

# Groton Daily Independent

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## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



**The officers for the Groton Senior Citizens are Bev Sombke, treasurer; Elda Stange, secretary; Sarge Likness, vice president; and Ruby Donovan, president.**

(Courtesy Photo)

## **Groton Senior Citizens** **A continuing series by Dorene Nelson**

The Groton area Senior Citizens is a charitable, non-profit corporation that has been in existence since 1954. The purpose of this organization is to provide services and entrainment to adults 55 years and older.

The Senior Citizens meet in the Groton Community Center three times a month on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Mondays of each month. On the 2nd and 3rd Mondays the meeting starts at 1 P.M. with treats being served after each meeting by a member.

On the last Monday of the month, the meeting starts at 12 noon for a potluck dinner. After all meetings, the group plays cards, bingo, and socializes with the same schedule followed every month.

A formal business meeting is held at the 2nd Monday of the month. After the meeting, various games are played and enjoyed. Games are also played after the other two meetings. The group's members love the fun and camaraderie.

The Senior Citizen's main project for the past several years has been to plant and maintain the flowers and trees around the Groton Community Center.

With the generous donation from Thrivent Financial, they have helped to make our town more beautiful.

Membership dues are a modest \$7 per year. The Groton Community Center is located on the corner of East 2nd Ave. and North 3rd Street. Contact any officer or member for more information or just walk in to any of the meetings.

## I have absolutely no advice for graduates

I've covered dozens of graduations over the years, and I never tire of the optimism and enthusiasm. We publish profiles of the seniors each year and learn their future plans, anything from medical school, the military, or beauty college.

I used to offer advice to graduates each year, but let's face it, most of them aren't going to read this unless we can figure out a way to post this on Instagram. So let's call them observations. I've learned through "observations" and personal experience that the happiest people are those who love what they do. That's why I appreciate the senior portraits with cows in the background and the seniors who plan to get an agriculture degree and take over the family enterprise. They get it. It's a lifestyle. Sometimes you make good money, sometimes it's slim pickin's, but there's freedom involved, although it may not seem that way when you're sitting across from your loan officer arm wrestling over whether you need that new air seeder or not. Anyway, it's not all about the money. Tell your banker I said so.

Here's the part where I go full-on old-timer. I shall, however, refrain from using the phrase, "Back in my day" or words like "whippersnapper." After exploring a good part of the country in a radio career—and it's always healthy to experience new locales—I realized, like the kids with the cows in the picture, that I am a child of the prairie. I loved the Rockies, loved Alaska, loved the ocean, but the buffalo grass and wheat fields called me back. This place speaks to me.

Though I never imagined that I would want to own my own business—it seemed scary and insecure, and sometimes it is, and it's not for everyone—but if I were going to offer advice (and I've pledged not to) I'd say it's worth looking into. You can make all the plans in the world when you're 18, but along the way, doors will open. It's up to you to decide whether you want to cross the threshold. Sometimes you build your own door. Being your own boss is about as American as it gets.

Back when I was dispensing my widely-ignored advice to graduates, I would tell them to save and invest your money starting yesterday and that debt is best employed as a tool not an extravagance. Getting a good CPA is a good idea, too.

As I traveled throughout the years, someone in New York or LA would ask in so many words, what the hell I was doing in North Dakota. "Because," I would try to explain, "I already have the things that people work their whole lives for, a roof that doesn't leak, space, nature, and kind neighbors. I enjoy these things daily. Why should I wait until I retire and try to pack it into the last couple decades of my life?" You can only move so fast in a walker. Besides, tomorrow's never guaranteed. That's not to say that Arizona doesn't sound better each winter, but for now, I still get some satisfaction from clearing snow in my Bobcat.

There's no right or wrong answer for any graduate. By all means, explore. Keep an open mind about EVERYTHING. The perspective you gain will serve you well no matter where you land. You can come home, but don't be provincial. If all that sounds like advice, it's not, because that's not what we're doing here.

A final observation... This is the part where the bored audience cheers the commencement speaker who drones on too long. I apparently flunked Fuddy-Duddy School, because I've never been one to complain about "kids today." I continue to be impressed with each new crop we send out into the world. Kids are better educated, more mature, and, I think, better looking than we were "back in my day." Dang it! I did it, anyway! Anyway, I base these comparisons on my 18-year-old self, so the baseline is relatively low. Don't get cocky.

Make the most of the days ahead. Enjoy life along the way. That's not advice, though. Actually, it's an order. And eat your vegetables, too. In the immortal words of Ferris Bueller, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." I think that's from the Old Testament.

So, congratulations. Now, will one of you whippersnappers help me get this on Instagram? Whatever that is.

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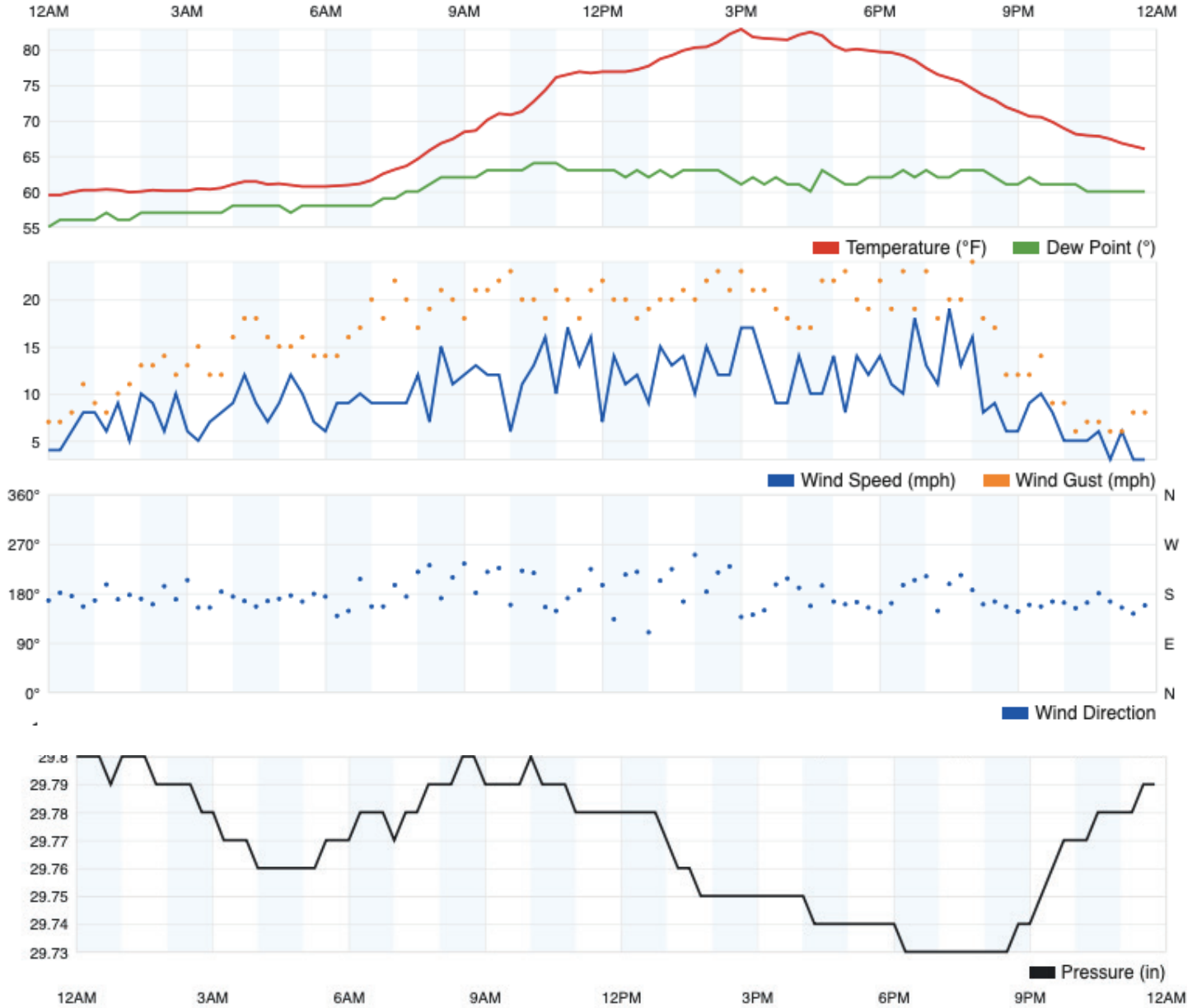
**That's  
Life**  
by Tony Bender



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
Chance T-storms and Breezy	Chance T-storms and Breezy then Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny and Breezy	Chance Showers and Breezy	Mostly Sunny then Chance T-storms
High: 85 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 88 °F	Low: 66 °F	High: 85 °F

## Marginal Risk

of severe thunderstorms

① 2 3 4 5

### Hazards

Thunderstorms possible. A few strong to severe storms could have the potential to produce lightning, large hail over the size of quarters, and wind gusts near 60 mph.

### Timing

Later Thursday afternoon through Thursday night, with the highest threat during the afternoon and evening hours.

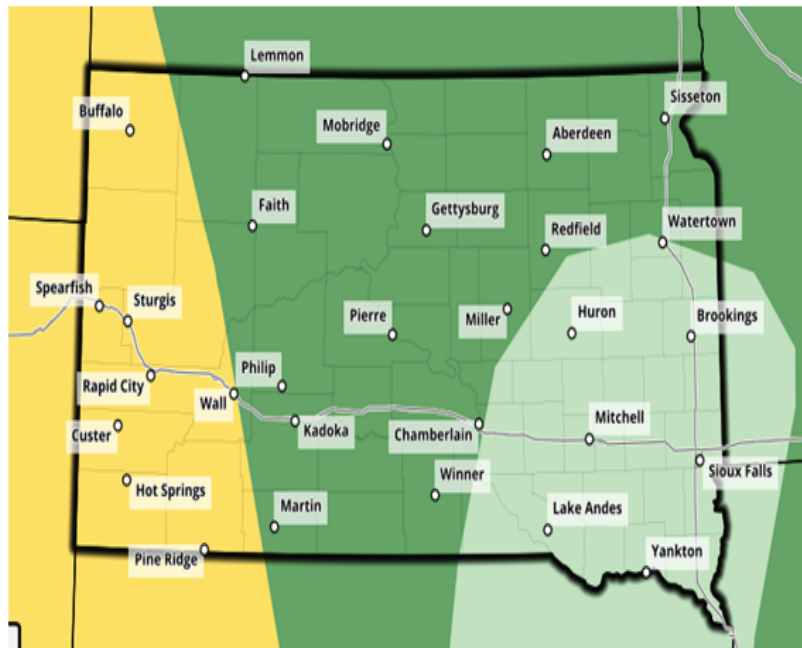
### Some Locations at Risk

Mobridge, Pierre, Gettysburg, Sisseton

### Action

Pay close attention to the weather, and be prepared to seek shelter if necessary.

## Severe Weather Outlook – Today & Tonight



Severe Weather Threat Key:	
5	High
4	Moderate
3	Enhanced
2	Slight
1	Marginal
	Thunder

ISSUED: 5:21 AM - Thursday, May 20, 2021

The potential exists for isolated strong to severe storms to develop, mainly west of the James River, later this afternoon and evening. There is a Marginal Risk of severe thunderstorms, meaning that isolated severe storms are possible that would be limited in duration, coverage, or intensity. Stay weather aware, and prepared to take shelter if needed later today through this evening.

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## Today in Weather History

May 20, 1965: A tornado hit north of Frederick. A barn and all outbuildings were destroyed on one farm. Windows exploded outward at the house. The tornado was estimated to be on the ground for about 5 miles.

May 20, 1974: Softball size hail fell in Kennebec, in Lyman County, breaking many windows in the schools and other buildings.

1894: A record late snow of two to eight inches whitened parts of central and eastern Kentucky. Lexington received six inches of snow, and Springfield Kentucky received 5 inches.

1916: In three consecutive years, a tornado passed near or through the town of Codell, Kansas. The tornado on this day was an estimated F2. The estimated F3 tornado in 1917 passed two miles west of town. Finally, an estimated F4 tornado moved through Codell on May 20th, 1918. This tornado killed 9 and injured at least 65 others.

1957: A tornado touched down to the southwest of Kansas City and traveled a distance of seventy-one miles cutting a swath of near destruction through the southeastern suburbs of Ruskin Heights and Hickman Mills. The tornado claimed the lives of forty-five persons and left hundreds homeless. It was the worst weather disaster on record for Kansas City. About all that remained of one house were a small table and a fishbowl atop, with the fish still swimming about inside the bowl. A canceled check from Hickman Hills was found in Ottumwa, Iowa, 165 miles away. Pilots reported debris at an altitude of 30,000 feet.

1894 - A record late snow of two to eight inches whitened parts of central and eastern Kentucky. Lexington KY received six inches of snow. (The Weather Channel)

1916 - A tornado struck the town of Codell, KS. A tornado struck the town on the same day the following year (1917), and a third tornado hit Cordell on May 20th in 1918. (The Weather Channel)

1957 - A tornado touched down to the southwest of Kansas City and traveled a distance of seventy-one miles cutting a swath of near total destruction through the southeastern suburbs of Ruskin Heights and Hickman Mills. The tornado claimed the lives of forty-five persons, and left hundreds homeless. It was the worst weather disaster of record for Kansas City. About all that remained of one house was a small table and a fish bowl atop, with the fish still swimming about inside the bowl, rather unconcerned. (The Kansas City Weather Almanac)

1987 - Thunderstorms in southern Texas produced grapefruit size hail, near the town of Dilley ("by dilly"), and produced wind gusts to 73 mph at Lake Amistad. The large hail broke windows, killed small animals, and damaged watermelon. Thunderstorms developing along a warm front produced severe weather from Indiana to the Dakotas. Thunderstorms produced baseball size hail at Denver IA, and wind gusts to 80 mph in southern Henry County IL. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms in the south central U.S. produced wind gusts to 70 mph at Omaha, NE, and wind gusts to 80 mph at Midland and Dallas, TX. Temperatures in California soared into the 90s and above 100 degrees. San Jose CA reported a record high of 97 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Pre-dawn thunderstorms produced large hail in eastern Oklahoma and northwestern Arkansas. Later in the morning thunderstorms in North Carolina produced dime size hail at Hanging Dog. Thunderstorms also produced severe weather from the Lower Mississippi Valley to the Central Plains Region later that day and night, with baseball size hail reported around Lawn, Novice and Eola TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather across the southeastern quarter of the nation through the day and night. Severe thunderstorms spawned six tornadoes, including one which injured two persons at Algoma, MS, and another which injured nine persons at Rogersville, MO. There were 119 reports of large hail or damaging winds. Thunderstorms produced baseball size hail at Houston MO and damaging winds which killed one person at Toccoa GA. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)





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## **ARE YOU BORED WITH THIS STUFF, GOD?**

It was time to climb into bed after reading a story from the Bible. "Now Edie," said her Mom, "be sure to kneel down and say your prayers before climbing into bed." Kissing her gently, she added, "I'll be downstairs if you need me. So, don't be afraid."

