along with money to build 500,000 charging stations by 2030.

The White House says the U.S. has just a fraction, about one-third, of the electric vehicle market share that China has, and far fewer public charging points — and needs to catch up before it can take the lead.

At Ford, its F-Series pickups — including heavy-duty versions — have been the top-selling vehicles in the U.S. for 39 straight years. Last year, the company sold more than 787,000 of the trucks, even though it had to close factories for eight weeks at the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

The F-150 Lightning electric truck, due in showrooms in the middle of next year, will come at a time

when few Americans have been willing to switch away from gasoline-powered vehicles. Through April of this year, automakers have sold only 107,624 fully electric vehicles in the U.S.

## Prosecutor finds deputies justified in shooting of Black man

By BEN FINLEY and JONATHAN DREW Associated Press

ELIZABETH CITY, N.C. (AP) — A North Carolina prosecutor said Tuesday that sheriff's deputies were justified in fatally shooting Andrew Brown Jr. because the Black man struck a deputy with his car and nearly ran him over while ignoring commands to show his hands and get out of the vehicle.

District Attorney Andrew Womble said at a news conference that Brown used his car as a "deadly weapon," causing Pasquotank County deputies to believe it was necessary to use deadly force.

Womble, who acknowledged Brown wasn't armed with guns or other weapons, said the deputies will face no criminal charges after he reviewed a state investigation of the shooting, which sparked weeks of protests. Pasquotank County Sheriff Tommy Wooten II said in a video statement Tuesday afternoon that the deputies will keep their jobs but will be "disciplined and retrained."

Brown's family released a statement calling Womble's decision "both an insult and a slap in the face." Attorneys for the family who watched body camera footage have said repeatedly that he was trying to drive away from deputies serving drug-related warrants and posed no threat.

The prosecutor declined to directly release copies of bodycam video of the April 21 shooting, but he played portions of the video during the news conference that media outlets broadcast live.

The multiple angles of the footage, projected onto a screen behind Womble, depicted a chaotic scene of about 44 seconds. After six deputies approach Brown's car with guns drawn, the video shows one of them putting his hand on the driver's side door, then yelling and recoiling as Brown backs up.

Seconds later, the same deputy appears to be in the path of the car as Brown moves forward, though it's not clear how fast the car is moving. The deputy appears to avoid a direct hit after pushing his hand onto the moving car's hood and quickly moving aside. Gunshots are then heard, and officers appear to continue firing as the car moves away from them.

The quality of the projected video, even replayed later on news websites that filmed it, made it hard for a viewer to glean the level of detail described by either the Brown family or prosecutor when they watched the footage in person. The family continued its calls Tuesday for direct release of the video, which would make longer and higher-quality versions public.

During his news conference, Womble said the deputy who tried to open Brown's car door was jerked over the hood when the car backed up, and the deputy's body was struck by the vehicle. The deputy then had to push off the hood with his hand "to avoid being run over" when Brown drove forward, Womble said. He said that was when the first shot was fired by a fellow deputy.

"I find that the facts of this case clearly illustrate the officers who used deadly force on Andrew Brown Jr. did so reasonably and only when a violent felon used a deadly weapon to put their lives in danger," Womble said, referring to Brown's car. He added that "Brown posed an immediate threat to the safety of the officers and others."

Though Womble said at least two deputies were endangered by Brown's driving, the sheriff has said his deputies weren't injured.

Attorneys for Brown's families decried Womble's conclusion.

"To say this shooting was justified, despite the known facts, is both an insult and a slap in the face to Andrew's family, the Elizabeth City community, and to rational people everywhere," it said. "Not only was the car moving away from officers, but four of them did not fire their weapons — clearly they did not feel that their lives were endangered. And the bottom line is that Andrew was killed by a shot to the back of the head."

The FBI is pursuing a separate investigation. A spokeswoman declined to comment on its progress.

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat, urged federal officials to thoroughly investigate. In a statement Tuesday afternoon, he reiterated past comments that Womble should have stepped aside for an



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independent prosecutor to take over.

"Public confidence would have been better served with a special prosecutor and by quickly making public the incident footage," Cooper said.

Womble, a Republican first appointed district attorney in 2013 before winning two elections, resisted calls for a special prosecutor. He has said he intends to run to be a superior court judge in 2022.

Some two dozen people gathered outside the municipal building where Womble spoke, and many expressed disappointment with his decision.

"Andrew Brown Jr. is the victim," said Keith Rivers, president of Pasquotank County's NAACP chapter. "It's not a district attorney's job to defend sheriff's deputies. It is his job to get justice for the victim. It is the court's job to decide whether or not it was reasonable or unreasonable."

The State Bureau of Investigation, which conducted the state review, issued a statement Tuesday noting it investigates the facts but "does not make any determinations as to whether criminal charges should be filed." It said its investigative report isn't a public record and won't be released.

The three deputies who fired shots — Investigator Daniel Meads, Deputy Robert Morgan and Cpl. Aaron Lewellyn — have been on leave since it happened. The sheriff's office said Morgan is Black, while Meads and Lewellyn are white. Womble said none have prior use-of-force complaints.

Four other deputies involved in serving the warrants were reinstated after the sheriff said it was clear they didn't fire shots.

A lawyer who represented some of the deputies in a prior court hearing didn't respond to an email seeking comment Tuesday.

Womble said a medical examiner working for the state found that Brown died from multiple gunshot wounds after being hit in the back of the head and right shoulder. Womble said the medical examiner also described superficial "abrasions" to his arm, leg and back from bullet shrapnel. The state's written autopsy hasn't been released yet.

Two deputies fired nine shots from Glock handguns and the third fired five rounds from an AR-15 rifle, according to Womble, based on spent shell casings.

An independent autopsy released by the family found Brown was hit by bullets five times, including once in the back of the head.

## Charles Grodin, 'Midnight Run,' 'Heartbreak Kid,' star, dies

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

Charles Grodin, the droll, offbeat actor and writer who scored as a caddish newlywed in "The Heartbreak Kid" and later had roles ranging from Robert De Niro's counterpart in the comic thriller "Midnight Run" to the bedeviled father in the "Beethoven" comedies, has died. He was 86.

Grodin died Tuesday in Wilton, Connecticut, from bone marrow cancer, his son, Nicholas Grodin, said.

Known for his dead-pan style and everyday looks, Grodin also appeared in "Dave," "The Woman in Red," "Rosemary's Baby" and "Heaven Can Wait." On Broadway, he starred with Ellen Burstyn in the long-running 1970s comedy "Same Time, Next Year," and he found many other outlets for his talents.

With bone-dry understatement, Grodin could steal entire scenes with just a look. His commitment, whether acting across De Niro or Miss Piggy, was unsurpassed. In his many late-night appearances, he once brought a lawyer with him to threaten David Letterman for defamation. (The lawyer instead took a shine to Letterman.) Hosting "Saturday Night Live," he pretended to not understand live television, ruining all the sketches. Steve Martin, who co-starred with Grodin in 1984's "The Lonely Guy," remembered him as "one of the funniest people I ever met."

In the 1990s, Grodin made his mark as a liberal commentator on radio and TV. He also wrote plays and television scripts, winning an Emmy for his work on a 1997 Paul Simon special, and wrote several books humorously ruminating on his ups and downs in show business.

Actors, he wrote, should "think not so much about getting ahead as becoming as good as you can be, so you're ready when you do get an opportunity. I did that, so I didn't suffer from the frustration of all the rejections. They just gave me more time." He spelled out that advice in his first book, "It Would Be

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So Nice If You Weren't Here," published in 1989.

Grodin became a star in the 1970s, but might have broken through years earlier: He auditioned for the title role in Mike Nichols' 1967 classic "The Graduate," but the part went instead to Dustin Hoffman.

Grodin did have a small role in "Rosemary's Baby" and was part of the large cast of Nichols' adaptation of "Catch-22" before he gained wide notice in the 1972 Elaine May comedy "The Heartbreak Kid."

He starred as a Jewish newlywed who abandons his comically neurotic bride to pursue a beautiful, wealthy blonde played by Cybill Shepherd. The movie was a hit and Grodin received high praise. He commented: "After seeing the movie, a lot of people would approach me with the idea of punching me in the nose."

"I thought the character in 'The Heartbreak Kid' was a despicable guy, but I play it with full sincerity," Grodin told the A.V. Club in 2009. "My job isn't to judge it. If it wasn't for Elaine May, I probably would never have had that movie career."

In the next few years, Grodin played in a lavish 1976 film remake of "King Kong" as the greedy showman who brings the big ape to New York. He was Warren Beatty's devious lawyer in "Heaven Can Wait," and Gene Wilder's friend in "The Woman in Red" (Less successfully, he appeared in May's 1987 adventure comedy "Ishtar," a notorious flop). His turn in 1981's "The Great Muppet Caper" was typically dedicated as a thief wooing Miss Piggy.

In 1988's "Midnight Run," Grodin was a bail-jumping accountant who took millions from a mobster and De Niro was the bounty hunter trying to bring him cross-country to Los Angeles. They're being chased by police, another bounty hunter and the Mob, and because Grodin is afraid of flying, they are forced to go by car, bus, even boxcar.

Grodin and De Niro improvised in many scenes in the film, revered as among the greatest buddy comedies. Often Grodin was genuinely trying to amuse his more intimidating co-star. One line he threw at De Niro: "You ever had sex with an animal, Jack?"

"I moved a little more toward drama and he moved a little toward comedy," Grodin said at the time. "And we met on a very good ground."

"Beethoven" brought him success in the family-animal comedy genre in 1992. Asked why he took up such a role, he told The Associated Press he was happy to get the work.