The next morning at breakfast her mom said, "Well, Edie, did you say your prayers before you fell asleep?" "Well, sort of, Mom," she replied. "I got down on my knees and started to pray. Then I thought, 'God, You must get bored with this kind of stuff night after night. Why don't You listen carefully, and I'll tell You the story of The Three Bears?' So I snuggled in bed and told Him the story of The Three Bears. I really think He enjoyed it."

God gave us no specific formula to follow when we pray. In Jesus' model prayer we are reminded of all the important things that we are to take to God in prayer. And, again in Gethsemane, He set another marvelous example of prayer. His prayers were always simple, sincere, significant, and straight forward.

David knew that it was not necessary to follow a formula when he prayed. For example, "Hear my prayer, O God; listen to the words of my mouth," is how he began a prayer on one occasion. Then with openness and honesty he said what he had to say, and God responded and met his immediate needs.

That is the way God is! When we have a need, all we must do is go to Him in faith, believing and claiming His promises, and express our needs and wait for His response. He will not disappoint us!

Prayer: We are so thankful, Lord, that when we pray there are no necessary words or magic phrases. Only a sincere heart and faith in Your goodness and grace, mercy and unending love. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Hear my prayer, O God; listen to the words of my mouth. Psalm 54:2



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## 2021 Community Events

- Cancelled** Legion Post #39 Spring Fundraiser (Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, every other year)  
03/27/2021 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)  
04/10/2021 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm  
04/24/2021 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)  
04/25/2021 Princess Prom (Sunday after GHS Prom)  
05/01/2021 Lions Club Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)  
05/31/2021 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)  
6/7-9/2021 St. John's Lutheran Church VBS  
06/12/2021 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

### South Dakota business groups call for immigration reforms

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's most influential business groups on Wednesday called for Congress to take up immigration reform to protect immigrants who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children.

The group, which included the state's Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Retailers Association and Dairy Producers, cast an economic argument on immigration, arguing that the thousands of job openings in the state showed the need for legal ways to immigrate. The group's call comes as President Joe Biden presses Congress to pass legislation codifying the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program that then-President Barack Obama instituted by executive action in 2012 to provide limited protections for immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children.

Don Haggart, the state executive director for the free-market organization, Americans for Prosperity, said immigration reform has gotten caught up in a "partisan ping-pong" battle, but there's currently an opportunity to find bipartisan support for a long-term solution for immigrants often described as "dreamers."

"Dreamers are among the best and brightest in our country," Haggart said. "These folks are contributors."

Biden has made clear that passing legislation enshrining DACA — which has wide, bipartisan support from the American public — should be the floor for action on immigration. However, his call for wider immigration reform to establish a pathway to citizenship for 11 million undocumented immigrants faces tough odds in a closely divided Congress.

The U.S. House recently passed a bill that would provide ways to obtain permanent legal status for DACA recipients, as well as other immigrants in the country under temporary programs protecting them from deportation. But South Dakota's lone congressman, Rep. Dusty Johnson voted against it.

"Legal immigration is an incredibly important part of the American story, but reforming the immigration system will be difficult until we end the crisis at the southern border," the Republican congressman said in a statement. "We need to address that crisis and also get the ten million unemployed Americans back to work."

The state's two Republican U.S. Senators, John Thune and Mike Rounds, have previously expressed support for immigration reform for DACA recipients but tied it to beefing up border security.

For people like Karen Benitez-Lopez, a DACA recipient who spoke at the virtual event with the business leaders, any delays to immigration reform mean their lives remain in limbo. Every two years, Benitez-Lopez has to reapply to receive DACA status, meaning she remains unsure whether she will be forced to return to a country she left when she was two years old.

"We came here with the hopes that we had a pathway to citizenship," she said. "The immigration system is behind."

### Navajo Nation tops Cherokee to become largest tribe in US

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 surpasses 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

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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 Miccosukee Tribe amended its lawsuit Wednesday to reflect the latest arguments.

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 enrollment 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 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 Wednesday:



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Dakota Cash

08-14-15-21-34

(eight, fourteen, fifteen, twenty-one, thirty-four)

Estimated jackpot: \$21,000

Lotto America

05-18-34-38-42, Star Ball: 10, ASB: 2

(five, eighteen, thirty-four, thirty-eight, forty-two; Star Ball: ten; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$6.2 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$515 million

Powerball

11-13-55-56-69, Powerball: 4, Power Play: 2

(eleven, thirteen, fifty-five, fifty-six, sixty-nine; Powerball: four; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$201 million

## Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Rapid City Journal. May 15, 2021.

Editorial: City Council needs to consider public's requests for surplus funds

Now that eight Rapid City department heads have made their pitch for a portion of the \$20 million in surplus funds that are largely the result of the CARES Act, it's time for the city to hear proposals from nonprofits and other local organizations.

On Monday night in a special city council meeting, department heads made requests ranging from \$12.5 million by the fire department to \$619,000 for bonuses for city employees. The police department, library, finance office, public works and The Monument also made requests for a piece of the pie, which is a one-time windfall due to the federal largesse that resulted from the pandemic. The requests totaled around \$25 million.

The CARES Act that was approved in 2020 by Congress sent hundreds of millions of dollars to state, local and tribal governments to help them recoup revenue losses inflicted by COVID-19. But thanks to Gov. Noem's resonating nationwide message that South Dakota was open for business, state and local governments thrived when compared to other states. In Rapid City, sales tax collections exceeded 2019 levels. In addition, city government wisely reduced department budgets by 10 percent as a precautionary measure when there was much uncertainty in the air.

So, the city now has an unexpected windfall and every nonprofit and organization in the city that suffered through the uncertainties and losses inflicted by the pandemic deserve an opportunity to make a pitch for that money. The city council should consider those requests with the same zeal as it does from one of its department heads.

That won't happen, however, unless the city council opens that door. Those ten elected members are the gatekeepers of federal money that local residents contributed to while dealing with their own hardships imposed by the pandemic.

So far, the city has received \$17.5 million from the Trump Administration's CARES Act and according to a story in Thursday's Journal expects to receive another \$13 million from the Biden Administration's American Rescue Plan.

That's \$30.5 million.

So even if the city council decides to let local organizations share the entire \$20 million for health care, child care, education and other essential programs that they provide for the community, the city still has \$10 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds to spend in addition to the additional sale tax revenue collected in 2020 that would not have been possible if Rapid City residents had not worked during the pandemic.

At its next meeting, the Rapid City Council should vote to treat the surplus funds like they are part of

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the Vision Fund and invite others to make their pitch. To do otherwise would show an indifference to the hardships everyone in this community suffered in 2020.

Yankton Press & Dakotan. May 18. 2021.

Editorial: A Sudden Change In Mask Guidelines

As we're all now realizing, shifting our lives from pandemic mode to something approaching a post-pandemic level is not as simple as turning a light back on in a darkened room.

A good example of this currently is the slate of changes proposed last week by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding mask guidelines. The CDC is now declaring that people who are fully vaccinated no longer have to wear masks in indoor or outdoor settings.

That seems straightforward enough, but it has a lot of ramifications.

To say that the mask announcement came as a surprise appears to be an understatement. According to the Politico news website, the White House itself was given very little notice about the change in guidelines. There was also apparently very little warning or coordination with federal or state health officials, especially those who have been working with mask mandates and similar regulations to varying degrees.

Also, the CDC announcement has generated concerns among those who have been dutifully been masking up to help combat the COVID-19 pandemic. While the vaccination effort has gone very well and the national infection numbers are dropping — according to reports, Monday was the first time in a long time that case numbers dropped in every state — the suggestion now that it's OK to do away with masking in most situations seems to belie the protective mindset that's been in place for more than a year. It's asking us now, suddenly, to step away from a strategy that, to date, has apparently been working.

Still, changing the mask guidelines is a logical consequence of the recent gains we've made in battling the pandemic.

Nevertheless, these changes may not be so easy for many people to embrace.

The CDC's sudden decision seems to reflect a reorganization of its pandemic response. According to Politico, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky appears to be streamlining the decision-making processes within the organization while also establishing the CDC's independence from the White House. That's fine, but more advanced warning would probably go down better not only at the White House but also on Capitol Hill and across the country.

Meanwhile, critics of the CDC's decision have pointed out that while conditions are improving, the pandemic is still not fully under control, and the arrival of new variants could present more issues. The concern is valid, for people are still getting infected and people are still dying: South Dakota is gradually approaching 2,000 deaths related to COVID. This remains a threat that hasn't been controlled.

Also, while vaccinations are generally going well, but there are still many millions of people who have yet to be vaccinated for various reasons. (The new mask guideline also relies on an honor system in which everyone who says they are vaccinated actually are.) Bear in mind, too, that the vaccine is not a 100% guarantee against infection, and there are still people who are high risk.

One irony here is that we all want life to return somewhat to normal, and the wearing of masks has generally been considered one of the simplest tools at our disposal to achieve that end.

Hopefully, the CDC's decision is not premature. While we all want to get back to normal, we also want to prevail over COVID. Masking up has been a handy tool, and it likely won't disappear too soon.

END

## Down syndrome abortion bans gain traction after court ruling

By DAVID CRARY and IRIS SAMUELS Associated Press

It's a ban that even supporters acknowledge will be hard to enforce. Yet 2021 has been a breakthrough year for legislation in several states seeking to prohibit abortions based solely on a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome.

Governors in Arizona and South Dakota recently signed such bills into law, and similar measures are

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pending in North Carolina and Texas. Most significantly, a federal appellate court said Ohio could begin to implement a 2017 law that has been on hold.

Although that ruling by the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals conflicted with other federal court decisions, anti-abortion activists say it increases the chances that the U.S. Supreme Court will agree to consider a case addressing the challenging issues the legislation poses. That could clear the path for bans to be enacted in some other states where courts are blocking them.

Just this week, the high court – with a 6-3 conservative majority resulting from three appointments by former President Donald Trump – signaled its willingness to reconsider the 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling establishing a nationwide right to abortion. The justices agreed to consider a Mississippi law that seeks to ban abortions after 15 weeks. Roe essentially legalized any abortion taking place before a fetus could survive outside the mother's womb, generally around 24 weeks.

Katherine Beck Johnson, a lawyer with the conservative Family Research Council, acknowledged that the Down syndrome laws might be easy to circumvent. Doctors could tell women not to share their specific reasons for wanting an abortion.

"But even if it's hard to enforce, it's worth being passed," she said, "It's important for a state to show they're not supporting eugenics; they want to remove the stigma of people who have Down syndrome."

Opponents of the bills, including some parents with children who have Down syndrome, argue that elected officials should not be meddling with a woman's deeply personal decision on whether to carry a pregnancy to term after a Down syndrome diagnosis.

"There's something condescending about these bans, suggesting people don't have the ability to make their own decisions," said Holly Christensen, a teacher and newspaper columnist in Akron, Ohio, whose 8-year-old daughter, Lyra, has Down syndrome.

Christensen said she believes that anti-abortion activists' push for such laws, in hopes of getting a case before the Supreme Court, has undercut efforts to disseminate more information about Down syndrome so more families would be willing to raise children with the condition.

She would like to see Ohio lawmakers increase funding for education and services for children with disabilities.

According to the National Down Syndrome Society, about one in every 700 babies in the United States, or roughly 6,000 annually, is born with the condition, which results from a chromosomal irregularity. There are no official figures on how many prenatal diagnoses of Down syndrome prompt a decision to abort; a 2012 study by medical experts estimated the abortion rate was 67%.

In the past, many children with Down syndrome were institutionalized. Christensen said these days, they frequently acquire job skills and some degree of self-sufficiency. Their life expectancy is more than 60 years, triple the expectation just a few decades ago.

"If you tell a woman, 'We're going to force you to have a baby with Down syndrome. she'll think, 'Oh my God, is it really that bad that you're going to force me?'" Christensen said.

In past years, courts routinely blocked state laws seeking to ban abortion if it was based on a diagnosis of Down syndrome or other fetal anomalies. Trump's judicial appointments to lower-level federal courts as well as the Supreme Court has altered the legal landscape.

"It feels like the ground is shifting," said Elizabeth Nash, who tracks state legislation for the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights.

Nash noted that court rulings already have allowed enforcement of the laws in Missouri, Tennessee and Ohio.

Last month's decision by a divided 6th Circuit court, which includes six justices nominated by Trump, reversed two earlier decisions that had blocked enforcement of the 2017 Ohio law. Doctors could face a felony charge, be stripped of their medical license and be held liable for legal damages if they are aware of a Down syndrome diagnosis when performing an abortion.

The majority opinion said the Ohio law is aimed at protecting the Down syndrome community from "the stigma it suffers from the practice of Down-syndrome-selective abortions."



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Arizona's new Down syndrome measure, part of a sweeping anti-abortion bill Republican Gov. Doug Ducey signed last month, is set to take effect later this year. Similar to the Ohio law, it calls for felony charges against doctors who perform an abortion based on a diagnosis of Down syndrome or other genetic abnormalities.

Opponents plan a lawsuit seeking to block it.

Dr. Julie Kwatra, an OB-GYN practicing in Arizona, is among people on both sides of the issue who suggest the law, if it takes effect, would be difficult to enforce.

"Women who want to terminate their pregnancies will do it, whether they do it in a safe, legal way or an unsafe, illegal way," she said. "It's still completely legal to terminate your pregnancy for any number of other reasons."

However, Kwatra said the new measure, by threatening criminalization, "puts a black cloud over the practice of medicine and the doctor-patient relationship."

Dr. Jamila Perritt, CEO of Physicians for Reproductive Health, said it would be damaging if doctors in states with the Down syndrome laws became defensive in their interactions with patients.

"When you go to see your health care provider, who do you want them to be protecting -- your welfare or theirs?" she said.

Cathi Herrod, president of the Center for Arizona Policy, a conservative group that backed the state legislation, said the law will be valuable even if women are free to give another reason for seeking an abortion.

"Doctors will be on notice, women will be on notice that you don't secure an abortion simply because there's a diagnosis of a nonterminal genetic condition," she said.

Michael New, an abortion opponent who teaches social research at Catholic University of America, said the laws are a good strategy for the anti-abortion movement even if their enforceability is questionable.

"If these laws are upheld, that would create a precedent that would increase the likelihood that other types of protective pro-life laws would be upheld," he said via email.

He also suggested the laws could help shape public opinion, drawing attention to the high percentage of abortions in cases of a Down syndrome diagnosis.

Erika Christensen, along with her husband, Garin Marschall, decided in May 2016 to terminate a pregnancy after learning during the third trimester that the fetus likely would be unable to breathe after birth. The couple lived in New York, where abortions were banned after 24 weeks of gestation. They traveled to Colorado, where Christensen had an abortion at 32 weeks.

Christensen and Marschall now oppose bills banning abortion for reasons related to genetic anomalies, saying they oversimplify the difficult decisions women and families must make.

"All decisions in these cases are necessarily complicated," said Christensen, who was grateful for the discussions she had with her doctors.

The couple noted that the 6th Circuit decision upholding the law in Ohio implies that patients seeking abortions in similar cases could lie to their doctors about their reasons.

"That is a really dangerous place to go with regard to the law," Marschall said.

## Gaming commission revises rules to include sports wagering

DEADWOOD, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Commission on Gaming has adopted a revised set of rules for sports gambling in Deadwood beginning in July.

Voters approved a constitutional amendment last November which authorized the Legislature to enact a law allowing sports wagering in Deadwood. Gov. Kristi Noem signed the sports betting into law in March.

The Commission on Gaming on Tuesday amended gaming rules to include a \$5,000 application fee for sports wagering service providers.

Other amendments added language for inspecting records for sports wagering equipment, prohibiting suppliers of the equipment from gambling on the sports betting equipment, or from manufacturing slot machines, the Rapid City Journal reported.

The rules also added sports betting to the list of gaming allowed in Deadwood.

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The commission will send the revised rules to the state Legislature's Interim Rules Review Committee for approval.

## China, in global campaign, vaccinates its people in Thailand

By FU TING and PATRICK QUINN Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Chinese citizens living in Thailand began being vaccinated on Thursday as part of China's global campaign to inoculate its nationals living and working abroad.

China recently donated 500,000 vaccine doses, and Thailand agreed in turn to inoculate Chinese nationals as it slowly rolls out shots for its own citizens to contain a coronavirus surge that has sickened tens of thousands in the past two months.

Yang Xin, minister counsellor at the Chinese Embassy, said Beijing's "Spring Sprout" program would benefit tens of thousands of Chinese in the country. An estimated 150,000 Chinese citizens live in Thailand.

China has so far supplied millions of vaccine doses to the country, most of which Thailand purchased.

The Thai government has said it will vaccinate Thais before inoculating most other foreigners, regardless of risk factors or age.

Just over 2% of Thailand's 70 million people have received a first vaccine dose and about 1% have received a second. The government hopes to inoculate 70% of its people by the end of the year, but has been criticized for taking too long to start vaccinating.

China's official People's Daily newspaper says more than 500,000 Chinese citizens in more than 120 countries have benefited from the "Spring Sprout" vaccine program since it was launched in March.

In downtown Bangkok, a Chinese volunteer with a white mask, transparent shield and blue gloves stood in front of a red banner reading "Spring Sprout Action" flanked by the flags of China and Thailand at a vaccination center.

A dozen people waited to get a cursory medical check as nurses, accompanied by a translator, gave Chinese-made Sinovac shots in another room.

"I am happy and proud to be able to get a vaccine on day 1 organized by my government," said Zhang Xiaohong, 40, who runs a logistics company in Thailand. He said he believes the Chinese government cares about its people.

Qin Qing, a 39-year-old real estate broker in Bangkok, said she was a bit nervous before getting the shot and felt slightly dizzy afterward.

"I am grateful for my country and the embassy, and people who help to make it happen, from airline staff who fly the vaccines here to Thai medical workers," she said.

Thailand had largely contained coronavirus cases last year by closing its borders, enforcing mandatory quarantines and actively tracing contacts of those found to be infected. The measures devastated its lucrative tourism industry but kept the pandemic at bay, for the most part, until early April.

Then a surge that began in high-end nightspots in central Bangkok spread rapidly as people were allowed to travel during a mid-April national holiday.

On Thursday, health authorities reported 2,636 new cases and 25 deaths for a total of 119,585 infections and 703 deaths since the pandemic began. Of that number, 90,722 confirmed cases and 609 deaths have been recorded since April 1.

A partial lockdown in recent weeks has made limited headway in containing outbreaks, especially in Bangkok and in prisons.

The capital has been hit especially hard, with thousands of cases surfacing in slums, crowded low-income housing and camps housing construction workers.

Thailand has a population of about 70 million. More than 2.5 million are from neighboring countries, including Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. Many are employed on construction sites and in factories.

Chinese nationals are the most numerous foreigners living in Thailand who are not from neighboring countries. They are the only foreigners being vaccinated under the "Spring Sprout" campaign.

Natapanu Nopakun, deputy Foreign Ministry spokesman, said Thursday there are around 1.3 million

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legal migrant workers in Bangkok and its vicinity and more than 1 million illegal ones across the country. The Labor Ministry intends to inoculate them as well because their high mobility is a risk factor in curbing infections.

Another 200,000 foreigners — from Australia, Japan, Europe, the United States and elsewhere — are mostly professionals and retirees. For now, they can only obtain COVID-19 shots by traveling overseas and would face lengthy, expensive quarantines on their return.

Groups representing Americans living in Thailand sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken last week asking the government to supply some of the millions of unused vaccine doses available in the U.S. to inoculate American citizens in Thailand.

## **EXPLAINER: How did Hamas grow its arsenal to strike Israel?**

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — In this fourth war between Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers, the Islamic militant group has fired more than 4,000 rockets at Israel, some hitting deeper in Israeli territory and with greater accuracy than ever before.

The unprecedented barrages reaching as far north as the seaside metropolis of Tel Aviv, coupled with drone launches and even an attempted submarine attack, have put on vivid display a homegrown arsenal that has only expanded despite the choke hold of a 14-year Israeli-Egyptian blockade.

"The magnitude of (Hamas) bombing is much bigger and the precision is much better in this conflict," said Mkhaimar Abusada, a professor of political science at Al-Azhar University in Gaza City. "It's shocking what they've been able to do under siege."

Israel has argued that the blockade — which has caused severe hardship for more than 2 million Palestinians in Gaza — is essential for preventing a Hamas arms build-up and cannot be lifted.

Here's a look at how, under intense surveillance and tight restrictions, Hamas managed to amass its cache.

### **FROM CRUDE BOMBS TO LONG-RANGE ROCKETS**

Since the founding of Hamas in 1987, the group's secretive military wing — which operates alongside a more visible political organization — evolved from a small militia into what Israel describes as a "semi-organized military."

In its early days, the group carried out deadly shootings and kidnappings of Israelis. It killed hundreds of Israelis in suicide bombings during the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising, which erupted in late 2000.

As violence spread, the group started producing rudimentary "Qassam" rockets. Powered partly by molten sugar, the projectiles reached just a few kilometers (miles), flew wildly and caused little damage, often landing inside Gaza.

After Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, Hamas assembled a secret supply line from longtime patrons Iran and Syria, according to Israel's military. Longer-range rockets, powerful explosives, metal and machinery flooded Gaza's southern border with Egypt. Experts say the rockets were shipped to Sudan, trucked across Egypt's vast desert and smuggled through a warren of narrow tunnels beneath the Sinai Peninsula.

In 2007, when Hamas fighters pushed the Palestinian Authority out of Gaza and took over governing the coastal strip, Israel and Egypt imposed their tight blockade.

According to the Israeli military, the smuggling continued, gaining steam after Mohammed Morsi, an Islamist leader and Hamas ally, was elected president of Egypt in 2012 before being overthrown by the Egyptian army.

Gaza militants stocked up on foreign-made rockets with enhanced ranges, like Katyushas and the Iranian-supplied Fajr-5, which were used during the 2008 and 2012 wars.

### **A HOMEGROWN INDUSTRY**

After Morsi's overthrow, Egypt cracked down on and shut hundreds of smuggling tunnels. In response, Gaza's local weapons industry picked up.

"The Iranian narrative is that they kick-started all the missile production in Gaza and gave them the



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technical and knowledge base, but now the Palestinians are self-sufficient, said Fabian Hinz, an independent security analyst focusing on missiles in the Middle East. "Today, most of the rockets we're seeing are domestically built, often with creative techniques."

In a September documentary aired by the Al-Jazeera satellite news network, rare footage showed Hamas militants reassembling Iranian rockets with ranges of up to 80 kilometers (50 miles) and warheads packed with 175 kilograms (385 pounds) of explosives. Hamas militants opened unexploded Israeli missiles from previous strikes to extract explosive materials. They even salvaged old water pipes to repurpose as missile bodies.

To produce rockets, Hamas chemists and engineers mix propellant from fertilizer, oxidizer and other ingredients in makeshift factories. Key contraband is still believed to be smuggled into Gaza in a handful of tunnels that remain in operation.

Hamas has publicly praised Iran for its assistance, which experts say now primarily takes the form of blueprints, engineering know-how, motor tests and other technical expertise. The State Department reports that Iran provides \$100 million a year to Palestinian armed groups.

## THE ARSENAL ON DISPLAY

The Israeli military estimates that before the current round of fighting, Hamas had an arsenal of 7,000 rockets of varying ranges that can cover nearly all of Israel, as well as 300 anti-tank and 100 anti-aircraft missiles. It also has acquired dozens of unmanned aerial vehicles and has an army of some 30,000 militants, including 400 naval commandos.

In this latest war, Hamas has unveiled new weapons like attack drones, unmanned submarine drones dispatched into the sea and an unguided rocket called "Ayyash" with a 250-kilometer (155-mile) range. Israel claims those new systems have been thwarted or failed to make direct strikes.

The Israeli military says its current operation has dealt a tough blow to Hamas' weapons research, storage and production facilities. But Israeli officials acknowledge they have been unable to halt the constant barrages of rocket fire.

Unlike guided missiles, the rockets are imprecise and the vast majority have been intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome defense system. But by continuing to frustrate Israel's superior firepower, Hamas may have made its main point.

"Hamas is not aiming for the military destruction of Israel. Ultimately, the rockets are meant to build leverage and rewrite the rules of the game," Hinz said. "It's psychological."

## Spain's migrant drama highlights EU outsourcing policy flaws

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The sight of hundreds of migrants swimming or climbing fences separating the Spanish enclave of Ceuta from the rest of Africa this week is a stark reminder of just how dependent the European Union can be on the whims of countries it chooses to pay to enforce its migration policy.

Since well over 1 million migrants entered the EU in 2015, most of them refugees fleeing conflict in Syria, the world's biggest trading bloc has spent vast sums trying to ensure that migrants no longer set out for Europe on arduous overland treks or dangerous sea journeys.

The EU granted billions of euros and other incentives to Turkey, for instance, to stop people leaving for Europe. Yet, just over a year ago, the government in Ankara waved thousands of people through the land border to Greece, sparking violence that almost erupted into open conflict.

That dispute was over Turkey's view that the EU had failed to amply support its invasion of northern Syria. Since then, the 27-nation bloc has quietly gone about reinvigorating the EU-Turkey deal, with an offer of yet more money and trade incentives.

Perhaps the authorities in Morocco are using the same playbook when an EU country takes action they, too, find unacceptable. "Morocco is playing with people's lives. They must not use people, among them its own citizens, as pawns in a political game," said Virginia Alvarez, Head of Internal Policy at Amnesty

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International Spain.

What is clear is that more than 8,000 people crossed into Spanish territory over two days this week. Many risked their lives by swimming around a breakwater to reach a beach on the European side.

Hanne Beirens, Director of the Migration Policy Institute, told The Associated Press that migration can feature very prominently at the negotiating table when the EU is drafting agreements with outside countries, whatever their nature.

"Today, if as a third country you hold a migration card in your hand, you're a powerful player," Beirens said.

The migrant influx in 2015 was a turning point for Europe. Arrivals overwhelmed reception centers and laid waste to the EU's inadequate asylum policy. Nations bickered over who should take responsibility for people landing on Europe's shore. Those disputes continue.

Entries these days are barely a trickle compared with 2015. In contrast, the load on small, poor Lebanon and Jordan, or Turkey, where around 3.7 million Syrian refugees are sheltering, is far greater.

But the inability of the EU, home to 27 of the richest countries in the world, to find a fair way to manage people seeking sanctuary or better lives is the source of one of its biggest political crises.

"The EU bloc of 2021 is one that still shivers at the idea of new waves of migrants arriving and having to deal with questions such as who will take them on, who will send them back. So this is really a big issue," Beirens said.