"I'm not that much in demand," Grodin replied. "It's not like I have this stack of wonderful offers. I'm just delighted they wanted me."

Amid his film gigs, Grodin became a familiar face on late-night TV, perfecting a character who would confront Johnny Carson or others with a fake aggressiveness that made audiences cringe and laugh at the same time.

"It's all a joke," he told The Los Angeles Times in 1995. "It's just a thing. It was a choice to do that."

His biggest stage success, by far, was "Same Time, Next Year," which opened on Broadway in 1975 and ran nearly 3½ years. He and Burstyn were two people who — though each happily married — meet in the same hotel once a year for an extramarital fling. Beyond the humor, the play won praise for deftly tracing the changes in their lives, and in society, from the 1950s to the '70s. Critic Clive Barnes called Grodin's character "a monument to male insecurity, gorgeously inept."

After 1994's "My Summer Story," Grodin largely abandoned acting. From 1995 to 1998, he hosted a talk show on CNBC cable network. He moved to MSNBC and then to CBS' "60 Minutes II."

In his 2002 book, "I Like It Better When You're Funny," he said too many TV programmers' believe that viewers are best served "if we hear only from lifelong journalists." He argued that "people outside of Washington and in professions other than journalism" also deserved a soapbox.

He returned to the big screen in 2006 as Zach Braff's know-it-all father-in-law in "The Ex." More recent credits include the films "An Imperfect Murder" and "The Comedian" and the TV series "Louie."

Grodin was born Charles Grodinsky in Pittsburgh in 1935, son of a wholesale dry goods seller who died when Charles was 18. He played basketball and later described himself as "a rough kid, always getting kicked out of class."

He studied at the University of Miami and the Pittsburgh Playhouse, worked in summer theater and then

struggled in New York, working nights as a cab driver, postal clerk and watchman while studying acting during the day.

In 1962 Grodin made his Broadway debut and received good notices in "Tchin Tchin," a three-character play starring Anthony Quinn. He followed with "Absence of a Cello" in 1964.

He co-wrote and directed a short-lived 1966 off-Broadway show called "Hooray! It's a Glorious Day ... and all that." That same year, he made his movie debut in a low-budget flop called "Sex and the College Girl."

In 1969, Grodin demonstrated his early interest in politics by helping write and direct "Songs of America," a TV special starring Simon and Garfunkel that incorporated civil rights and antiwar messages. But the original sponsor pulled out and Simon later called the little-noticed effort "a tragedy."

Simon returned with a special in 1977 that spoofed show business and featured Grodin as the show's bumbling producer. Grodin and his co-writers won Emmys.

Grodin and his first wife, Julia Ferguson, had a daughter, comedian Marion Grodin. The marriage ended in divorce. He and his second wife, Elissa Durwood, had a son, Nicholas.

## **Palestinians go on strike as Israel-Hamas fighting rages**

By FARES AKRAM and RAVI NESSMAN Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Palestinians across Israel and the occupied territories went on strike in a rare collective protest Tuesday as Israeli missiles toppled a building in Gaza and militants in the Hamas-ruled territory fired dozens of rockets that killed two people.

The demonstrations and ongoing violence came as moves toward a cease-fire appeared to be gaining more traction.

U.S. officials said the Biden administration was privately encouraging Israel to wind down its bombardment of Gaza. Egyptian negotiators also were working to halt the fighting, and while they have not made progress with Israel, they were optimistic international pressure would force it to the table, according to an Egyptian diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was discussing diplomatic efforts.

The general strike was a sign that the war could widen again after a spasm of communal violence in Israel and protests across the occupied West Bank last week.

Although the strike was peaceful in many places, with shops in Jerusalem's usually bustling Old City markets shuttered, violence erupted in cities in the West Bank.

Hundreds of Palestinians burned tires in Ramallah and hurled stones at an Israeli military checkpoint. Troops fired tear gas, and protesters picked up some of the canisters and threw them back. Three protesters were killed and more than 140 wounded in clashes with Israeli troops in Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron and other cities, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. The Israeli army said two soldiers were wounded by gunshots to the leg.

The general strike was an uncommon show of unity by Palestinian citizens of Israel, who make up 20% of its population, and those in the territories Israel seized in 1967 that the Palestinians have long sought for a future state.

The strike was intended to protest the war and Israeli policies that many activists and some rights groups say constitute an overarching system of apartheid that denies Palestinians rights afforded to Jews. Israel rejects that characterization, saying its citizens have equal rights. It blames the war on Hamas, the Islamic militant group that controls Gaza, and accuses it of inciting violence.

Leaders of the Palestinian community in Israel called the strike, which was embraced by the internationally backed Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, where ministries and schools were closed. Most businesses appeared to be observing the strike.

Strike organizer Muhammad Barakeh said Palestinians are standing against Israeli "aggression" in Gaza and Jerusalem, as well as "brutal repression" by police.

The war has also seen an unusual outbreak of violence in Israel, with groups of Jewish and Palestinian citizens fighting in the streets and torching vehicles and buildings. In both Israel and the West Bank, Palestinian protesters have clashed with Israeli forces. Scores have been injured, including a Jewish man

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who died Monday after being attacked last week by a group of Arabs in the central city of Lod.

The fighting began May 10 when Hamas fired long-range rockets toward Jerusalem in support of Palestinian protests against Israel's heavy-handed policing of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a flashpoint site sacred to Jews and Muslims, and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers.

At least 217 Palestinians have been killed in airstrikes, including 63 children, with more than 1,500 people wounded, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not break the numbers down into fighters and civilians. Hamas and Islamic Jihad say at least 20 of their fighters have been killed, while Israel says the number is at least 130.

Twelve people in Israel, including a 5-year-old boy, have been killed in rocket attacks.

Tuesday's rocket attack from Gaza hit a packaging plant in a region bordering the territory, killing two Thai workers. Israel's Magen David Adom rescue service said it took another seven to the hospital. Thai Foreign Ministry spokesman Tanee Sangrat said the wounded were also Thai.

The Israeli military said rockets also were fired at the Erez pedestrian crossing and at the Kerem Shalom crossing, where humanitarian aid was being brought into Gaza, forcing both to close. It said a soldier was slightly wounded at Erez.

Israeli airstrikes into Gaza demolished a six-story building housing bookstores and educational centers used by the Islamic University and other colleges. Desks, office chairs, books and wires could be seen in the debris. Israel warned its occupants beforehand, sending them fleeing before dawn. There were no reports of casualties.

The Israeli military has launched hundreds of airstrikes it says are targeting Hamas' militant infrastructure, while Palestinian militants have fired more than 3,400 rockets from civilian areas in Gaza at civilian targets in Israel.

Israeli military spokesman Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus said the military was focusing on destroying the tunnels where Hamas fighters hide, move between locations and resupply launchers with rockets to fire at Israel.

The tunnels run under civilian neighborhoods, and Israeli airstrikes have been trying to target roads above them to minimize damage to buildings, Conricus said. One weekend airstrike that Israel said targeted a tunnel caused several buildings to collapse and killed 42 people in the deadliest single attack of the conflict.

The attacks on the tunnels continue, "and the assessment is that that effort will be expanded to areas that we so far have not conducted this effort in, and that is to be expected over the coming days," he said.

Medical supplies, fuel and water are running low in Gaza, which is home to more than 2 million Palestinians and under an Israeli-Egyptian blockade since Hamas seized power from rival Palestinian forces in 2007. Nearly 47,000 Palestinians have fled their homes.

Israeli attacks have damaged at least 18 hospitals and clinics and destroyed one health facility, the World Health Organization said. Nearly half of all essential drugs in the territory have run out.

The WHO said the bombing of key roads, including those leading to the main Shifa Hospital, has hindered ambulances and supply vehicles in Gaza, which was already struggling to cope with a coronavirus outbreak.

Among the buildings leveled by Israeli airstrikes was one housing The Associated Press Gaza office and those of other media outlets.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu alleged that Hamas military intelligence was operating in the building. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday in Iceland that Israel had given the U.S. information about the bombing. Blinken declined to characterize the material, and Israel has not publicly provided evidence of its claim.

AP President Gary Pruitt reiterated calls for an independent investigation of the attack.

## **Biden back behind the wheel, zooming away in electric truck**

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) — Joe Biden is back behind the wheel. And now he's gone, bolting down the track. The self-described "car guy" took a spin in the new Ford F-150 Lightning truck during a visit to a Ford



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safety testing center Tuesday as part of a trip to Michigan to sell his \$2 trillion infrastructure plan. The automaker showed off its new electric truck to coincide with Biden's tour of Ford's Rouge Electric Vehicle Center in Dearborn, where the truck will be produced.

"This sucker's quick," the president said, as he rolled up to the traveling press corps. Then he warned them, "I'm just gonna step on it. I'll come off at 80 miles an hour."

Not quite, but off he sped, fast as a one-man drag race, quiet as a ... well, an electric vehicle.

Ford says the Lightning will hit 60 mph from a standing start in about 4.5 seconds.

The truck will be formally unveiled Wednesday night. Ford still had it wrapped in black-and-white camouflage on Tuesday.

One reporter asked if she could ask about Israel. Only way to stop him, Biden said, was to get in front of the truck, and he was planning to step on the accelerator. Just "teasing," he added, but off he zoomed.

The son of a car salesman, Biden is known for his love of cars, a fact that featured prominently in some of the Obama White House's public messaging when he was vice president and also in his 2020 run for president. Supporters displayed campaign paraphernalia declaring they were "ridin' with Biden," complete with a stylized image of Biden behind the wheel of a convertible, wearing aviators and a broad grin.