Six years ago, the EU clinched the deal with Turkey that has been lauded for slowing migrant arrivals almost to a standstill. It's since used that as a model for similar arrangements with Morocco and Tunisia, where the EU's top migration official heads Thursday for more talks.

Hundreds of millions of euros have also been spent in lawless Libya, the departure point for many Europe-bound migrants.

Morocco is the second-largest beneficiary of migration aid in that region, receiving around 346 million euros (\$422 million). But Rabat appears to have leveraged its control of the Ceuta border to punish Spain for permitting a militant group leader from Western Sahara, a region Morocco annexed in 1975, to receive medical treatment.

In the first public comments on the situation in Ceuta by a Moroccan official, Mostapha Hamid, minister for human rights, said in a Facebook post on Tuesday that Spain's decision to receive the Polisario Front leader was "reckless, irresponsible and totally unacceptable."

"What was Spain expecting from Morocco when it hosted an official from a group that is carrying arms against the kingdom?" Hamid wondered.

Beirens claims no insight into Rabat's motives. But generally, she said, a "tit-for-tat approach has become a kind of a model for third countries in securing, on the one hand greater support for migration, but also — and this far more important — on scoring deals on trade, on foreign affairs and other policy domains."

As events in Ceuta unfolded, Spain on Tuesday approved a 30-million-euro (\$37 million) transfer to beef up Morocco's policing of irregular migration flows. Madrid said the economic package was already budgeted before the latest developments.

European Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas told Spanish National Radio Wednesday that "nobody can blackmail the European Union."

He may believe what he says, but no one doubts that Morocco, Tunisia, Libya and Turkey all hold strong migration cards.

## Israel unleashes strikes after vowing to press on in Gaza

By FARES AKRAM and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel unleashed another wave of airstrikes across the Gaza Strip early Thursday, killing at least one Palestinian and wounding several, as it pushed ahead despite U.S. calls to wind down the offensive against Gaza's militant Hamas rulers, who have fired thousands of rockets at Israel.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is facing mounting pressure from his country's closest ally but appears determined to inflict maximum damage on Hamas in a war that could help save his political career.

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Still, diplomatic efforts to secure a cease-fire gathered pace, with officials close to the talks saying they expect a truce to be announced in the next 24 hours.

Explosions shook Gaza City and orange flares lit up the pre-dawn sky, with bombing raids also reported in the central town of Deir al-Balah and the southern town of Khan Younis. As the sun rose, residents surveyed the rubble from at least five family homes destroyed in Khan Younis. There were also heavy airstrikes on a commercial thoroughfare in Gaza City.

The Israeli military said it struck at least three homes of Hamas commanders in Khan Younis and another in Rafah, targeting "military infrastructure," as well as a weapons storage unit at a home in Gaza City.

With hundreds already killed in the worst fighting since Israel and Hamas' 2014 war, U.S. President Joe Biden told Israel on Wednesday that he expected "a significant de-escalation today on the path to a cease-fire" — but Netanyahu pushed back, saying he was "determined to continue this operation until its aim is met." It marked the first public rift between the two close allies since the fighting began and poses a difficult test of the U.S.-Israel relationship early in Biden's presidency.

Still, an Egyptian intelligence official said a cease-fire was likely late Thursday or early Friday, after the U.S. appeal bolstered Cairo's own efforts to halt the fighting. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the delicate talks.

Khalid Okasha, director of the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies, which has close ties to the government, also said a cease-fire was likely in that timeframe, as did Osama Hamdan, a senior Hamas official.

Visiting the region, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said Israel has "the right to defend itself against such unacceptable attacks." But he also expressed concern about the rising number of civilian victims and support for truce efforts.

Even as the diplomatic efforts appeared to gather strength, an Israeli airstrike smashed into the Khawaldi family's two-story house in Khan Younis, destroying it. The 11 residents, who were sleeping outside of the home out of fear, were all wounded and hospitalized, said Shaker al-Khozondar, a neighbor.

Shrapnel also hit own home, killing his aunt and wounding her daughter and two other relatives, he said. Al-Khozondar spoke from his aunt Hoda's bedroom where she had died. The windows were shattered and the bed pillows and rubble were stained with blood.

Weam Fares, a spokesman for a nearby hospital, confirmed the death and said at least 10 people were wounded in strikes overnight.

Heavy airstrikes also pummeled a street in the Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza, destroying ramshackle homes with corrugated metal roofs nearby. The military said it struck two underground launchers in the camp used to fire rockets at Tel Aviv.

"Never in my life have I seen such destruction," said Ibrahim Afana, 44. "We didn't even have three minutes to put a slipper on our foot," he said, describing his family's panicked flight after they were awakened by the bombing. He said the army had called some residents to warn them about the impending strikes. There were no reports of casualties.

The current round of fighting between Israel and Hamas began May 10, when the militant group 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.

Since then, Israel has launched hundreds of airstrikes that it says have targeted Hamas' infrastructure, including a vast tunnel network. Hamas and other militant groups embedded in residential areas have fired over 4,000 rockets at Israeli cities, with hundreds falling short and most of the rest intercepted.

At least 230 Palestinians have been killed, including 65 children and 39 women, with 1,710 people wounded, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not break the numbers down into fighters and civilians. Hamas and militant group 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, a 16-year-old girl and a soldier, have been killed. The



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military said an anti-tank missile fired from Gaza hit an empty bus near the frontier on Thursday, lightly wounding an Israeli soldier.

Since the fighting began, Gaza's infrastructure, already weakened by a 14-year blockade, has rapidly deteriorated. Medical supplies, water and fuel for electricity are running low in the territory, on which Israel and Egypt imposed the blockade after Hamas seized power in 2007.

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.

## **Biden's pattern with Israel: public support, private scolds**

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

It's a story Joe Biden has loved recounting over the decades: A chain-smoking Golda Meir welcoming the 30-year-old senator to Israel on his first visit in 1973 and giving him a grandmotherly hug before schooling him on the Six-Day War and the dangers still faced by Israel.

A classified Israeli government memo, though, paints a less anodyne version of Biden's meeting with the Israeli prime minister that day, reporting that the young senator privately "displayed an enthusiasm" that "signaled his lack of diplomatic experience" as he laid out his concerns over land seized in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by Israel years earlier. The document was published last year by Israel's Channel 13.

For Biden it was the start of a familiar dynamic. Over his nearly 50 years in national politics, he has often reserved his toughest messages for Israeli leaders for private talks while publicly burnishing his image as an unwavering supporter of Israel.

The pattern holds true to the present, as Biden has delivered his most pointed messages for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about the conflict with Hamas in Gaza during private conversations while having little to say in public.

For days, as Hamas rockets have flown toward Israel and Israeli airstrikes pounded Gaza, Biden resisted mounting calls from some Democrats and U.N. Security Council members to more forcefully pressure Israel for a cease-fire. On Wednesday, in their fourth conversation in eight days, Biden told Netanyahu that he expected a "significant de-escalation" by day's end on the path to a cease-fire, according to a White House summary of the phone call.

But hours later, Biden didn't make even a passing reference to the Gaza war or his diplomacy during a commencement speech at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy as he spoke of the need to face accelerating global challenges.

In 1982, Washington was the setting when Biden was among a group of U.S. lawmakers who had a tense meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Biden reportedly pressed Begin to halt the building of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, while some of his colleagues were critical of other aspects of Israel's policies.

"I think it is fair to say that in my eight years in Washington I've never seen such an angry session with a foreign head of state," Sen. Paul Tsongas, a Massachusetts Democrat, told reporters after the meeting.

Overall, Biden has hewed to the U.S. establishment line of reaffirming a financial commitment to Israel regardless of its actions toward Palestinians, while frequently reminding Jewish American audiences of his personal closeness to their community. In a 1986 Senate floor speech, he offered a fulsome defense of U.S. aid to Israel — calling it "the best \$3 billion investment we make" — and urged colleagues to stop apologizing for their support of the country.

Biden has spoken to Jewish audiences about building bonds with the nine Israeli prime ministers who've overlapped with his own time in elected office, recalled his father teaching him about the horrors of Nazi efforts to rid Europe of Jews, and noted that he took each of his children to visit the Dachau concentration camp. On the lighter side, he often jokes that his daughter gave him every Irish-Catholic father's dream when she married a Jewish surgeon.

But there have also been moments where Biden's frustration with Netanyahu has seeped into public view. As vice president, he kept Netanyahu waiting for a dinner meeting after the Israeli leader embarrassed

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Biden and President Barack Obama by approving the construction of 1,600 new apartments in disputed east Jerusalem in the middle of Biden's 2010 visit to Israel.

Netanyahu sought to patch up hurt feelings at the dinner. But after the meal, Biden admonished the prime minister in a statement, saying the move undermined an Obama administration effort to persuade the Palestinians to resume peace talks.

Amid ongoing tension between Obama and Netanyahu, Biden went out of his way during a 2014 speech before the Jewish Federations of North America to note that he and Netanyahu were "still buddies" — albeit with a somewhat complicated relationship.

Biden noted that he had once inscribed a photo for Netanyahu with the message "Bibi I don't agree with a damn thing you say but I love you."

In late 2019, during a question-and-answer session with voters on the campaign trail, Biden called Netanyahu "counterproductive" and an "extreme right" leader, while accusing Palestinian leaders of "fomenting" the conflict and "baiting everyone who is Jewish." He also suggested that some on the U.S. political left give the Palestinian Authority "a pass" when criticizing Israeli leadership.

As the Biden White House negotiated the current crisis, the president and his advisers made the calculation that the Israelis are unlikely to respond to international resolutions or public demands by the U.S. and that their best leverage would happen behind the scenes, 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.

Aaron David Miller, a former Mideast adviser to Democratic and Republican administrations, said Biden had demonstrated patience with Netanyahu's campaign to degrade Hamas' military capability in part because Biden has bigger priorities, including shepherding the U.S. recovery from the global pandemic and focusing on an emerging economic and strategic competition from China.

"This is not Joe Biden approaching the crisis as a young senator or as the head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee," said Miller, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "This is not even Joe Biden as vice president. This is Joe Biden as a president that faces immediate crises and an agenda that would make your head spin. The last thing he wants to do is find himself bogged down on this issue."

Biden validated that notion this week during a visit to Michigan as he sat in the cab of an electric-powered Ford truck he was taking for a test drive.

A reporter asked Biden if he would take a question about the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict.

"Not unless you get in front of the car as I step on it," Biden shot back. He added that he was teasing, but then hit the gas and sped away.

## China says providing vaccines to almost 40 African states

BEIJING (AP) — China said Thursday it is providing COVID-19 vaccines to nearly 40 African countries, describing its actions as purely altruistic in an apparent intensification of what has been described as "vaccine diplomacy."

The vaccines were donated or sold at "favorable prices," Foreign Ministry official Wu Peng told reporters.

Wu compared China's outreach to the actions of "some countries that have said they have to wait for their own people to finish the vaccination before they could supply the vaccines to foreign countries," in an apparent dig at the United States.

"We believe that it is, of course, necessary to ensure that the Chinese people get vaccinated as soon as possible, but for other countries in need, we also try our best to provide vaccine help," said Wu, who is director of the ministry's Africa department.

While the U.S. has been accused by some of hoarding vaccines, President Joe Biden on Monday pledged to share an additional 20 million vaccine doses in the coming six weeks, bringing the total U.S. commitment to 80 million. The Biden administration hasn't said which countries will receive them.

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The doses will come from existing U.S. production of Pfizer, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccine stocks. The administration previously committed to share about 60 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine by the end of June.

The U.N. Security Council called on Wednesday for accelerated availability of COVID-19 vaccines for Africa, expressing concern that the continent has only received about 2% of all vaccines administered globally.

A presidential statement approved by all 15 members at a council meeting on African issues reiterated the need for "equitable access" to quality, affordable COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines.

China's vaccine diplomacy has been a surprising success: It has pledged roughly half a billion doses of its vaccines to more than 45 countries, according to an Associated Press tally.

With just four of China's many vaccine makers claiming they are able to produce at least 2.6 billion doses this year, a large part of the world's population will end up inoculated not with the fancy Western vaccines boasting headline-grabbing efficacy rates, but with China's humble, traditionally made shots.

Egypt will start locally producing China's Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine in June, with Sinovac enabling the Egyptian side to obtain the expertise and technical assistance to produce the vaccine, giving the license to manufacture and pack the vaccine in Egypt.

"Aid alone cannot solve Africa's vaccine issues. We must support local manufacturing of vaccines in Africa, even though this is difficult due to (low) levels of industrialization," Wu said.

## When do I still need to wear a mask?

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — When do I still need to wear a mask?

It depends, mostly on whether or not you're vaccinated.

If you're fully vaccinated, the latest guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says you no longer need to wear a mask or physically distance in most situations. That includes when you're outside and in many indoor spaces like restaurants, though you still need to follow any local or business rules.

Americans also still need a mask when traveling, including on buses, subways and planes and at airports. The guidance on masks will differ by country.

Some experts say the CDC is relaxing its recommendations too soon.

Part of the concern is that there's no way to tell who's vaccinated, so unvaccinated people could claim they got the shots and go maskless, said David Holtgrave, dean of the School of Public Health at University at Albany. That could cause cases to rise.

"A central mistake in public health is easing up infectious disease control efforts just before crossing the finish line," he said.

Vaccinated people might also prefer to continue wearing their masks. Though chances are low, it's still possible to get infected, even if symptoms are likely to be mild or nonexistent.

That's why the CDC's guidance says vaccinated people should put their masks back on and get tested if they end up developing symptoms.

There are other exceptions. Masks are still needed in select settings including hospitals and nursing homes. And if you have a weakened immune system because of a health condition or medications, the agency says to talk to your doctor before shedding your mask, since vaccines generally don't work as well in people with weak immune systems.

People are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after their last required shot.