As vice president, he once lamented to Car and Driver that the Secret Service wouldn't allow him to drive his treasured 1967 Corvette — "the one thing I hate about this job." The same is true now that he's president. But for a few great moments on Tuesday, that all was forgotten.

## Congress OKs bill to fight hate crimes vs. Asian Americans

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress approved legislation Tuesday intended to curtail a striking rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, sending President Joe Biden a bipartisan denunciation of the spate of brutal attacks that have proliferated during coronavirus pandemic.

The bill, which the House passed on a 364-62 vote, will expedite the review of hate crimes at the Justice Department and make grants available to help local law enforcement agencies improve their investigation, identification and reporting of incidents driven by bias, which often go underreported. It previously passed the Senate 94-1 in April after lawmakers reached a compromise. Biden has said he will sign it.

"Asian Americans have been screaming out for help, and the House and Senate and President Biden have clearly heard our pleas," said Rep. Grace Meng, D-N.Y., who helped lead efforts to pass the bill in the House.

To many Asian Americans, the pandemic has invigorated deep-seated biases that in some cases date back to the Chinese Exclusion Act of more than a century ago. President Donald Trump repeatedly referred to the virus, which emerged in Wuhan, China, as the "China Virus" or the "Kung Flu." And as cases of the illness began to rise in the U.S., so too did the attacks, with thousands of violent incidents reported in the past year.

Rep. Judy Chu, D-Calif., said it's painful for many to "open up the newspaper everyday and see that yet another Asian American has been assaulted, attacked and even killed."

In February, an 84-year-old man died after he was pushed to the ground near his home in San Francisco. A young family was injured in a Texas grocery store attack last year. And in Georgia, six Asian women were killed in March during a series of shootings targeting workers at massage parlors. Prosecutors are seeking hate crimes charges. The women who were killed are mentioned in the text of the bill.

"You start to think, 'Well, will I be next?'" Chu said.

Yet to some activists, including organizations representing gay and transgender Asian Americans, the legislation is misguided. More than 100 groups have signed onto a statement opposing the bill for relying too heavily on law enforcement while providing too little funding to address the underlying issues driving a rise in hate crimes.

"We have had hate crimes laws since 1968, it's been expanded over and over again, and this new legislation is more of the same," said Jason Wu, who is co-chair of GAPIMNY-Empowering Queer & Trans Asian Pacific Islanders. "These issues are about bias, but also rooted in inequality, and lack of investment and

resources for our communities. Not a shortage of police and jails.”

Meng acknowledged some of the concerns raised by the groups, but countered that the widespread underreporting of hate crimes needs to be addressed.

“Law enforcement is currently underreporting these kinds of incidents and it makes it easy to ignore hate crimes all together,” she said.

Rep. Jim Jordan, an Ohio Republican, suggested that the surge in Asian American violence was tied to efforts backed by some Democrats and other progressives to decrease funding for the police.

“This violence, by and large, is happening in Democrat-controlled cities,” said Jordan. If “money wasn’t taken from police and they were allowed to do their jobs, we would probably be in an entirely different position.”

Yet the bill also represented a rare moment of bipartisanship in a Congress that has struggled to overcome partisan gridlock, while underscoring an evolution in Republican thought on hate crimes legislation.

Many conservatives have historically dismissed hate crimes laws, arguing they create special protected classes so that victims of similar crimes are treated differently.

“I’m glad Congress is coming together in a bipartisan way,” said Rep. Young Kim, a California Republican who is Korean American. “Let’s also recognize that we cannot legislate hate out of our people’s hearts and minds.”

Speaking earlier in the day, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said passage of the bill sends a “powerful message of solidarity” to those who have suffered discrimination during the pandemic.

“Discrimination against Asian Americans is, sadly, not a new phenomenon in our nation’s history, but the pandemic brought old biases and prejudices back to the foreground,” the New York Democrat said. “The Senate can be proud it took the lead.”

## **Changed by pandemic, many workers won’t return to old jobs**

By DEE-ANN DURBIN, STEPHEN GROVES, ALEXANDRA OLSON and JOSEPH PISANI undefined

There’s a wild card in the push to return to pre-pandemic life: Many workers don’t want to go back to the jobs they once had.

Layoffs and lockdowns, combined with enhanced unemployment benefits and stimulus checks, gave many Americans the time and the financial cushion to rethink their careers. Their former employers are hiring again — and some, like Uber and McDonald’s, are offering higher pay — but workers remain hesitant.

In March, U.S. job openings rose 8% to a record 8.1 million, but overall hiring rose less than 4%, according to government data.

Nate Mullins quit his job as a bartender last November after clashing with managers over mask rules and worrying that he would spread the coronavirus to his immune-compromised sister.

Mullins’ unemployment checks don’t match what he was making at his Oak Harbor, Washington bar, but they’re enough to get by while he looks for jobs that would provide health care and retirement benefits.

“This opportunity to take a step back and really think about what you’re doing really changed my mind,” said Mullins, 36. “(It) made me think long-term for the first time.”

Workers like Mullins are one reason U.S. hiring slowed in April. Employers and business groups argue that the \$300-per-week federal unemployment supplement gives recipients less incentive to look for work. Several states have begun requiring those receiving the benefits to show they are actively searching for work, and a few will stop providing the supplement.

But Heidi Shierholz, a senior economist who researches low- and middle-income workers with the Economic Policy Institute, said health concerns and child care responsibilities seem to be the main reasons holding workers back.

In April, she said, at least 25% of U.S. schools weren’t offering in-person learning, forcing many parents to stay home. And health concerns could gain new urgency for some workers now that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said fully vaccinated people can stop wearing masks in most settings.

Shierholz added that unemployment benefits are designed to give workers the time to find jobs that are

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better suited to their abilities.

"We want people well-matched to their skills and experience," she said. "That's what helps the economy run better."

Higher pay for workers can push up inflation, which jumped in April as the economy struggled with widespread shortages of raw materials and parts amid a faster-than-expected reopening. If companies are forced to raise prices to cover the cost of higher wages, that could slow the recovery and reduce Americans' purchasing power.

For now, most economists see labor shortages as likely to be temporary. As more Americans are vaccinated, fewer will worry about getting sick at work. Schools should reopen in September, freeing more parents to return to work, and the extra \$300 in unemployment aid is also set to expire in early September. Those steps should bring more people into the job market.

Sarah Weitzel gave birth to her second child in February 2020. She was on leave from her job at a Victoria's Secret store in St. Louis when the pandemic threw her life into chaos.

She got a text telling her she was furloughed. Then her husband lost his restaurant job. In financial straits, they sold their home, moved in with friends, survived on unemployment insurance and fell deeper into debt.

In the fall, Victoria's Secret offered Weitzel part-time work that would pay \$12 an hour, but she declined. She and her husband, who now works long hours at a new restaurant job, can't afford child care.

"Something just kind of broke, where I thought about how hard I was working for this job that paid about \$32,000 a year," Weitzel said.

Weitzel, 31, got accepted to Rung for Women, a St. Louis program that offers career coaching and training for jobs in high demand, including banking, health care, customer service and technology. In the fall, when her oldest daughter starts preschool, Weitzel hopes to get part-time work in a new career.

Mark Smithivas drove for Uber and Lyft for four years before he abruptly quit last spring out of concern for his health. He has spent the last year taking technology classes in a federal worker training program.

Smithivas, 52, just got his second vaccination, but he doesn't want to go back to ride-hailing. He worries about carjackings and other crimes targeting drivers in Chicago, where he lives.

"I always viewed this job as temporary, and I really do want to find something that fits my career and background better," he said.

Some workers say the pandemic helped them prioritize their mental and physical health.

After a lifelong career as a bartender, 57-year-old Ellen Booth was in constant pain from lifting ice buckets and beer kegs. But without a college degree, she felt she had limited options.

When the restaurant she worked for closed last year, she said it gave her "the kick I needed." Booth, of Coventry, Rhode Island, started a year-long class to learn to be a medical coder. When her unemployment benefits ran out two months ago, she started drawing on her retirement funds. Booth will take an exam in the coming weeks to get certified, after which she will hit the job market.

Shelly Ortiz, 25, used to love her career as a restaurant server. But things changed last June, when her Phoenix restaurant reopened its dining room. She wore two masks and glasses to protect herself, but still felt anxiety in a restaurant full of unmasked diners.

Sexual harassment also got worse, she said. Patrons would ask her to pull down her mask so they could see how cute she was before tipping her.

Ortiz quit in July after she learned that the restaurant didn't deep-clean the bar after a bartender was potentially exposed. She and her partner, a teacher, curtailed their spending, and Ortiz returned to school full time. This month, she is graduating from Glendale Community College with a degree in film and a certificate in documentary directing.

Ortiz stopped getting unemployment benefits in November, when she did some part-time film work. Money is tight, she said, but she's never been happier. And she doesn't think she'll ever be a restaurant server again.

"I don't know if I could do it with a smile anymore," she said. "I don't think it should be an option for

anyone to treat any worker the way that service industry workers are treated in America."

In a tight labor market, some workers are also finding that if they hold out, they might get a better job than the one they left.

Taryn Henderson spent six years working at Best Buy before she was unexpectedly let go in February. "They didn't value the work I put in, the time I put in, because I got laid off," said Henderson, 24, a college student who lives in Austin, Texas. "It was just really discouraging."

At first she focused on her schoolwork, living on her unemployment checks and a severance payment that gave her 10 weeks' worth of pay. But soon she was anxious to work again, and thought a new job that valued her more would make her feel better.

After a few months of searching, she found another job with a music streaming service. She'll start later this month and will make \$10 more per hour than the \$17 she made at Best Buy.