If you're not yet fully vaccinated, the CDC still recommends masks in most places outside your home. That includes indoor public spaces, crowded outdoor events like concerts and small outdoor gatherings that include other unvaccinated people.

When you're outdoors alone or with people from your household, the agency says unvaccinated people don't need masks.

Since children younger than 12 aren't yet eligible for COVID-19 shots, they should continue to wear masks

indoors outside the home and in most public places like other unvaccinated people.

## Netanyahu's prospects bolstered amid Israel-Hamas fighting

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel is at war with Hamas, Jewish-Arab mob violence has erupted inside Israel, and the West Bank is experiencing its deadliest unrest in years. Yet this may all bolster Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Just over a week ago, the longtime Israeli leader's political career seemed all but over. He had failed to form a coalition government following an indecisive parliamentary election, and his political rivals were on the cusp of pushing him out of office.

Now, as Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers wage their fourth war in just over a decade, Netanyahu's fortunes have changed dramatically. His rivals' prospects have crumbled, Netanyahu is back in his comfortable role as Mr. Security, and the country could soon be headed for yet another election campaign that would guarantee him at least several more months in office.

The stunning turn of events has raised questions about whether Netanyahu's desperation to survive may have pushed the country into its current predicament. While opponents have stopped short of accusing him of hatching just such a conspiracy, they say the fact that these questions are being asked is disturbing enough.

"If we had a government, security considerations would not be mixed with political considerations," opposition leader Yair Lapid wrote on Facebook. "No one would ask themselves why the fire always breaks out just when it's most convenient for the prime minister."

Lapid appeared to be poised to make history early last week, saying he was wrapping up the final details of arranging a government that would end Netanyahu's 12-year rule.

"In a few days, we should be able to swear in a new Israeli government that is functional and that is based on broad agreements and the common good," he declared, hours before the war erupted.

The sudden outburst of fighting was the culmination of a series of events that have made it increasingly difficult, and maybe impossible, for Lapid to assemble his coalition.

His alliance was to include diverse groups that span the spectrum from right-wing to left-wing Jewish parties, as well as an Islamist party, unified by little more than their opposition to Netanyahu.

Such a coalition would make history. An Arab party has never officially been part of an Israeli governing coalition.

Netanyahu himself had courted the same Arab party when he was granted the first chance by Israel's figurehead president to assemble a coalition government after the March 23 elections.

But as it became clear Netanyahu could not secure the required parliamentary majority, things began to heat up between Jews and Arabs in the contested city of Jerusalem, in large part due to the actions of the prime minister's allies.

Israelis and Palestinians both claim east Jerusalem and its sensitive holy sites. These competing claims lie at the heart of their conflict and have repeatedly triggered violence.

The Cabinet minister in charge of police, a Netanyahu loyalist, authorized the closure of a popular gathering spot outside Jerusalem's Old City used by Palestinians during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. When protests broke out, heavy-handed Israeli police tactics led to days of unrest that peaked with police raids on the Al Aqsa Mosque. The violent scenes caused outrage across the Muslim world.

At the same time, Jewish settlers pressed ahead with attempts to evict dozens of Palestinians from their homes in a nearby east Jerusalem neighborhood. Itamar Ben-Gvir, a leader of a racist anti-Arab party aligned with Netanyahu, temporarily set up what he called a "parliamentary office" in the neighborhood, further enraging residents.

Then, on May 10, in an event widely seen as a provocation, thousands of far-right flag-waving Israeli activists gathered for a planned march through the heart of the Muslim Quarter of the Old City to celebrate Israel's capture of contested east Jerusalem in 1967.



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At the last minute, the Israeli government ordered marchers to change their route, but by then it was too late. Hamas, saying it was protecting Jerusalem, launched a barrage of long-range rockets at the city, crossing an Israeli "red line" and sparking the war.

As the war intensified, violent clashes between Jews and Arab mobs erupted in cities across Israel. The violence also spilled over to the West Bank, where more than 20 Palestinians have been killed in stone-throwing demonstrations against Israeli security forces in recent days, according to Palestinian health officials.

In this fraught environment, it appears unlikely that Lapid will be able to cobble together a government by a June 2 deadline.

Naftali Bennett, a far-right politician and key partner, abandoned the talks last week after the fighting began. Mansour Abbas, the leader of the Arab party, suspended negotiations. He has said he will resume them if the fighting ends, but time is running out.

Lapid's office says he will work until the last minute to try to form a government. If he fails, the country most likely will be plunged into an unprecedented fifth election in little over two years.

It is a script that fits Netanyahu's needs well and reinforces his image as a survivor. The unrest has diverted attention away from his ongoing corruption trial, and Netanyahu is at his best when focused on security issues, projecting a calm and powerful demeanor in his frequent TV appearances.

Netanyahu has been desperate to remain in office throughout his trial, using the position to rally public support and lash out at police and prosecutors.

A new campaign would leave him in office until at least the new election this fall. It would also give him another chance at forming a friendlier coalition with his religious and nationalist allies that could grant him immunity from prosecution.

Gayil Talshir, a political scientist at Israel's Hebrew University, said she did not think Netanyahu had conspired to keep himself in office. But she called him a master of manipulating events in his favor.

"I think he controlled how much oil he puts into the fire," she said.

"From Netanyahu's perspective, he's looking only at his trial and his power base," she added. "This is where Israeli politics are at. It's the political survival of this prime minister and not the public interest."

## No-hitter for 2nd straight day: Kluber pitches Yanks' gem

By STEPHEN HAWKINS AP Baseball Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Corey Kluber stopped for a moment before his first pitch of the ninth inning.

"I had to take a breath after the warmups and calm myself down a little bit," said the pitcher nicknamed Klubot for his robot-like demeanor.

Kluber then finished the sixth no-hitter in the majors this season and second in two nights, leading the New York Yankees over the Texas Rangers 2-0 on Wednesday.

"It was a lot of fun, I think it was a special night," Kluber said. "I've never been part of one, witnessed one, let alone thrown one."

There have been four no-hitters in a 15-day span. The six total are the most this early in a season.

Kluber came within a four-pitch walk to Charlie Culberson in the third inning of throwing a perfect game.

"I don't really do too much with what-ifs. Obviously I would've like to not walk a guy on four straight pitches," Kluber said. "That being said, at that point in the game, it's still 0-0, so my thoughts after that walk were try to get out of the inning without allowing a run."

The 35-year-old right-hander pitched his gem a night after Detroit right-hander Spencer Turnbull threw one against Seattle, marking the first no-hitters on consecutive days since 1969, when Cincinnati's Jim Maloney threw one on April 30 and Houston's Don Wilson on May 1. There were two no-hitters on June 29, 1990, by the Los Angeles Dodgers' Fernando Valenzuela and Oakland's Dave Stewart.

Kluber (4-2) struck out nine. The two-time AL Cy Young Award winner threw 71 of 101 pitches for strikes in his ninth start for the Yankees, lowering his ERA to 2.86 and winning his fourth straight decision.

With his fastest pitch at 92.5 mph, he mixed 31 curveballs, 27 cutters, 23 sinkers, 18 changeups and

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two four-seam fastballs.

"I had butterflies in that ninth inning, I'm getting a little emotional now, even just getting to witness that was really, really special," manager Aaron Boone said. "And to see his teammates and the excitement of everyone for Corey and just the excitement for themselves being a part of such a thing. What a performance."

Kluber was pitching on that same mound when he was hurt after one inning last season, tearing a muscle in his right shoulder on July 26 in his Texas debut. He insisted that he didn't even think about that until after that game when Robinson Chirinos, the former Rangers catcher now on the Yankees taxi squad, mentioned that it was better than his previous start in the \$1.2 billion stadium.

That was the second straight shortened season for Kluber, whose 2019 season ended May 1 when he was hit on the forearm by a comebacker. He left the Rangers as a free agent to sign an \$11 million, one-year deal with the Yankees.

"We expected some outings like that in our ballpark, unfortunately not against us," Texas manager Chris Woodward said. "I can't say enough good things about him. I'm not surprised by this guy's success. I've watched this guy go through his routine and the work he puts in."

Right fielder Tyler Wade made a running catch of pinch-hitter David Dahl's flyball for the second out in the ninth inning before Willie Calhoun's game-ending groundout to Gleyber Torres in the shortstop's first game back after being on the COVID-19 injured list. Wade entered in the third inning after Ryan LaMarre injured a hamstring.

Boone, whose dad Bob caught Angels pitcher Mike Witt's no-hitter at Texas in 1984, said he got nervous on the ball Dahl hit, thinking it was going to get down the line. Then he noticed what a good jump Wade had gotten on the ball.

"I knew I was going to catch it," Wade said. "I didn't know if I was going to have to dive, or catch it like I did. But I knew I was going to catch it."

Wade said he wasn't sure because he was unable to hear the bat off the ball with a screaming crowd of 31,689 — many of them Yankees fans.

Kluber said that was one of the few balls hit during the game that he thought might fall for a hit.

"His closing speed was pretty impressive," Kluber said.

It was the 12th no-hitter in Yankees history, the 11th in the regular season and the first since David Cone's perfect game against Montreal on July 18, 1999. It was New York's first on the road since Allie Reynolds at Cleveland on July 12, 1951.

This was the fifth no-hitter against the Rangers, who also were at home April 9 when San Diego native Joe Musgrove threw the first no-hitter in Padres history.

"It stinks. It's baseball. No-hitters happen. There's been a lot so far this year. Unfortunate for us that we've been a part of two of them," Culberson said. "It just shows you how good these pitchers are, these teams are and what they're doing."

New York got its only runs in the sixth inning when Kyle Higashioka had a leadoff walk and scored on a triple by Wade. DJ LeMahieu followed with a sacrifice fly against Hyeon-Jong Yang (0-1).

That is about the time Kluber really starting thinking about a no-hitter.

"After that point, we had gotten a couple of runs ... makes it a little easier to kind of pound the strike zone and know you have that run support in your back pocket," he said.

Before getting hurt in 2019, Kluber was a 20-game winner in 2018, and had thrown at least 203 innings with 222 strikeouts each season from 2014-18. He was the Cy Young winner in 2014 and 2017.

"Obviously wish this guy well," Woodward said, "but I didn't wish him that well."

The four no-hitters in May are the most in a month since June 1990. It is also the first time three teams have been no-hit twice in one season, with the Rangers joining Cleveland and Seattle.

Given the drama, even Amanda Kluber took a look.

"She doesn't like to watch too much," the pitcher said of his wife, "but she turned it on in the last inning to watch the end of it."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Yankees: LaMarre grabbed at his right hamstring just before getting to first base when running out a groundball. ... OF Clint Frazier (neck issues) was out of the lineup for the second game in a row. "I don't know if it's stiffness or what, but we're looking into all that and what it could mean," Boone said. ... C Gary Sánchez, who left Tuesday night's game with cramping in his left hamstring, was available to play. Boone said he had always anticipated Sánchez not playing Wednesday night before the day game for the series finale.

Rangers: 3B Brock Holt (right hamstring strain) played his second rehab game with Double-A Frisco. He has been out since May 3.

#### UP NEXT

The Yankees are 6-3 going into the finale of their trip. Domingo Germán (3-2, 3.62 ERA) pitches for New York against Rangers right-hander Dane Dunning (2-3, 4.34) whose ninth start will be the most among AL rookies.

## Durst's defense says dismemberment helps prove innocence

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The savage and sloppy manner in which Robert Durst dismembered a man he accidentally killed in Texas helps prove the New York real estate heir didn't murder his best friend or kill his wife, his lawyer said.

Durst's amateurish efforts to dispose of the body of Morris Black after fatally shooting him in Galveston in 2001 left a trail of evidence — unlike the clinical crime scene where Susan Berman's body was found or the absence of clues when his wife vanished, attorney Dick DeGuerin said Wednesday.

A garbage bag floating in Galveston Bay with one of Black's body parts contained a receipt with Durst's name on it, blood from the drifter was discovered in his car, and DNA of the man was found at the crime scene in the multimillionaire's \$300-a-month apartment.

"There was clues everywhere. Hundreds of clues," DeGuerin told jurors in Los Angeles County Superior Court. "Significantly different from whoever killed Susan Berman. Significantly different from the disappearance without a trace of Kathie Durst."

DeGuerin, who represented Durst in the Texas trial in which he was acquitted of murder after claiming he shot Black in self-defense, is aiming for a repeat in Los Angeles, where Durst is charged with murder in Berman's fatal shooting in 2000.

While prosecutors are using the killing of Black as evidence that Durst also knocked off Berman in his efforts to avoid prosecution in his wife's suspected killing in New York in 1982, the defense is trying to use the Texas case to its advantage.

The trial began in March 2020 but was adjourned after six days because of the pandemic. It resumed this week in Inglewood with lawyers making abbreviated opening statements to remind jurors about the evidence.

Deputy District Attorney John Lewin on Tuesday said the three killings are intertwined and Berman and Black were killed to help cover-up the killing of Durst's wife.

"In essence, all three are interrelated," Lewin said. "Everything starts with Kathie Durst's disappearance."

Durst has long been suspected of killing Kathie Durst but has never been charged and has denied any role in her disappearance. She's never been found.

DeGuerin said there was no evidence Durst killed his wife or that Berman had helped him cover his tracks by posing as Kathie Durst in a phone call to the dean of the medical school where she was a student.

"Kathie Durst disappeared without a trace," DeGuerin said. "It was and is a mystery."

Durst fled New York and went into hiding in Texas in November 2000 after Westchester prosecutors reopened the investigation into Kathie Durst's suspected death. He disguised himself as a mute woman and rented an apartment next to Black.

Black was killed because he discovered Durst's identity, Lewin claimed.

But DeGuerin repeated the defense that won over jurors in Galveston in 2003: Black pulled Durst's gun

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on him and was shot in a struggle for the weapon.

After the killing, Durst smoked pot and drank Jack Daniels whiskey and then went to a hardware store, where he purchased a bow saw, a paring knife, garbage bags and painter's drop cloth to keep things tidy while he hacked up the body, DeGuerin said.