"As long as I'm making enough money that I can support myself, the people that I love and I can get to travel every once in a while, I'm good," said Henderson. "I think this job will afford me the opportunities to do that."

## Conservatives push big issues to fore at Supreme Court

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Abortion. Guns. Religion. A Trump-fortified conservative majority is making its presence felt at the Supreme Court by quickly wading into high-profile social issues that have been a goal of the right for decades.

For years, frustrated conservatives, including some justices, chided a court with a majority of Republican appointees for not going far enough or passing on issues they thought demanded the court's attention.

Now, with three appointees of former President Donald Trump on the nine-member court, longer-serving conservative Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas can cobble together five-justice majorities even without the vote of Chief Justice John Roberts.

The Trump-appointed justices represent "not only a shift of ideology but a shift of power. There are five justices to right of Roberts," said Boston College law professor Kent Greenfield. "What that means is that the chief is not in control of the court anymore."

In the seven months since Justice Amy Coney Barrett joined the court, conservative majorities have issued a series of orders in favor of religious worshippers who had challenged restrictions imposed because of COVID-19.

Barrett provided the fifth vote in several cases. Roberts has been unwilling to second guess elected officials in these cases and, prior to her death in September, Ginsburg also had voted to keep the restrictions on religious services in place.

Perhaps even more significant are the culture war issues that the court will, in all likelihood, rule on in the spring of 2022, in the run up to the congressional midterm elections. The justices announced Monday that they will hear an abortion case that could undermine nearly 50 years of abortion rights rulings and agreed last month to decide whether Americans have a constitutional right to carry guns in public for self-defense.

Waiting in the wings is a direct challenge to affirmative action in college admissions, in a case, involving Harvard, that calls on the court to reverse a 2003 ruling upholding race as a permissible factor in admissions. A vote to hear that case next term could come before the court takes its long summer break.

A decision to hear a case takes just four votes and is no guarantee of its outcome. But on guns and abortion in particular, the court with a less-conservative lineup passed up several opportunities to wade in.

Thomas, the longest-serving current justice, has long complained about his colleagues' timidity on these topics. For nearly 30 years, he has called on the court to overturn the landmark Roe v. Wade decision that extended abortion rights across the country. He was one of four justices who would have overturned Roe in 1992, in his first term on the court.

Instead, a five-member majority composed entirely of justices appointed by Republican presidents reaffirmed constitutional protections for women seeking abortions.



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On guns, Thomas has lamented that his colleagues treat the Second Amendment "right to keep and bear arms" as a second-class right, a phrase that Barrett herself used when she was an appeals court judge.

The court's shift to the right grows out of two untimely deaths and one crucial retirement.

It began five years ago, when Justice Antonin Scalia died suddenly and Senate Republicans refused to act on President Barack Obama's nomination of Merrick Garland to take Scalia's seat. Had Garland, now the attorney general, been confirmed, it would have given the court a majority appointed by Democratic presidents for the first time in 50 years.

Instead, the seat remained empty, Trump shocked the world by winning the presidency and Justice Neil Gorsuch joined the court in April 2017.

A year later the court's "swing vote," Justice Anthony Kennedy, retired and Trump put Justice Brett Kavanaugh in his seat.

Kennedy's retirement essentially put Roberts at the ideological, though right-leaning, center of the court, and the chief justice has resisted public perceptions of the court as merely a political institution. He has voted with the liberal justices to uphold the Obama era health care law and strike down a Louisiana abortion regulation.

But Ginsburg's death, which led to Barrett's confirmation days before the 2020 election, ended a brief period in which Roberts controlled how far the court would go in either direction.

Trump had pledged to nominate "pro-life justices" and predicted back in 2016 that with three appointments, "Roe would be gone."

Carrie Severino, whose Judicial Crisis Network spent tens of millions of dollars in support of confirming the three Trump appointees, said the justices have not shied away from big issues.

"Having Trump's nominees on the court has made a real impact. It's exciting to see a solid majority of the court committed to interpreting the Constitution as it's written," said Severino, a onetime law clerk for Thomas.

Liberal groups are alarmed at the turn of events generally and the court's intervention in the abortion case in particular.

Take Back the Court, a group pushing for Supreme Court expansion, said in a letter it is sending to President Joe Biden that the recent developments are a predictable result of Republican efforts to keep Scalia's seat open, then fill Ginsburg's quickly.

"None of this is a surprise: The Supreme Court was stolen by Mitch McConnell — and its theft designed by the Federalist Society — explicitly to overturn Roe and restrict women's rights," the letter reads.

Biden's commission on Supreme Court reform is holding its first meeting Wednesday. It's supposed to report back in six months.

Ginsburg herself recognized what might come to pass with Trump's election. In an interview with The Associated Press in July 2016, she was confident that Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton would become president and have several Supreme Court appointments.

But what, Ginsburg was asked, would happen if Trump were to win?

"I don't want to think about that possibility, but if it should be, then everything is up for grabs," she said.

## Spain, Morocco square off after 8,000 migrants arrive by sea

By RENATA BRITO and ARITZ PARRA Associated Press

CEUTA, Spain (AP) — Spain deployed its military to the Moroccan border Tuesday and expelled nearly half of the thousands of migrants who jumped fences or swam onto European soil over two days after Rabat loosened border controls amid a deepening diplomatic spat.

Overwhelmed soldiers separated the adults from the young and carried children in their arms while Red Cross workers helped an endless trickle of migrants who were emerging from the water shivering and exhausted. One unconscious woman laid on the sand before she was carried away on a stretcher.

The sudden influx of migrants has fueled the diplomatic spat between Rabat and Madrid over the disputed Western Sahara region and created a humanitarian crisis for Ceuta, the Spanish city of 85,000 in North Africa on the Mediterranean Sea, separated from Morocco by a double-wide, 10-meter (32-foot) fence.

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Amina Farkani, a 31-year-old Moroccan woman who commuted to jobs in Ceuta for 18 years until foreign workers were banned from entering when coronavirus outbreaks began to surge last year, said she saw an opportunity to go back to work when she heard that police were not controlling the border.

"They let people pass and stand there without speaking," Farkani told The Associated Press. "People just pass and pass and pass."

Farkani was among the thousands of migrants who were sent back to Morocco. AP reporters saw Spanish military personnel and police officers ushering both adults and children through a gate in the border fence. Some tried to resist and were pushed and chased by soldiers who used batons to hasten them.

Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska denied that unaccompanied migrants under 18, who are allowed to remain legally under the tutelage of Spanish authorities, were being deported.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez canceled a trip to Paris, where he was to attend a summit on international aid to Africa, and flew by helicopter to Ceuta. While calling Morocco a "friend of Spain," Sánchez also urged authorities to "respect the shared border."

A senior Moroccan Foreign Ministry official said the government had recalled its ambassador to Spain for consultations. The official wasn't authorized to be identified by name in media reports.

By Tuesday afternoon, nearly 8,000 sea-soaked people had crossed the border into the city since early Monday, the Spanish government said, including some 2,000 thought to be teenagers. The number getting in slowed after Spain deployed additional police officers and soldiers, but the arrivals didn't stop even when anti-riot police on the Moroccan side dispersed crowds of people hoping to cross over.

At least 4,000 were returned to Morocco, according to Spain's Interior Ministry. Morocco and Spain signed an agreement three decades ago to expel all those who swim across the border.

Yet many arriving Tuesday were sub-Saharan Africans who often migrate to flee poverty or violence at home. Spain has agreements to return some of those migrants to their native countries, but not all of them.

One young man drowned and dozens were treated for hypothermia or small injuries, the Red Cross in Ceuta said, adding that it was performing coronavirus tests on the new arrivals. The adults were being transferred to Ceuta's main soccer stadium, while those thought to be minors were sent to warehouses run by charity groups.

Neither the government in Rabat nor local officials have commented about the mass influx or responded to queries by The Associated Press.

"It's such a strong invasion that we are not able to calculate the number of people that have entered," said Juan Jesús Vivas, the president of Ceuta, an autonomous city of about 20 square kilometers (7.7 square miles).

"The army is at the border in a deterrent role, but there are great quantities of people on the Moroccan side waiting to enter," he told Cadena SER radio.

Four Spanish armored vehicles parked Tuesday at Tarajal beach in Ceuta, where the border fence leads to a short breakwater. Some people also rushed up the hills surrounding the city and jumped over the fences.

In a video shared by a Spanish police union urging authorities to send in reinforcements, anti-riot officers behind the border fence were using shields to protect themselves from stones being thrown by people in Morocco.

The European Union's top migration official – Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson – described the incidents as "worrying" and called on Morocco to prevent people from setting out in the first place.

"The most important thing now is that Morocco continues to commit to prevent irregular departures, and that those who do not have the right to stay are orderly and effectively returned," Johansson told the European Parliament.

"Spanish borders are European borders. The European Union wants to build a relationship with Morocco based on trust and shared commitments. Migration is a key element," she said.

Morocco's loosened border watch came after Spain decided to grant entry for medical treatment to the chief of a militant group that fights Morocco for the independence of Western Sahara. Morocco annexed the sprawling region on the west coast of Africa in 1975.

Morocco's Foreign Ministry has said Madrid's move to assist Brahim Ghali, head of the Polisario Front,

was "inconsistent with the spirit of partnership and good neighborliness" and vowed there would be "consequences."

Vivas, Ceuta's conservative regional president, said residents were in a state of "anguish, concern and fear" and 60% of the city's children had not shown up for school on Tuesday. He also linked the sudden mass arrival to Spain's compassionate assistance to Ghali.

The Spanish government officially rejects the notion that Morocco is punishing Spain for a humanitarian move. Foreign Minister Arancha González Laya summoned Morocco's ambassador, however, to express the government's "disgust" and to communicate that Spain rejected "the massive entry of Moroccan immigrants."

Moroccan Ambassador Karima Benyaich was later recalled by Rabat.

Sánchez appeared on live television to announce he would visit Ceuta and that his top priority was to ensure safety in the city "in the face of any challenge, any eventuality and under any circumstance."

Over the decades, Spain has built a close relationship with Morocco to crack down on illegal border crossings but also to increase economic exchanges and fight extremism. Sánchez on Tuesday avoided any direct criticism to Rabat in his speech.

"To be effective," he said, "that cooperation must always be based on respect — respect for the shared border."

The prime minister also faced a political storm at home. The far-right Vox party blamed the migration crisis on the government's "inaction" and sending its leader on a quick visit to Ceuta.

Many African migrants regard Ceuta and nearby Melilla, another Spanish territory, as a gateway into Europe. In 2020, 2,228 chose to cross into the two enclaves by sea or land, often risking injuries or death.

On Tuesday, another 80 African migrants reached Melilla, 350 kilometers (218 miles) east of Ceuta, by jumping over the enclave's double fence.

Morocco scored a diplomatic victory last year when the previous U.S. administration under Donald Trump recognized Rabat's sovereignty over Western Sahara, paving the way for normalizing relations between Israel and Morocco.

## **Study: Climate change added \$8 billion to Sandy's damages**

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Climate change-triggered sea level rise added \$8 billion in damage during 2012's Superstorm Sandy, one of nation's costliest weather disasters, a new study said.

During Sandy — a late fall freak combination of a hurricane and other storms that struck New York and surrounding areas — the seas were almost 4 inches (9.6 centimeters) higher because of human-caused climate change, according to a study in Tuesday's journal *Nature Communications*. Researchers calculated that those few inches caused 13% of Sandy's overall \$62.5 billion damage, flooding 36,000 more homes. Sandy killed 147 people, 72 in the eastern United States, according to the National Hurricane Center.

While past studies have determined global warming was a factor in extreme weather events, either by increasing the chance of them happening or making them stronger, the new study is one of the first to tally the human costs of climate change from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas.

"In most cases, flooding was made worse by sea level rise and we show how much worse," said study co-author Philip Orton, a physical oceanographer at the Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey.

Orton said there were places, such as basement apartments in the New York City area, filled with water that would have been dry without human-caused sea level rise.

"There are people who experienced significant losses from Hurricane Sandy who would not have experienced those losses but for climate change," said study lead author Ben Strauss, a sea level scientist who is CEO of Climate Central, a science-and-journalism venture.

To come up with its damage totals, the study first calculated how much of the storm surge — as much as 9 feet (2.7 meters) above the high tide line at the Battery in Manhattan — could be attributed to climate change.

Researchers did this by comparing 2012 observations to climate simulations of a world without global

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warming. They made calculations for sea level rise overall, then did it for each of the main contributors to sea level rise: warmer waters expanding and extra water from melting glaciers and ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica.

The researchers determined globally seas in 2012 were 4.1 inches (10.5 centimeters) higher than in 1900 because of climate change, but the amount was slightly less in New York: 3.8 inches (9.6 centimeters).

The reason is that Alaska's melting glaciers and Greenland's melting ice sheet are relatively close to the East Coast and the physics of sea level rise puts the biggest increases on the opposite end of the globe from the biggest melts, said study co-author Bob Kopp, director of Rutgers University's Institute of Earth, Oceans and Atmospheric Sciences.

Then the researchers looked at where the flooding was and what computer simulations showed would have happened with four inches (9.6 centimeters) less water. In some places, such as Howard Beach in Queens, it was a big deal, Orton said.

These calculations for sea level rise from climate change alone seem to make sense, said Steve Nerem, a scientist who studies sea rise at the University of Colorado and was not part of the research. Nerem said he wasn't qualified to comment on the damage calculations but is a bit skeptical because 4 inches (9.6 centimeters) on such a large storm surge doesn't seem so huge.

Susan Cutter, director of the University of South Carolina's Hazards and Vulnerability Research Institute who also wasn't part of the research, said the study's damage estimates seem reasonable to her.

Study author Strauss pointed out that Hurricane Irene in 2011 showed that the first five feet (1.5 meters) of flooding doesn't do nearly as much damage as what follows. Then, he said, the damage soars at an increasingly higher rate per inch.

One way to think about that, Strauss said, is the extra few inches can put enough water above a house's lowest electrical outlet to require expensive fixes.

Craig Fugate, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency when Sandy struck, said he can't make a judgement on specific storms like Sandy being more costly because of climate change. But in general, he said, storms are worsening because of climate change.

After Sandy, Fugate said, then-President Barack Obama turned to him and stated: "The debate on climate change is over, we must start talking about climate adaptation."

## Russia's northernmost base projects its power across Arctic

By KOSTYA MANENKOV and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

NAGURSKOYE, Russia (AP) — During the Cold War, Russia's Nagurskoye airbase was little more than a runway, a weather station and a communications outpost in the Franz Josef Land archipelago.

It was a remote and desolate home mostly for polar bears, where temperatures plunge in winter to minus-42 Celsius (43 degrees below zero Fahrenheit) and the snow only disappears from August to mid-September.

Now, Russia's northernmost military base is bristling with missiles and radar and its extended runway can handle all types of aircraft, including nuclear-capable strategic bombers, projecting Moscow's power and influence across the Arctic amid intensifying international competition for the region's vast resources.

The shamrock-shaped facility — three large pods extending from a central atrium — is called the "Arctic Trefoil" and is painted in the white-red-and-blue of the national flag, brightening the otherwise stark vantage point on the 5,600-kilometer (3,470-mile) Northern Sea Route along Russia's Arctic coast. Other buildings on the Island, which is called Alexandra Land, are used for radar and communications, a weather station, oil storage, hangars and construction facilities.

Russia has sought to assert its influence over wide areas of the Arctic in competition with the United States, Canada, Denmark and Norway as shrinking polar ice from the warming planet offers new opportunities for resources and shipping routes. China also has shown an increasing interest in the region, believed to hold up to one-fourth of the Earth's undiscovered oil and gas.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has cited estimates that put the value of Arctic mineral riches at \$30



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trillion.

Tensions between Russia and the West will likely loom large over Thursday's meeting of the Arctic nations' foreign ministers in Reykjavik, Iceland, where Moscow is set to take a rotating chairmanship in the Arctic Council.

"We have concerns about some of the recent military activities in the Arctic," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday after arriving in Iceland for talks with foreign ministers of the eight members of the Arctic Council. "That increases the dangers of accidents and miscalculations and undermines the shared goal of a peaceful and sustainable future for the region. So we have to be vigilant about that."

The Russian base, which sits about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) south of the geographic North Pole, was built using new construction technologies as part of Kremlin efforts to bolster the military amid spiraling tensions with the West following Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

The following year, Russia submitted a revised bid for vast territories in the Arctic to the United Nations, claiming 1.2 million square kilometers (over 463,000 square miles) of Arctic sea shelf, extending more than 350 nautical miles (650 kilometers) from shore.

While the U.N. pondered that claim and those from other nations, Russia has said it sees the Northern Sea Route as its "historically developed national transport corridor," requiring authorization from Moscow for foreign vessels to navigate along it. The U.S. has dismissed Russia's claims of jurisdiction on parts of the route as illegitimate.

Moscow has declared its intention to introduce procedures for foreign ships and assign Russian pilots for guidance along the route, which runs from Norway to Alaska.

As part of that effort, Russia has rebuilt and expanded facilities across the polar region, deploying surveillance and defensive assets. A base in the similar trefoil shape and patriotic colors to the one in Nagurskoye is on Kotelný Island, between the Laptev Sea and the East Siberian Sea on eastern end of the shipping route, also with missiles and radar.

Adm. Alexander Moiseyev, chief of Russia's Northern Fleet, said last week that Moscow has the right to set navigation rules along the shipping lane.

"Practically the entire Northern Sea Route goes through Russia's territorial waters or the country's economic zone," Moiseyev told reporters aboard the Peter the Great missile cruiser. "The complex ice conditions make it necessary to organize safe shipping, so Russia insists on a special regime of its use."

NATO is increasingly worried about the growing Russian military footprint in the Arctic, and Washington sent B-1 bombers to Norway this year.

"Increased Russian presence, more Russian bases in the High North, has also triggered the need for more NATO presence, and we have increased our presence there with more naval capabilities, presence in the air, and not least, the importance of protecting transatlantic undersea cables transmitting a lot of data," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said.

Moiseyev fretted about the U.S. military assets in Norway, saying it has led to an "increase of the conflict potential in the Arctic."

The Russian Foreign Ministry last week fumed at a U.S. nuclear submarine calling at a Norwegian port, saying it reflected what it described as "Oslo's course for the militarization of the Arctic."

On the sidelines of this week's Arctic Council meeting, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is set to hold talks with Blinken -- an encounter intended to lay the groundwork for Putin's meeting with U.S. President Joe Biden planned for next month.

Blinken has pointed out that with the Arctic warming at twice the rate of the rest of the global average, Russia has moved to increase its presence in the region.

"Russia is exploiting this change to try to exert control over new spaces," he said last month. "It is modernizing its bases in the Arctic and building new ones."

Blinken has rejected Russian calls to resume a military component of the Arctic Council. He also took Lavrov to task for comments earlier this week in which the Russian diplomat dismissed such criticism because the Arctic "is our territory, our land."