A sickly Durst, 78, seated in a wheelchair in a blue sport coat, faced the jury as DeGuerin described the "awful, awful" dismemberment. Durst blinked occasionally but no outward sign of emotion was discernible behind his white mask.

DeGuerin said Durst then did what he's done much of his life: he ran just as he had from his rich but dysfunctional family's mansion as a child.

He fled to New Orleans but was arrested when he returned to Galveston to pick up a pair of glasses waiting at an optometrist office.

"He doesn't make good decisions," DeGuerin said repeatedly, blaming it partly on a diagnosis that Durst is on the autism spectrum and doesn't interact normally.

Lewin has scoffed at that explanation and played a clip of an interrogation in which Durst acknowledged it was something a psychiatrist made up. Later in the interview, though, Durst said he didn't like communicating with people.

DeGuerin said Durst had nothing to do with Berman's killing.

"Bob Durst did not kill Susan Berman and he doesn't know who did," he said. "Bob Durst had no motive and nothing to gain by the death of Susan Berman."

Berman, the daughter a Las Vegas mobster who was a writer, had been best pals with Durst since they met on the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles, in the 1960s. DeGuerin showed a photo of a younger bearded Durst, his smiling wife and a beaming Berman at one of her book launches.

Lewin said Berman told friends she helped Durst cover up the killing by phoning in sick for Kathie Durst the day after she was last seen — providing evidence she was alive the day after her husband said he put her on train back to New York City after a weekend at their lakeside cottage.

But DeGuerin said Berman was famous for embellishing stories with lies. Even her friends didn't believe what she told them.

"She was a fabulist. She made up stories," he said. "She told lies day in and day out."

DeGuerin said Durst discovered Berman's body when he showed up at her house in Benedict Canyon just before Christmas. The back door was open and she was lying on her back with blood pooled under her black hair.

Durst "freaked out," fearing the killer might be there and fled, DeGuerin said. But before leaving town, Durst sent a handwritten note to police with Berman's address and the word "CAVAVER" written in block letters so she'd be found.

Until the admission by his lawyer, Durst had always denied writing the note or being at the crime scene. He even told documentary filmmakers and investigators that only the killer could have written the cadaver note.

DeGuerin tried to discredit the filmmakers and suggest that Durst was "playing" with investigators during an interrogation.

Lewin will get his chance to press Durst on it later in the trial. DeGuerin said he would testify.

## House backs commission on Jan. 6 riot over GOP objections

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House voted to create an independent commission on the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, sending the legislation to an uncertain future in the Senate as Republican leaders work to stop a bipartisan investigation that is opposed by former President Donald Trump.

Democrats say an independent investigation is crucial to reckoning what happened that day, when a violent mob of Trump's supporters smashed into the Capitol to try and overturn President Joe Biden's victory. Modeled after the investigation into the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, the legislation would establish



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an independent, 10-member commission that would make recommendations by the end of the year for securing the Capitol and preventing another insurrection.

The bill passed the House on Wednesday 252-175, with 35 Republicans voting with Democrats in support of the commission, defying Trump and House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy. Trump issued a statement urging Republicans to vote against it, calling the legislation a "Democrat trap."

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell is trying to prevent defections among his own ranks, echoing McCarthy's opposition in a Senate floor speech Wednesday morning. Both men claimed the bill was partisan, even though membership of the proposed commission would be evenly split between the parties.

The January insurrection has become an increasingly fraught topic for Republicans, with a growing number in the party downplaying the severity of the worst attack on the Capitol in more than 200 years. While most Republicans voted against forming the commission, only a few spoke on the floor against it. And the handful of Republicans who backed the commission spoke forcefully.

"This is about facts — it's not partisan politics," said New York Rep. John Katko, the top Republican on the House Homeland Security Committee who negotiated the legislation with Democrats. He said "the American people and the Capitol Police deserve answers, and action as soon as possible to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again."

Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., said that Jan. 6 "is going to haunt this institution for a long, long time" and that a commission is necessary to find the truth about what happened. He recalled that he "heard the shouts, saw the flash-bangs, smelled the gas on that sorry day."

Democrats grew angry as some Republicans suggested the commission was only intended to smear Trump. Several shared their own memories of the insurrection, when rioters brutally beat police, broke in through windows and doors and sent lawmakers running. Four of the rioters died, including a woman who was shot and killed by police as she tried to break into the House chamber. A Capitol Police officer collapsed and died after engaging with the protesters, and two officers took their own lives in the days after.

"We have people scaling the Capitol, hitting the Capitol Police with lead pipes across the head, and we can't get bipartisanship? What else has to happen in this country?" shouted Rep. Tim Ryan, D-Ohio, on the floor just before the vote. He said the GOP opposition is "a slap in the face to every rank and file cop in the United States."

The vote was yet another test of Republican loyalty to Trump, whose grip on the party remains strong despite his election defeat. House Republicans booted Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney from their leadership last week for her criticism of Trump's false claims, installing a Trump loyalist in her place. Cheney, in turn, suggested to ABC News that a commission could subpoena McCarthy because he spoke to Trump during the insurrection.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., called McCarthy's opposition to the commission "cowardice." 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. The bipartisan legislation accommodates all three of those requests, she said.

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

In the Senate, McConnell's announcement dimmed the prospects for passage, as Democrats would need at least ten Republicans to vote with them. But Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., vowed to force a vote on the bill, charging that Republicans are "caving" to Trump.

Schumer said that Republicans are trying to "sabotage the commission" and are "drunk" off Trump's baseless claim that the election was stolen from him. That false assertion, repeated by the mob as the rioters broke into the Capitol, has been rebuked by numerous courts, bipartisan election officials across the country and Trump's own attorney general.

Like in the House, some Senate Republicans have suggested they will support the legislation.

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." Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy said he doesn't agree with McConnell that the bill is slanted toward Democrats and "I'm inclined to support it."

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Maine Sen. Susan Collins, a Republican, said that she supports the idea of a commission but that the House bill would need adjustments.

Others have pushed their colleagues to oppose the commission. Missouri Sen. Roy Blunt, the top Republican on the Senate Rules Committee, is working on a report with his Democratic colleagues that will include 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."

South Dakota Sen. John Thune, the No. 2 Republican in the Senate, cited concern in the caucus that the investigation could be "weaponized politically" in the 2022 election cycle.

"I want our midterm message to be about the kinds of issues that the American people are dealing with," Thune said. "It's jobs and wages and the economy, national security, safe streets, strong borders and those types of issues, and not relitigating the 2020 election."

Separately Wednesday, aides to Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., circulated a letter they said was from a group of around 40 to 50 anonymous U.S. Capitol Police officers who had been speaking with the congressman.

"It is inconceivable that some of the Members we protect would downplay the events of January 6th," the letter reads. "It is a privileged assumption for Members to have the point of view that 'it wasn't that bad.' That privilege exists because the brave men and women of the USCP protected you, the Members."

The letter was quickly repudiated by Capitol Police leaders, who said the agency doesn't take any position on legislative matters.

Raskin said in an interview Wednesday evening that the officers approached his office with the letter, and that they and their families have been traumatized about what happened on the 6th. Raskin said "they can't believe there is dissension in the Congress" about the simple facts of the insurrection.

## **SUPREME COURT NOTEBOOK: Justice Thomas remembers 'rapid' RBG**

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In her last years on the Supreme Court, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg moved slowly. She was always the last justice to exit the courtroom, with Justice Clarence Thomas helping her down the steps from the Supreme Court bench. But Ginsburg, who died in September at age 87, was known for her speed at something: writing opinions.

In a new, short remembrance for The Supreme Court Historical Society, Thomas says Ginsburg's "efficiency became a source of humorous banter as well as a thing of legend" among her colleagues.

Ginsburg described herself as "Rapid Ruth" when it came to opinion writing. And because she was so fast in writing her own opinions and so speedy in responding to draft opinions circulated by colleagues, other justices always got back to her as quickly as possible, said Thomas, who served with Ginsburg longer than any other justice.

"It was as though we all owed it to her to reciprocate her conscientiousness. I cannot recall a single colleague who felt burdened by this. In fact, it often served as a source of laughter. When we discussed circulating opinions, she might quietly note that several colleagues had not responded to her opinion that circulated a day or two before. And, because it was her opinion, we would laughingly chide the 'tardy' colleague," Thomas wrote.

Thomas first worked with Ginsburg when they served together on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Ginsburg had already been a judge on the court for nearly a decade when Thomas arrived in 1990, and he left for the Supreme Court just 19 months later. But he says Ginsburg invited him to dinner and they were assigned to the same three-judge panels a few times.

Before Ginsburg joined the Supreme Court in 1993, Thomas remembered, another justice asked his opinion of her. He gave her rave reviews based on their brief time together on the appeals court.

"In my short time as a judge and as a member of the Court, I had learned that, unlike elsewhere in the city, disagreement was not the controlling factor in relationships among judges. Character and work ethic

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were far more important. I expected Judge Ginsburg would be an excellent colleague, and her tenure converted my assessment to a prophecy," he wrote.

On the court, the liberal Ginsburg and conservative Thomas disagreed more often than almost any other pair of justices. In her last term on the court, for example, they agreed with each other only 49% of the time. Only Justice Sonia Sotomayor disagreed with Thomas more often, according to statistics compiled on the SCOTUSblog website.

"Justice Ginsburg and I often disagreed, but at no time during our long tenure together were we disagreeable with each other. She placed a premium on civility and respect," Thomas wrote.

While civil, disagreements between justices can sometimes have an edge to them. A back-and-forth between Justice Brett Kavanaugh and Justice Elena Kagan in an opinion this week seemed more heated than usual.

It was a contrast, at least, from 2018 when, after Kavanaugh's bruising confirmation, Kagan seemed to welcome him to the court. The justices, who sit next to each other, often seemed to chat warmly on the bench.

But this week, the pair was on opposite sides of an opinion about extending the impact of a 2020 Supreme Court decision. The 2020 opinion said criminal juries must be unanimous to convict. The question this time was whether that decision should be made retroactive, benefiting more people. Kavanaugh said no in a 6-3 decision for the court's conservatives.

His opinion steamed Kagan, who wrote a dissent for the court's three liberals. She hurled what amounts to a legal insult at Kavanaugh's opinion, saying it "discards precedent without a party requesting that action."

And that was just the beginning of the barb-slinging. Kavanaugh, for his part, underscored that Kagan would have kept in place a 1972 decision approving non-unanimous juries. And he wrote that criminal defendants are better off after the two rulings than they would have been if Kagan's views won out. Kagan responded by accusing Kavanaugh of treating "judging as scorekeeping" while Kavanaugh called Kagan's rhetoric "misdirected."

The justices have many more opinions to issue before they take a summer break. Whether Kagan and Kavanaugh will find common ground elsewhere or whether Kagan and her liberal colleagues will lose many more decisions 6-3 remains to be seen. But sometimes one charged disagreement can signal more to come.

The most prolific author on the Supreme Court will have a new book in September.

Justice Stephen Breyer's sixth book comes out then. The question is whether he'll still be a sitting justice when it's published. Some liberals have urged the 82-year-old justice to retire now, so that President Joe Biden can replace him with another liberal while Democrats have control of the Senate.

But Breyer said in a speech in April that judges don't make decisions with politics in mind. That speech is being published in book form with the title "The Authority of the Court and the Peril of Politics." A summary of the book on Harvard University Press' website says that if public trust in the judiciary is currently in decline, "the solution is to promote better understanding of how the judiciary actually works: overwhelmingly, judges adhere to their oath to avoid considerations of politics and popularity." So would Breyer consider making a politically timed retirement? Maybe, but maybe not.

The court's other authors include Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the author of four books (eight if you count that each has a Spanish translation). Justice Neil Gorsuch and Justice Clarence Thomas have each published one book as a justice. The court's newest member, Amy Coney Barrett, also has a book deal.

## Gaza's health system buckling under repeated wars, blockade

By FARES AKRAM and AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — The Gaza Strip's already feeble health system is being brought to its knees by the fourth war in just over a decade.

Hospitals have been overwhelmed with waves of dead and wounded from Israel's bombardment. Many

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vital medicines are rapidly running out in the tiny, blockaded coastal territory, as is fuel to keep electricity going.

Two of Gaza's most prominent doctors, including the No. 2 in Gaza's coronavirus task force, were killed when their homes were destroyed during barrages since fighting between Hamas and Israel erupted 10 days ago.

Just as Gaza was climbing out of a second wave of coronavirus infections, its only virus testing lab was damaged by an airstrike and has been shut. Health officials fear further outbreaks among tens of thousands of displaced residents crowded into makeshift shelters after fleeing massive barrages.

At one U.N.-run school where 1,400 people were taking shelter, Nawal al-Danaf and her five children were crammed into a single classroom with five other families. Blankets draped over cords crisscrossed the room to carve out sleeping spaces.

"The school is safe from the war, but when it comes to corona, with five families in a room, everyone infects each other," said al-Danaf, who fled Israeli tank shelling on the northern Gaza town of Beit Lahiya a few days ago.

Blankets and laundry dangled from the railings of the school's balcony, as women looked down into a yard where children were playing and men sat chatting. No one wore a mask or could do any social distancing in the cramped quarters.

The Gaza Strip's health infrastructure was already collapsing before this latest war, said Adnan Abu Hasna, a spokesman for UNRWA, the U.N. agency that provides vital assistance to the 75% of the enclave's population who are refugees. "It's frightening," he said.

The sector has been battered by three previous wars between Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers.

This war 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.

Since then, Israel has struck hundreds of targets across the Mediterranean coastal strip, and Hamas has fired thousands rockets at Israel. Israel says it seeks to cripple Hamas by targeting its leaders, and military infrastructure, while trying to avoid civilian casualties. But the powerful bombs dropped on crowded Gaza have caused significant damage to the territory's infrastructure.

During each of the wars, hospitals and clinics were damaged or destroyed, and medical personnel killed. And after each, authorities had to slowly rebuild, hampered by the blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt since Hamas took power in 2007.

Other turmoil also weighed on the system. More than two years of weekly Friday Palestinian protests at the border with Israel against the blockade produced a constant stream of casualties from Israeli fire — more than 35,000 injured, many with lifelong disabilities and around 100 still awaiting reconstructive surgery and amputations.

Now health facilities are struggling to handle both the casualties of war and the everyday needs of Gaza's 2 million people.

"It's layer-upon-layer of crisis. And there never is really enough time between each crisis to rebuild," said Matthias Schmale, the UNRWA director in Gaza. "The (health care) system has gradually been quite significantly weakened. I wouldn't say it's on its knees, but getting close."

Gaza health officials say at least 227 Palestinians, including 64 children, have been killed in airstrikes and more than 1,600 wounded. Twelve people in Israel have been killed by rockets.

The bombardment has driven more than 56,000 Gazans from their homes, fleeing into 59 schools run by UNRWA. The U.N. agency is providing them with water and basic hygiene supplies, including face masks. Unknown numbers more have taken refuge with relatives.

UNRWA learned from the last war, in 2014, when some 292,000 displaced people crammed into its schools and other shelters during 50 days of fighting. Since then, the agency has installed showers, more bathrooms and extra water and electricity capacity into some of the schools in case they might be needed again for shelters, officials said.



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So far, the current onslaught has not been as directly destructive to health facilities as 2014, when multiple hospitals and clinics took direct hits from Israeli bombing, as did U.N. schools housing the displaced.

Still, Israeli attacks this time have damaged at least 18 hospitals and clinics, the World Health Organization said. Nearly half of all essential drugs have run out. Schmale said at least three health care centers have been leveled, including a trauma and burn center run by Doctors Without Borders.

Among the sites damaged was the main health care clinic, the only site in Gaza where tests detecting COVID-19 can be analyzed, said Dr. Majdi Dhair, head of preventive medicine at the Health Ministry. As a result, coronavirus testing has halted.

"It's like a ticking bomb because people are not tested, and those who are infected won't know that they are infected," Dhair said.

As of Monday, when the clinic was damaged, Gaza had recorded more than 105,000 coronavirus infections, including 986 deaths. Some 80 people were in critical condition with the virus.

Gaza's COVID-19 vaccination drive, already slow, has stopped, said WHO's top official in Gaza, Sacha Bootsma.

Just under 39,000 people, or 2% of Gaza's population, have received vaccinations. There are only enough doses to vaccinate another 15,000, and those expire in June, raising fears they will be unusable by the time they can be given.

"In a war, there are responsibilities to protect health institutions and health care workers," Schmale said.

He said this week a senior lab technician who works at a main UNRWA health clinic was seriously wounded in an airstrike as he rushed home to help his wife evacuate. He is in intensive care with severe brain damage.

"The price the civilian population is paying is unbearable and unacceptable, and health care workers are an element of that," Schmale said.

"Our staff are as terrified as the rest of the population. They are really afraid to go to work after heavy nights of shelling or bombing."

Only about half of government-run primary care centers are operating. Sixteen of UNRWA's 22 health care centers were working as of Wednesday. Most of Gaza relies on the U.N. centers, according to UNRWA.

All of the government's 13 hospitals are running, though some have sustained damage, and as of Monday, 16 private or NGO-run hospitals were working.

But all are badly in need of emergency medical supplies. WHO listed some 40 key medicines and medical supplies that it is waiting for, including anesthetics, antibiotics, sutures and blood bags. Gaza's border with Israel has been closed throughout the fighting.

Also urgently needed is fuel. Electricity output in Gaza has dropped some 60%, forcing hospitals to rely more on fuel-thirsty generators, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore said in a statement.

During one brief opening, UNRWA was able to bring in five fuel trucks, enough to help it run its facilities for a few weeks. But other trucks of food and medicine could not enter, reportedly prevented by ongoing shelling. Two days ago, Egypt sent in a supply convoy that included medical supplies and fuel, but that fuel is expected to run out Thursday.

If the border stays closed, supplies will begin to run out and "we will need so-called humanitarian corridors open to bring stuff in," Schmale said.

## Chinese authorities order video denials by Uyghurs of abuses

By DAKE KANG Associated Press

URUMQI, China (AP) — China has highlighted an unlikely series of videos this year in which Uyghur men and women deny U.S. charges that Beijing is committing human rights violations against their ethnic group. In fact, a text obtained by the AP shows that the videos are part of a government campaign that raises questions about the willingness of those filmed.

Chinese state media have published dozens of the videos praising the Communist Party and showing Uyghurs angrily denouncing former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for declaring a genocide in the far west Xinjiang region. The videos, which officials have insisted are spontaneous outpourings of emo-

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tion, have also featured prominently in a series of government news conferences held for foreign media.

But the text obtained by AP is the first concrete confirmation that the videos are anything but grassroots. Sent in January to government offices in the northern city of Karamay, the text told each office to find one Uyghur fluent in Mandarin to film a one-minute video in response to Pompeo's "anti-China remarks."

"Express a clear position on Pompeo's remarks, for example: I firmly oppose Pompeo's anti-Chinese remarks, and I am very angry about them," the text said. "Express your feelings of loving the party, the country and Xinjiang (I am Chinese, I love my motherland, I am happy at work and in life, and so on)."

While it's not impossible officials were able to find Uyghurs willing to be in such a public relations campaign, China's track record in Xinjiang and its documented abuses of Uyghurs have led many experts to conclude it's more likely those in the videos were forced to take part.

"There's something instinctive about these videos which feels ingenuine, but the significance is that there's hard evidence here that the Chinese government is requesting these kinds of videos," said Albert Zhang, a researcher at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute who recently coauthored a report on Beijing's disinformation campaign on Xinjiang.

Xinjiang spokesperson Xu Guixiang did not directly deny the authenticity of the text, but said it didn't follow the usual format of state orders and that his understanding was that "the government has never issued this kind of notice or made this kind of request." He suggested the videos were made voluntarily.

"This didn't require government organization. Many among the masses made this totally spontaneously," Xu said in a recent interview. "Pompeo's anti-China remarks arose the intense resentment of various ethnic groups in Xinjiang."

Beijing is increasingly under fire for its campaign of mass detention, cultural destruction and forced assimilation of Uyghurs and other largely Muslim minorities native to Xinjiang. Western governments have levied sanctions against top Chinese officials, while the U.S. government has banned imports of cotton and tomatoes from Xinjiang, citing concerns over forced labor.

Tahir Imin, a Uyghur activist who fled China in 2017, said the videos are almost certainly state-orchestrated and coerced, given that information in Xinjiang is heavily censored.

"People don't know who Pompeo is or what he's saying," Imin said. "How would they know what Mike Pompeo is saying about the Uyghurs?"

The AP was unable to authenticate the text independently. However, friends of Firdavs Drinov, the man who sent a screenshot of the text to the AP, said he had obtained it from a friend with family working for the Karamay government. Three days after he sent it, police detained Drinov and the friend, holding a special meeting on how to punish him, two other friends said.

In a fax, the Xinjiang government confirmed that Drinov had been arrested, saying he was suspected of "fabricating and posting fake information" and "poisoning and bewitching ignorant groups and instigating splittism." Referring to Drinov by his legal Mandarin name, Chen Haoyu, it said he is awaiting trial in a detention center and that his "rights will be protected according to the law."

The fax did not answer a question about whether Drinov's detention was linked to the screenshot.

His friend Vincent Gao called the charges nonsense, saying Drinov, who is biracial, opposed Xinjiang independence and believed in friendship between Uyghurs and Han Chinese, the country's dominant ethnic group. Gao added that Drinov was very wary of fanatic extremism.

"He's never said or done anything to split the country," said Gao, a PhD student in Italian at Yale University in the U.S. "He was very proud of his Han heritage. There is no rational reason why he would support separatism."

Drinov is a linguist who harbored dreams of obtaining a doctorate in the United States despite never having gone to college. Fluent in Mandarin, English, Uzbek, Uyghur, Russian, and French, he had at one point trained to represent China at the International Linguistics Olympiad in 2015.

Drinov maintained an open presence on Western social media platforms banned in China such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. He had run into trouble with authorities before.

In December 2019, he was put in a detention center for 15 days for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," a vague charge often used against people the ruling Communist Party sees as threatening. Po-

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lice grilled him after he posted internal documents about the government's crackdown in Xinjiang from a New York Times story on one of his Chinese social media accounts, according to texts he sent to Wang Tonghe, a computational linguist who befriended Drinov online.

Experts say the videos of supportive Uyghurs ordered up by authorities are part of a broader state-coordinated disinformation campaign aimed at whitewashing their policies in Xinjiang.

Dozens of new Twitter and Tiktok accounts promoting those policies have cropped up. Some purport to be run by Uyghurs from Xinjiang, even though merely downloading those apps has landed others in detention. The accounts share videos promoting Xinjiang's lush landscapes and snow-capped mountains, depicting an idyllic, carefree life at total odds with accounts from hundreds of Uyghurs and Kazakhs who have fled the region in recent years.

Zhang's Australian Strategic Policy Institute report traced some of the social media videos to a company funded by the Xinjiang government. It found that many of the accounts were likely to be inauthentic and state-linked, though it could not prove so definitively.

"I think it's interesting, the amount of resources the Chinese government is willing to use to produce this content and disseminate it," Zhang said. "The scale and the persistence of it is new and sort of concerning."

Many of the glowing Uyghur social media posts have been shared by a slew of new accounts opened by Chinese officials and state media outlets in recent years.

China has had a much different reaction to scholars and activists using social media to research or speak out against the situation in Xinjiang.

Nyrola Elimä, a Uyghur living in Sweden, said that after she started tweeting about the detention of her cousin, police pounded on her mother's door in Xinjiang clutching printouts of her tweets. "Make your daughter delete these," they said, threatening to detain her if Elimä didn't comply.

In March, Beijing sanctioned British Uyghur specialist Joanne Smith Finley after she repeatedly characterized the Chinese government's actions in Xinjiang as a genocide, first doing so in an AP story about forced birth control measures.

Finley responded to the sanctions on Twitter: "I have no regrets for speaking out, and I will not be silenced."

## Appeals court hears case of 3 ex-cops charged in Floyd death

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Minnesota Court of Appeals will hear oral arguments Thursday on whether three former Minneapolis police officers charged in George Floyd's death should face an additional count of aiding and abetting third-degree murder.

Thomas Lane, J. Kueng and Tou Thao are scheduled to face trial next March on charges of aiding and abetting second-degree murder and manslaughter. Prosecutors want to add the third charge following an appeals court ruling in February.

The three-judge panel has 90 days to make a ruling. Based on the February opinion and a related ruling in the case of former officer Derek Chauvin, it's possible the judges could rule in favor of the state and send the case back to the lower court to add the charge.

Floyd, 46, died on May 25, 2020, after Chauvin pinned him to the ground with a knee on his neck as the Black man repeatedly said he couldn't breathe. Kueng and Lane helped to restrain Floyd — Kueng knelt on Floyd's back and Lane held down Floyd's legs. Thao held back bystanders and kept them from intervening during the roughly 9 1/2-minute restraint.

Chauvin was convicted last month of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and manslaughter and is awaiting sentencing. All four former officers also face federal charges accusing them of violating Floyd's civil rights.

The issue of the third-degree murder count has been complicated in this case.

In October, Judge Peter Cahill tossed a third-degree murder charge against Chauvin, saying it could only be sustained if Chauvin's conduct had been "eminently dangerous to others" and not specifically directed

at Floyd.

But in February, a three-judge panel of the Appeals Court opened a window for that charge to be reinstated when it issued a ruling in an unrelated police shooting death. In that case, the court upheld the third-degree murder conviction for former officer Mohamed Noor in the 2017 shooting death of Justine Ruszczyk Damond. The panel ruled that a third-degree murder conviction can be sustained even if the action that caused a death was directed at a single person.

That led prosecutors to seek the reinstatement of the third-degree murder charge against Chauvin, and add a count of aiding and abetting third-degree murder for the other officers. Cahill denied both requests, and prosecutors appealed. The Appeals Court then ruled that the Noor opinion set binding precedent, even though it remains before the state Supreme Court. Cahill reinstated the charge against Chauvin.

Prosecutors say the other former officers should now be charged with aiding and abetting third-degree murder.

"This Court routinely follows its precedents from their date of publication unless and until the Minnesota Supreme Court reverses them," prosecutors said in written arguments. To allow courts to flout these decisions "invites chaos because it would allow courts to eschew precedent based on their own preferred reading of the law. ... And it threatens to undermine public faith in the judicial process and the rule of law."

Defense attorneys argued that third-degree murder is an unintentional act and relies on a defendant's reckless state of mind, but aiding and abetting must be intentional.

"To aid and abet in third degree murder, an aider and abettor would have to have intentionally aided in an unintentional homicide, would have to have known that the principal intended to commit a crime and have known the principal's subjective mindset," the defense wrote. "This is inherently impossible."

Prosecutors said that argument is without merit.

Thursday's oral arguments will be held over Zoom. Judges Matthew Johnson, Theodora Gaitas and Renee Worke will be on the panel.

## **Absent media, Texas executes inmate who killed great aunt**

By JUAN A. LOZANO and MICHAEL GRACZYK Associated Press

HUNTSVILLE, Texas (AP) — A Texas man convicted of fatally beating his 83-year-old great aunt more than two decades ago was executed Wednesday evening without media witnesses present because prison agency officials neglected to notify reporters it was time to carry out the punishment.

Quintin Jones received the lethal injection at the state penitentiary in Huntsville for the September 1999 killing of Berthena Bryant, agency spokesman Jeremy Desel said about 30 minutes after Jones was pronounced dead.

Desel never received the usual phone call from the Huntsville Unit prison to bring reporters from The Associated Press and The Huntsville Item to the prison. He and the media witnesses were waiting in an office across the street.