"We have to proceed all of us, including Russia, based on the rules, based on norms, based on the com-

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mitments that we've each made and also avoid statements that undercut those," Blinken said.

Since Putin visited the Nagurskoye base in 2017, it has been strengthened and expanded. It now houses a dedicated tactical group that operates electronic surveillance, air defense assets and a battery of Bastion anti-ship missile systems.

A runway has been extended to accommodate all types of aircraft, including Tu-95 nuclear-capable strategic bombers, said Maj.-Gen. Igor Churkin, who oversees air force operations at the base.

"The modernization of Arctic airfields significantly increases the potential of the Northern Fleet's aviation to control the airspace in the area of the Northern Sea Route and allows to ensure its security," he said.

In March, the Russian military conducted drills at Nagurskoye with ground troops and a pair of MiG-31 fighters flying over the North Pole. The exercise also saw three nuclear submarines smash through the Arctic ice next to one another in a carefully planned show of force.

On Monday, Lavrov rebuffed Western criticism of Russia's Arctic expansion and bristled at what he described as Norway's push for a stronger NATO presence there.

"We hear whining about Russia expanding its military activities in the Arctic," Lavrov said. "But everyone knows that it's our territory, our land. We bear responsibility for the Arctic coast to be safe, and everything our country does there is fully legitimate."

## The blockbuster movie makes a comeback this summer

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

After more than a year of benching its biggest spectacles, Hollywood is ready to dazzle again.

From "F9" and "In the Heights" to "The Suicide Squad" and "Black Widow," there will be a steady stream of blockbusters populating multiplexes across the country for the first time since March 2020. For streaming-weary audiences, the promise of air conditioning, popcorn, soda fountains, 60-foot screens and state-of-the-art sound could be a welcome respite from the living room and virtual watch parties. Not to mention the ever-romantic concept of the shared experience.

For beleaguered movie theaters, it's not a moment too soon.

The modern summer movie season, which runs from May through Labor Day, regularly accounts for over \$4 billion in revenue and makes up around 40% of the year's grosses. Last year, summer earnings were \$176 million, down 96% from 2019. Although theaters have been ramping up operations for a while, this summer will prove to be the biggest litmus test so far about whether habits have changed irrevocably during the pandemic.

In some ways, the calendar looks like a do-over of last summer. Many of the most anticipated releases were supposed to come out a year ago, including John Krasinski's "A Quiet Place Part II," up first on May 28, the big screen adaptation of Lin-Manuel Miranda's Tony-winning "In the Heights" (June 11), the ninth installment of the "Fast & Furious" series, "F9" (June 25), Marvel's "Black Widow" (July 9) starring Scarlett Johansson, the Emily Blunt and Dwayne Johnson action adventure "Jungle Cruise" (July 30) and Nia DaCosta's "Candyman" reboot (Aug. 27).

"In the Heights" director Jon M. Chu had to convince Miranda that it was worth it to wait for a theatrical release. Miranda wanted to get his joyous musical about a bodega owner, Usnavi (Anthony Ramos) and his friends in Washington Heights out to people immediately. But Chu knows just how important a global release is for films with underrepresented casts. Like "Crazy Rich Asians," "In the Heights" features unknowns in key roles who are poised for a breakout given the right platform.

"We had big dreams for this," Chu said. "To be able to do it on the biggest scale possible meant so much."

And it's not the only blue-sky blockbuster in the bunch. The "Fast & Furious" series has always been about creating a fun theatrical experience and "F9" not only brings back a fan favorite — Sung Kang's Han — but also literally sends cars into space. It's expected to be one of the season's biggest hits.

"Whenever I get together with Vin (Diesel) and everybody to make these movies, we're not even talking about the plot or anything like that, but the feeling. I just remember as a kid in the summer saving enough money to go to the movies to share that experience with a bunch of strangers," said director Justin Lin.

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"When that moment hits and everyone's laughing or cheering together, it is magical."

Before the pandemic, going to the movies in the summer was a ritual. Audiences made up for last year by screening retro summer hits at drive-ins. Now it's a wild card whether the promise of an "event film" will motivate audiences back to theaters, especially if something is also available to watch at home.

"Space Jam: A New Legacy" director Malcom D. Lee called his film, "The epitome of a popcorn movie." The sequel to the 1996 Michael Jordan pic finds LeBron James now sharing the screen with classic Looney Toons characters.

Those looking for a more R-rated experience can thank James Gunn, who made movie stars out of the once obscure "Guardians of the Galaxy," and now is out to do the same for the "misfit, Z-grade supervillains" of "The Suicide Squad." He had his pick of DC characters and turned down Superman for Margot Robbie's Harley Quinn, Idris Elba's Bloodsport and John Cena's Peacemaker.

Gunn looked to one of his favorite genres for inspiration: The 1960s war caper. Think, "The Dirty Dozen" and "Where Eagles Dare."

"To reinvigorate that genre just using these crappy supervillains as the protagonists was very appealing to me," Gunn said.

There are many other options too, including a host of big-name documentary titles, from Morgan Neville's "Roadrunner: A Film About Anthony Bourdain" (July 16) to Peter Jackson's "The Beatles: Get Back" (Aug. 27). There are family films, like "Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway" (June 18) and "Hotel Transylvania: Transformania" (July 23) and horrors like "The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It" (June 4), and "Don't Breathe 2" (Aug. 13). You can see Matt Damon try to save his daughter in the drama "Stillwater" (July 30) or watch as Gael García Bernal starts to age rapidly in M. Night Shyamalan's "Old" (July 23). Ryan Reynolds is in two big action flicks, "The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard" (June 16) and "Free Guy" (Aug. 13). There's even an epic Dev Patel-led take on a classic Arthurian legend, "The Green Knight" coming July 30.

"I'm really glad that our movie is one of the ones that was held back because I really I want audiences to get a chance to see it on the big screen," said "The Green Knight" director David Lowery. "It was obviously meant to be seen that way but also it's a strange movie and I think that the idea of having that experience in a cinema with other people is going to be really, really exciting, especially after a year away from the big screen."

Some studios have been cautiously rolling out bigger films to decent results lately, like "Godzilla vs. Kong." But after seven weeks, even that monster sock 'em up is still shy of cracking the \$100 million mark domestically. And it's unclear what the new benchmarks for success will be or if any movie has a chance of hitting anything close to pre-pandemic expectations. The last "Fast" movie opened to \$98.8 million in 2017. "Black Widow" was once pegged for at least a \$90 million launch. So far this year, the biggest domestic opening was just over \$30 million.

For moviegoers, it's also become hard to keep tabs on ever shifting dates, delays and multi-platform releases. Some summer-ready titles, like "Top Gun: Maverick" and the new James Bond, "No Time To Die," are waiting until later in the year to debut. "Jurassic World: Dominion" pushed to 2022. And changes are still being made as some offload titles to streaming services. Sony sold its Camilla Cabello and Billy Porter-led "Cinderella" to Amazon Prime and its Kevin Hart as a single dad pic "Fatherhood" to Netflix.

Even the films with theatrical debuts will have either unique hybrid release plans or shortened theatrical windows. All Warner Bros. titles including "In the Heights," "The Suicide Squad," "Space Jam," will be available free for HBO Max subscribers for 31 days as well as in theaters. Most Disney movies, including "Cruella" (May 28), "Black Widow" and "Jungle Cruise" are opening both in theaters and on Disney+ as a premium \$29.99 rental. Their Pixar title "Luca" is going straight to Disney+, free for subscribers, on June 17. And the Sundance breakout "CODA" is getting a simultaneous release in theaters and on Apple TV+.

For theaters and studios, the unknowns are many. Are movie theaters even on people's re-opening priority lists? Will there be a \$100 million opening weekend any time soon? Will there ever be a \$250 million opening weekend again? The filmmakers aren't trying to concern themselves with that. But everyone is feeling emotional that moviegoing might finally become normal again.

"I think about it all the time," said Gunn. "I can't wait to sit in a theater with a group of people and watch films again. It is a true joy in life. It's a magical space for me and has been since I was a very little boy."

## Amid threats to members, House to vote on new security

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Colorado Rep. Jason Crow, a former Army Ranger who served three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, says it took time for him to stop constantly scanning his environment for threats when he returned from war 15 years ago. But after the violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, he says he's picked the habit up again.

Crow was trapped with several other members of Congress in the upper gallery of the U.S. House that day while a mob of President Donald Trump's supporters tried to beat down the doors to the chamber and stop the certification of President Joe Biden's victory.

Crow says he never would have thought "in a million years" he'd be in that situation in the Capitol, but some of his old training has since kicked in, like looking in his rear-view mirror and assessing if people around him might be carrying a gun. Like almost every other member of Congress, his office has received threats against his life.

"There's no doubt that members are on edge right now," Crow says, and the threats from outside "are unfortunately the reality of congressional life."

Those threats have more than doubled this year, according to the U.S. Capitol Police, and many members of Congress say they fear for their personal safety more than they did before the siege. Several say they have boosted security measures to protect themselves and their families, money for which will be part of a broad \$1.9 billion spending bill that the House will vote on this week, along with a separate measure that would create a bipartisan commission to investigate the Jan. 6 attack. Democrats, in particular, say both bills are crucial to try to reconcile the trauma that many still feel.

"This was an armed assault on our democracy, and I'm a witness — I'm a victim and a witness to it," says New Hampshire Rep. Annie Kuster. She received treatment for post-traumatic stress after she was also trapped in the House gallery that day and heard rioters trying to break through the doors close to where she was hiding.

Kuster says she thought she was going to die before officers cleared the hallways and hustled her and others out. "I think we need a full investigation with a Jan. 6th commission, and I believe that the Capitol Police who saved our lives that day deserve more support," she says.

Democrats say a bipartisan commission investigating the attack, including what led to it, is more important than ever after some Republicans have recently started to downplay the severity of the insurrection, portraying the rioters who brutally beat officers with flagpoles and other weapons and broke into the Capitol through windows and doors as peaceful patriots.

Many Republicans who initially condemned Trump for telling his supporters to "fight like hell" that day have increasingly stayed quiet on his repeated false claims that the election was stolen, even though that was rebuked by numerous courts, bipartisan election officials across the country and Trump's own attorney general. House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy said Tuesday he would oppose the commission, calling it "duplicative and potentially counterproductive."

Rep. Andrew Clyde, R-Ga., said at a hearing last week that a video feed of the rioters looked like they were on a "normal tourist visit." Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., said a woman who was shot and killed by police as she tried to break through a window adjacent to the House chamber was "executed," and he argued that the Justice Department is harassing those who have been arrested.

Michigan Rep. Dan Kildee, a Democrat who also says he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder after the attack, said those comments were "really hard to take" after witnessing the insurrection. He says he's received an increased number of threats since January, especially when he has spoken on TV about treatment he received in the aftermath. Some of the calls and messages are specific and credible threats, he says, while many others are "abusive, threatening type language."



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The security spending bill would provide congressional offices with more money to combat those threats, including enhanced travel security, upgrades to home-district offices and better intelligence to track people down. The bill would also "harden" the complex by reinforcing doors and windows, adding security vestibules and cameras and providing dollars for removable fencing that could quickly be erected during a threatening situation while leaving the Capitol open to visitors.

Like many members, Republican Rep. Rodney Davis of Illinois says he feels as if the threats are more acute in his home district, where there is less security. On Capitol Hill, lawmakers are currently protected by a tall fence and National Guard troops who have been there since Jan. 6. Members are "as safe as ever" there, he says, but "it's those times when you're not in the Capitol, I think that's where the threats seem to emanate from the most."

Davis knows that well, as one of several Republican members who was at a baseball practice four years ago in Alexandria, Virginia, when a gunman wounded Rep. Steve Scalise, R-La., and four other people. And in 2019, an Illinois man was arrested for "threatening to blow my head off," as Davis puts it. Randall Tarr pleaded guilty to federal charges and was sentenced to probation.

As the top Republican on the House Administration Committee, which oversees the Capitol Police, Davis has pushed for the force to be more aggressive in arresting those who threaten members and to reform the arcane command structure in Congress that forces the chief to ask for permission before making major decisions. The security spending bill would not do that, but it would boost Capitol Police training and pay for new equipment after the force was badly overrun on Jan. 6.

In the meantime, members are upgrading their personal security. Rep. Jim Himes, D-Conn., says he's started using his house alarm more often and has been more cautious in recent months. "I've definitely felt less secure since Jan. 6 than I did before," says Himes, who sits on the House intelligence committee.

Some say it's easier not to know what's going on. Illinois Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, a Democrat, said he's generally adopted a "don't ask, don't tell" policy with his staff on security matters since the insurrection, and he doesn't ask why when a police car sometimes shows up in front of his house to guard it.

"I don't necessarily want to know the full story," says Krishnamoorthi, who has young children. "I just trust that law enforcement is doing their job."

Kuster says she is feeling better these days after taking advantage of employee assistance resources in the Capitol. Still, she says her experience was "really, really difficult," especially because she received a death threat as soon as she arrived home to New Hampshire after the insurrection. Home was the one place "I can usually feel safe," she says.

She said she regularly talks to and texts with her colleagues who have also had post-traumatic stress, and she says some of them are still hurting.

"We need a security plan so that everyone can feel safe here," Kuster says. "I want the 'people's house' to be able to reopen."

## Supreme Court throws abortion fight into center of midterms

By DAVID CRARY and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In agreeing to hear a potentially groundbreaking abortion case, the Supreme Court has energized activists on both sides of the long-running debate who are now girding to make abortion access a major issue in next year's midterm elections.

For many evangelicals, the case could serve as a validation of more than four decades of persistent work and a sometimes awkward relationship with former President Donald Trump, whose three Supreme Court appointments sealed a 6-3 conservative majority. If those justices unite to uphold a Mississippi law banning abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy, it would mark a first step toward the possible demise of the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, which established a nationwide right to abortion at any point before a fetus can survive outside the womb, roughly 24 weeks.

Abortion rights advocates, meanwhile, are urgently warning that the case is the biggest threat to decades of rulings that have consistently upheld, with some caveats, a woman's constitutional right to decide

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whether to end her pregnancy.

Since the Roe decision, abortion has become a defining theme in American politics, emerging as the sole issue that some voters use to assess which candidates they'll support. The Mississippi case could emerge as another turning point — with unpredictable results. Abortion opponents may become further emboldened if their long-desired goal moves closer to reality, while an unfavorable decision could spur supporters to intensify calls for dramatic changes to the judiciary.

For now, both sides say they are fully engaged.

"This is huge — it's saying that for the first time in a long time that we have a pro-life majority on the Supreme Court," said Katherine Beck Johnson, a lawyer with the conservative Family Research Council. "It will encourage the voting base to get out and vote Republican."

Jennifer Dalven, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Reproductive Freedom Project, said the high court's decision to hear the case was "really alarming."

"For more than 40 years the Supreme Court has said states can't ban abortion prior to viability," Dalven said. "There is simply no way for the court to rule for Mississippi without gutting Roe v. Wade."

The case probably will be argued in the fall, with a decision likely in the spring of 2022 during the campaign for congressional midterm elections. Many abortion-rights groups urged their supporters to start mobilizing now.

"There's never been a more important time to elect Democratic pro-choice women to local and national office," said one of those groups, Emily's List. "If the Supreme Court strikes down Roe v. Wade, we'll need all the help we can get."

Even if the court does not explicitly overrule Roe, a decision favorable to Mississippi could lay the groundwork for allowing more restrictions on abortion. Bills have been enacted in multiple Republican-governed states that would ban abortion as early as six weeks, and also in cases where a decision to abort was based solely on a diagnosis of Down syndrome.

Nationwide polls have repeatedly shown that most Americans support the premise of Roe v. Wade. An April poll from the Pew Research Center found that 59% of Americans think abortion should be legal in most or all cases, while 39% think it should be illegal in most or all cases.

Some abortion opponents, noting those surveys, are skeptical that the Supreme Court would fully overturn Roe.

"The Supreme Court has never led public opinion but followed it when it comes to major issues like slavery, gay marriage and women's rights," said the Rev. Robert Jeffress, a Dallas megachurch pastor who has been a close ally of Trump.

"As long as 70% of the American people oppose the overturn of Roe, it will never happen," he said. "Realistically, conservatives can hope that the court uses the Mississippi case to chip away at unrestricted abortion in our country."

Charles Camosy, a professor of theological and social ethics at Fordham University, also acknowledged those poll findings. But he noted that the Gallup poll has repeatedly found that more than two-thirds of Americans say abortion should be illegal after the 12th week of pregnancy — a time frame that is in force in several European countries.

"I doubt the court's majority is willing to totally undo the legal right to abortion," he said. "More than likely they will rule that a 15-week limitation does not pose an undue burden on a woman's right to abortion."

White evangelicals, who remain among Trump's most loyal backers, had celebrated his overhaul of the federal courts and his reshaping of the Supreme Court as perhaps his greatest accomplishment. But there remains trepidation after the court surprised them by failing to rule their way in past cases.

"Trying to predict what the Supreme Court is going to do on a state statute on abortion regulation is like trying to predict the path of a hurricane, only more difficult, because there are a lot of things at play," said Ralph Reed, chair of the Faith and Freedom Coalition and a longtime ally of Trump.

Reed acknowledged that abortion is only a top issue for a small minority of voters but argued that in many competitive congressional and gubernatorial elections, "it could theoretically be the difference."

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"It's not necessarily the issue that ranks highest in terms of determining one's vote, but it still matters in terms of intensity and enthusiasm," he said.

Among 2022 U.S. Senate races where the issue could be a key factor are those in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

If the Mississippi ban is upheld, "pro-lifers would be energized," said Michael New, an abortion opponent who teaches social research at Catholic University of America.

"It would show that the strategy of supporting pro-life candidates for the presidency resulted in a Supreme Court that was sympathetic to legal protections to preborn children," he said. "Pro-life state legislators in other states would likely pass similar 15-week abortion bans, confident that these bans would also be upheld."

The Rev. Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said he was optimistic the Mississippi ban would be upheld, giving abortion-rights groups a chance to mobilize their supporters with warnings of Roe's demise while infusing abortion opponents with a new sense of optimism.

"Pro-life voters are looking for progress," Mohler said. "What serves to deflate the vote of pro-life Americans is frustration at the impression of the lack of progress."

Mallory Quigley of the Susan B. Anthony List, which seeks to elect anti-abortion candidates, predicted the issue would be a "huge motivator on both sides" going into the midterms.

As far as Republicans, she said, "It's motivating to see how past electoral choices are impacting policy today and then moving forward, what more is to be done."

Abortion-rights supporter Kelly Baden of the State Innovation Exchange, a strategy center for state legislators who champion progressive values, said the wave of anti-abortion legislation in Republican-led states "shows how much we've already lost and how dire our circumstances already are."

"But we have the power to take it back," she said. "If and when the courts let us down, we can and must show up at the voting booth."

## **EXPLAINER: How worrying is the variant first seen in India?**

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — For the first time in months, people across England are meeting indoors at pubs, restaurants, cinemas, gyms and elsewhere as coronavirus rules were relaxed this week.

But Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned Britons to be cautious and some of the scientists advising him say restrictions might need to be reimposed quickly because of a worrying variant first detected in India.

Here's a look at what we know and don't know about the variant:

### **WHAT IS THIS VARIANT?**

The COVID-19 variant first identified in India has been classified as a "variant of concern" by Britain and the World Health Organization, meaning there is some evidence that it spreads more easily between people, causes more severe disease, or might be less responsive to treatments and vaccines.

"The absolute numbers of cases (of the variant) in the U.K. remain quite small, but the growth rate is quite high," said Nick Loman, a professor of microbial genomics at the University of Birmingham.

To date, there have been more than 2,300 cases identified in Britain. Figures released by Public Health England show cases of the variant first detected in India have tripled in the past week and experts say it's on track to become the most dominant COVID-19 variant in the country.

Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's COVID-19 technical lead, said more information was still needed about the variant's spread globally.

"We need more sequencing, targeted sequencing to be done and to be shared in India and elsewhere so that we know how much of this virus is circulating," she said.

### **HOW TRANSMISSIBLE IS THE VARIANT?**

We don't entirely know. But according to the minutes of an expert group advising the government last week, scientists said "it is a realistic possibility that (the variant first seen in India) is as much as 50% more transmissible" than the variant first reported in Britain — whose explosive spread led to the country's

longest lockdown in January.

"There are plausible biological reasons as to why some of the mutations present could make this variant more transmissible," they concluded. If the variant proves to be 40 to 50% more transmissible, the scientists predicted that would "lead to a much larger peak" of cases, hospitalizations and deaths than previous waves of coronavirus — particularly if the government continues with its existing plans to exit lockdown.

Dr. Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust and one of the scientists advising the government, said it was entirely possible the COVID-19 restrictions relaxed on Monday might need to be reintroduced soon if the variant's spread leads to a spike in hospitalizations and deaths.

"A very careful lifting (of restrictions) is reasonable, but we may have to reverse that," Farrar warned. Experts think the next few weeks should provide more details about how quickly the variant identified in India is sickening people and whether that might overwhelm hospitals.

Johnson said any proof the variant identified in India is more dangerous could "pose a serious disruption" to the U.K. government's plans to lift all remaining COVID-19 restrictions next month.

## DO VACCINES WORK AGAINST THIS VARIANT?

Scientists think so but are still waiting for definitive answers.

At a press briefing last week, Marco Cavaleri, head of vaccines at the European Medicines Agency, said the data appeared "rather reassuring" that vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna would protect against the variant first seen in India.

He said the agency was still gathering more information on the effectiveness of the shots made by AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson and was "pretty confident" those vaccines too would afford people enough protection from the variant.

"Urgent experimental data is being generated (for this variant)," said Sharon Peacock of the U.K. COVID-19 Genomics Consortium. She noted that vaccines appear to work against other variants to date but that it is important to determine if one dose is effective or if two are needed.

In the areas of the U.K. worst hit by the variant, Britain's health secretary Matt Hancock said most people hospitalized had "chosen not to have the jab."

On Monday, Johnson said people over 50 and those with underlying health conditions would have their wait for a second vaccine dose cut from 12 weeks to eight, over concerns about the variant's rapid spread.

## India scours sea after barge sinks, 2nd adrift after cyclone

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — The Indian navy is working to rescue crew members from a sunken barge and a second cargo vessel that was adrift Tuesday off the coast of Mumbai after a deadly cyclone struck the western coast.

The navy said it has rescued 177 of the 400 people on the two barges in the Arabia Sea. Three warships, maritime patrol aircraft and helicopters joined the rescue operations and were scouring the sea, the navy said.

Both barges were working for Oil and Natural Gas Corp., the largest crude oil and natural gas company in India.

The company said the barges were carrying personnel deployed for offshore drilling and their anchors gave away during the storm.

Cyclone Tauktae, the most powerful storm to hit the region in more than two decades, packed sustained winds of up to 210 kilometers (130 miles) per hour when it came ashore in Gujarat state late Monday. Four people were killed in the state, raising the storm's total to 16.

Residents emerged from relief shelters Tuesday to find debris strewn across roads, trees uprooted and electricity lines damaged. The coast guard rescued eight fishermen who were stranded at sea near Veraval, a fishing industry hub in Gujarat state.

In Maharashtra, six people were killed Monday but the state's capital, Mumbai, was largely spared from major damage even as heavy rains pounded the city's coastline and high winds whipped its skyscrapers.



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Over the weekend, the cyclone killed six people in Kerala, Karnataka and Goa states as it moved along the western coast.

The cyclone has weakened, but the India Meteorological Department forecast heavy rainfall for many parts of Gujarat and Maharashtra in the coming days.

Ahead of the cyclone, about 150,000 people were evacuated from low-lying areas in Maharashtra and Gujarat states. S.N. Pradhan, director of India's National Disaster Response Force, said social distancing norms were being followed in evacuation shelters and rescue teams were clearing debris from affected areas.

Both states, among the hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic, had scrambled disaster response teams, fearing the storm could endanger India's fight against the virus with supply lines cut, roads destroyed and lockdown measures slowing relief work.

Tropical cyclones are less common in the Arabian Sea than on India's east coast and usually form later in the year. Experts say changing climate patterns have caused them to become more intense, rather than more frequent.

In May 2020, nearly 100 people died when Cyclone Amphan, the most powerful storm to hit eastern India in more than a decade, ravaged the region.

This story has been corrected to show that the barges were working for Oil and Natural Gas Corp. and are not owned by it.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, May 19, the 139th day of 2021. There are 226 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 19, 1967, the Soviet Union ratified a treaty with the United States and Britain, banning nuclear and other weapons from outer space as well as celestial bodies such as the moon. (The treaty entered into force in October 1967.)

On this date:

In 1536, Anne Boleyn, the second wife of England's King Henry VIII, was beheaded after being convicted of adultery.

In 1864, American author Nathaniel Hawthorne, 59, died in Plymouth, New Hampshire.

In 1913, California Gov. Hiram Johnson signed the Webb-Hartley Law prohibiting "aliens ineligible to citizenship" from owning farm land, a measure targeting Asian immigrants, particularly Japanese.

In 1920, ten people were killed in a gun battle between coal miners, who were led by a local police chief, and a group of private security guards hired to evict them for joining a union in Matewan, a small "company town" in West Virginia.

In 1921, Congress passed, and President Warren G. Harding signed, the Emergency Quota Act, which established national quotas for immigrants.

In 1935, T.E. Lawrence, also known as "Lawrence of Arabia," died in Dorset, England, six days after being injured in a motorcycle crash.

In 1943, in his second wartime address to the U.S. Congress, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill pledged his country's full support in the fight against Japan; that evening, Churchill met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the White House, where the two leaders agreed on May 1, 1944 as the date for the D-Day invasion of France (the operation ended up being launched more than a month later).

In 1981, five British soldiers were killed by an Irish Republican Army land mine in County Armagh (AR'-mah), Northern Ireland.

In 1993, the Clinton White House set off a political storm by abruptly firing the entire staff of its travel office; five of the seven staffers were later reinstated and assigned to other duties.

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In 1994, former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis died in New York at age 64.

In 2003, WorldCom Inc. agreed to pay investors \$500 million to settle civil fraud charges.

In 2019, "Game of Thrones" aired its 73rd and final episode on HBO, with a record-setting number of viewers.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama for the first time endorsed the Palestinians' demand that their eventual state be based on borders that existed before the 1967 Middle East war, a position that put him sharply at odds with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Katie Couric, the first regular solo anchorwoman of a network evening newscast, signed off the "CBS Evening News" for the last time after five years.

Five years ago: An EgyptAir jetliner en route from Paris to Cairo with 66 people aboard swerved wildly in flight before crashing into the Mediterranean Sea, killing all on board. Veteran "60 Minutes" correspondent Morley Safer died in New York at age 84. Actor-comedian Alan Young, who played straight man to a talking horse in the 1960s sitcom "Mister Ed," died in Woodland Hills, California, at age 96.

One year ago: A Trump administration policy of quickly expelling most migrants stopped along the border because of the COVID-19 pandemic was indefinitely extended. President Donald Trump attacked the validity of a study of veterans that raised alarms about the malaria drug Trump had been actively promoting as a treatment for the coronavirus. Annie Glenn, widow of astronaut and senator John Glenn and later an advocate for people with speech disorders, died at a Minnesota nursing home at the age of 100.

Today's Birthdays: TV personality David Hartman is 86. Actor James Fox is 82. Actor Nancy Kwan is 82. Rock singer-composer Pete Townshend (The Who) is 76. Concert pianist David Helfgott is 74. Rock singer-musician Dusty Hill (ZZ Top) is 72. College Football Hall of Famer and former NFL player Archie Manning is 72. Singer-actor Grace Jones is 70. Rock musician Phil Rudd is 67. Actor Steven Ford is 65. Actor Toni Lewis is 61. Rock musician Iain Harvie (Del Amitri) is 59. Actor Polly Walker is 55. Actor Jason Gray-Stanford is 51. Gospel singer Israel Houghton is 50. Rock singer Jenny Berggren (Ace of Base) is 49. Former race car driver Dario Franchitti is 48. TV personality Kim Zolciak Biermann (TV: "Real Housewives of Atlanta") is 43. Country/rock singer Shooter Jennings is 42. Actor Drew Fuller is 41. Actor-comedian Michael Che (chay) (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 38. Christian rock musician Tim McTague (Underoath) is 38. Actor Eric Lloyd is 35. Pop singer Sam Smith is 29. Actor Nolan Lyons is 20.