"The Texas Department of Criminal Justice can only apologize for this error and nothing like this will ever happen again," he said.

He said the execution, the first in Texas in nearly a year, included a number of new personnel who have never participated in the process.

"Somewhere in that mix there was never a phone call made to this office for me to accompany the witnesses across the street into the Huntsville Unit," Desel said.

Desel said he didn't immediately know if the glitch was a violation of state law or a violation of agency policy.

The previous 570 executions carried out by Texas since capital punishment resumed in 1982 all had at least one media witness.

"My assumption is there will be a thorough investigation into how this all transpired and what was missed that allowed it to happen, and I expect that investigation is already underway," Desel said.

There were no unusual circumstances with the execution itself, he said, relying on accounts from agency



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officials who were inside the death chamber.

Jones made a brief statement thanking his supporters and expressing love for them.

"I was so glad to leave this world a better, more positive place," he said, according to a prison transcript of his remarks. "It's not an easy life with all of the negativity.

"I hope I left everyone a plate of food full of happy memories, happiness and no sadness."

As the lethal dose of pentobarbital was administered, he took four or five deep breaths followed by "a long deep snore," Desel said.

Jones was pronounced dead at 6:40 p.m., 12 minutes after the drugs began.

Less than an hour before the scheduled punishment, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to halt the 41-year-old man's execution.

Prosecutors said after Bryant refused to lend Jones money, he beat her with a bat in her Fort Worth home then took \$30 from her purse to buy drugs.

Some of Bryant's family members, including her sister Mattie Long, had said they didn't want Jones to be executed. Jones was Long's grandnephew.

"Because I was so close to Bert, her death hurt me a lot. Even so, God is merciful. Quintin can't bring her back. I can't bring her back. I am writing this to ask you to please spare Quintin's life," Long wrote in a letter that was part of Jones' clemency petition with the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.

The board denied Jones' clemency petition on Tuesday and Gov. Greg Abbott didn't go against that decision and also declined to delay the execution. Abbott has granted clemency to only one death row inmate, Thomas Whitaker, since taking office in 2015.

On Wednesday, Jones' attorney filed a civil rights complaint against the board, alleging race played "an impermissible role" in its denial of Jones' petition. Jones' attorney argued the case was similar to that of Whitaker's and the only difference was that Whitaker is white and Jones was Black. U.S. District Judge George C. Hanks Jr. dismissed the complaint, writing that Jones didn't present direct evidence of his allegation.

Helena Faulkner, a Tarrant County assistant criminal district attorney whose office prosecuted Jones, said not all of Bryant's family members had opposed the execution.

In his final appeals, Jones' attorney, Michael Mowla, argued that Jones was intellectually disabled and that his death sentence was based on since discredited testimony that wrongly labeled him as a psychopath and a future danger. Mowla also said Jones' history of drug and alcohol abuse that started at age 12 and physical and sexual abuse he suffered were never considered at his trial.

Jones was the first inmate in Texas to receive a lethal injection since the July 8 execution of Billy Joe Wardlow. Four other executions had been set for earlier this year but were either delayed or rescheduled. While Texas is usually the nation's busiest death penalty state, in 2020 it executed only three inmates — the fewest executions in nearly 25 years, mainly because of the pandemic.

In court documents filed last week, prosecutors argued the death sentence was justified because Jones had a violent history, including assaulting teachers and participating in two other murders.

## House backs commission on Jan. 6 riot over GOP objections

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House voted Wednesday to create an independent commission on the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, sending the legislation to an uncertain future in the Senate as Republican leaders work to stop a bipartisan investigation that is opposed by former President Donald Trump.

Democrats say an independent investigation is crucial to reckoning what happened that day, when a violent mob of Trump's supporters smashed into the Capitol to try and overturn President Joe Biden's victory. Modeled after the investigation into the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, the legislation would establish an independent, 10-member commission that would make recommendations by the end of the year for securing the Capitol and preventing another insurrection.

The bill passed the House 252-175, with 35 Republicans voting with Democrats in support of the com-

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mission, defying Trump and House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy. Trump issued a statement urging Republicans to vote against it, calling the legislation a "Democrat trap."

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell is trying to prevent defections among his own ranks, echoing McCarthy's opposition in a Senate floor speech Wednesday morning. Both men claimed the bill was partisan, even though membership of the proposed commission would be evenly split between the parties.

The January insurrection has become an increasingly fraught topic for Republicans, with a growing number in the party downplaying the severity of the worst attack on the Capitol in more than 200 years. While most Republicans voted against forming the commission, only a few spoke on the floor against it. And the handful of Republicans who backed the commission spoke forcefully.

"This is about facts — it's not partisan politics," said New York Rep. John Katko, the top Republican on the House Homeland Security Committee who negotiated the legislation with Democrats. He said "the American people and the Capitol Police deserve answers, and action as soon as possible to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again."

Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., said that Jan. 6 "is going to haunt this institution for a long, long time" and that a commission is necessary to find the truth about what happened. He recalled that he "heard the shouts, saw the flash-bangs, smelled the gas on that sorry day."

Democrats grew angry as some Republicans suggested the commission was only intended to smear Trump. Several shared their own memories of the insurrection, when rioters brutally beat police, broke in through windows and doors and sent lawmakers running. Four of the rioters died, including a woman who was shot and killed by police as she tried to break into the House chamber. A Capitol Police officer collapsed and died after engaging with the protesters, and two officers took their own lives in the days after.

"We have people scaling the Capitol, hitting the Capitol Police with lead pipes across the head, and we can't get bipartisanship? What else has to happen in this country?" shouted Rep. Tim Ryan, D-Ohio, on the floor just before the vote. He said the GOP opposition is "a slap in the face to every rank and file cop in the United States."

The vote was yet another test of Republican loyalty to Trump, whose grip on the party remains strong despite his election defeat. House Republicans booted Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney from their leadership last week for her criticism of Trump's false claims, installing a Trump loyalist in her place. Cheney, in turn, suggested to ABC News that a commission could subpoena McCarthy because he spoke to Trump during the insurrection.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., called McCarthy's opposition to the commission "cowardice." 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. The bipartisan legislation accommodates all three of those requests, she said.

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

In the Senate, McConnell's announcement dimmed the prospects for passage, as Democrats would need at least ten Republicans to vote with them. But Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., vowed to force a vote on the bill, charging that Republicans are "caving" to Trump.

Schumer said that Republicans are trying to "sabotage the commission" and are "drunk" off Trump's baseless claim that the election was stolen from him. That false assertion, repeated by the mob as the rioters broke into the Capitol, has been rebuked by numerous courts, bipartisan election officials across the country and Trump's own attorney general.

Like in the House, some Senate Republicans have suggested they will support the legislation.

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." Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy said he doesn't agree with McConnell that the bill is slanted toward Democrats and "I'm inclined to support it."

Maine Sen. Susan Collins, a Republican, said that she supports the idea of a commission but that the House bill would need adjustments.

Others have pushed their colleagues to oppose the commission. Missouri Sen. Roy Blunt, the top Re-

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publican on the Senate Rules Committee, is working on a report with his Democratic colleagues that will include 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."

South Dakota Sen. John Thune, the No. 2 Republican in the Senate, cited concern in the caucus that the investigation could be "weaponized politically" in the 2022 election cycle.

"I want our midterm message to be about the kinds of issues that the American people are dealing with," Thune said. "It's jobs and wages and the economy, national security, safe streets, strong borders and those types of issues, and not relitigating the 2020 election."

Separately Wednesday, aides to Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., circulated a letter they said was from a group of around 40 to 50 anonymous U.S. Capitol Police officers who had been speaking with the congressman.

"It is inconceivable that some of the Members we protect would downplay the events of January 6th," the letter reads. "It is a privileged assumption for Members to have the point of view that 'it wasn't that bad.' That privilege exists because the brave men and women of the USCP protected you, the Members."

The letter was quickly repudiated by Capitol Police leaders, who said the agency doesn't take any position on legislative matters.

Raskin said in an interview Wednesday evening that the officers approached his office with the letter, and that they and their families have been traumatized about what happened on the 6th. Raskin said "they can't believe there is dissension in the Congress" about the simple facts of the insurrection.

## 10 seconds of terror: Alaska man survives brown bear mauling

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Allen Minish was alone and surveying land for a real estate agent in a wooded, remote part of Alaska, putting some numbers into his GPS unit when he looked up and saw a large brown bear walking about 30 feet away.

"I saw him and he saw me at the same time, and it's scary," he said by phone Wednesday from his hospital bed in Anchorage, a day after being mauled by the bear in a chance encounter.

The mauling left Minish with a crushed jaw, a puncture wound in his scalp so deep the doctor told him he could see bone, lacerations and many stitches after a 4½-hour surgery. He also is wearing a patch over his right eye, saying the doctors are worried about it.

All that damage came from a very brief encounter — he estimates it lasted less than 10 seconds — after he startled the bear Tuesday morning just off the Richardson Highway, near Gulkana, located about 190 miles (306 kilometers) northeast of Anchorage.

The bear, which Minish said was larger than 300-pound black bears he has seen, charged and closed the ground between them in a few seconds.

Minish tried to dodge behind small spruce trees. That didn't stop the bear; he went through them.

As the bear neared, Minish held up the pointed end of his surveying pole and pushed it toward the bear to keep it away from him.

The bear simply knocked it to the side, the force of which also knocked Minish to the ground.

"As he lunged up on top of me, I grabbed his lower jaw to pull him away," he said, noting that's how he got a puncture wound in his hand. "But he tossed me aside there, grabbed a quarter of my face."

"He took a small bite and then he took a second bite, and the second bite is the one that broke the bones ... and crushed my right cheek basically," he said.

When the bear let go, Minish turned his face to the ground and put his hands over his head.

And then the bear just walked away.

He surmises the bear left because he no longer perceived Minish as a threat. The bear's exit — Alaska State Troopers said later they did not locate the bear — gave him time to assess damage.

"I realized I was in pretty bad shape because I had all this blood everywhere," he said.

He called 911 on his cellphone. While he was talking to a dispatcher, he pulled off his surveyor's vest

and his T-shirt and wrapped them around his head in an attempt to stop the bleeding.

Then he waited 59 minutes for help to arrive. He knows that's how long it took because he later checked his cellphone record for the length of the time he was told to stay on the line with the dispatcher until rescue arrived.

At one point, he was able to give the dispatcher his exact coordinates from his GPS unit, but even that was a struggle.

"It took awhile to give them that because I had so much blood flowing into my eyes and on to the GPS, I kept having to wipe it all off," he said.

He said one of the rescuers called him a hero after seeing how much blood was on the ground.

Rescuers tried to carry him through the woods to a road that parallels the nearby trans-Alaska pipeline to meet an ambulance. That didn't work, and he said they had to help walk him a quarter mile through swamps, brush and trees. From there, he was taken to a nearby airport and flown to Providence Alaska Medical Center in Anchorage by a medical helicopter. He is listed in good condition at Providence.

Before help arrived, he worried about the bear returning to finish him off. "I kept hearing stuff," he said, but every time he tried to lean up to look around, he became dizzy from the loss of blood.

"He didn't come back, and so I just lay there and worried about it," he said.

Minish, 61, has had his share of bear encounters over the 40 years he's lived in Alaska, but nothing like this. He owns his own surveying and engineering business, which takes him into the wild often.

"That's the one lesson learned," he said. "I should have had somebody with me."

He left his gun in the vehicle on this job but said it wouldn't have mattered because the bear moved on him too fast for it to have been any use.

He can now add his name to the list of six people he knows who have been mauled by bears in Alaska.

"I guess I feel lucky," Minish said of his encounter with the bear, after someone told him it's better than being dead.

"In all honesty, it wouldn't have mattered either way. You know, if it killed me, it killed me. I had a good life; I'm moving on. It didn't kill me, so now let's move on to the other direction of trying to stay alive," he said.

## **Defense says dismemberment is evidence of Durst's innocence**

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The savage and sloppy manner in which Robert Durst dismembered a man he accidentally killed in Texas helps prove the New York real estate heir didn't murder his best friend or kill his wife, his lawyer said.

Durst's amateurish efforts to dispose of the body of Morris Black after fatally shooting him in Galveston in 2001 left a trail of evidence — unlike the clinical crime scene where Susan Berman's body was found or the absence of clues when his wife vanished, attorney Dick DeGuerin said Wednesday.

A garbage bag floating in Galveston Bay with one of Black's body parts contained a receipt with Durst's name on it, blood from the drifter was discovered in his car, and DNA of the man was found at the crime scene in the multimillionaire's \$300-a-month apartment.

"There was clues everywhere. Hundreds of clues," DeGuerin told jurors in Los Angeles County Superior Court. "Significantly different from whoever killed Susan Berman. Significantly different from the disappearance without a trace of Kathie Durst."

DeGuerin, who represented Durst in the Texas trial in which he was acquitted of murder after claiming he shot Black in self-defense, is aiming for a repeat in Los Angeles, where Durst is charged with murder in Berman's fatal shooting in 2000.

While prosecutors are using the killing of Black as evidence that Durst also knocked off Berman in his efforts to avoid prosecution in his wife's suspected killing in New York in 1982, the defense is trying to use the Texas case to its advantage.

The trial began in March 2020 but was adjourned after six days because of the pandemic. It resumed



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this week in Inglewood with lawyers making abbreviated opening statements to remind jurors about the evidence.

Deputy District Attorney John Lewin on Tuesday said the three killings are intertwined and Berman and Black were killed to help cover-up the killing of Durst's wife.

"In essence, all three are interrelated," Lewin said. "Everything starts with Kathie Durst's disappearance."

Durst has long been suspected of killing Kathie Durst but has never been charged and has denied any role in her disappearance. She's never been found.

DeGuerin said there was no evidence Durst killed his wife or that Berman had helped him cover his tracks by posing as Kathie Durst in a phone call to the dean of the medical school where she was a student.

"Kathie Durst disappeared without a trace," DeGuerin said. "It was and is a mystery."

Durst fled New York and went into hiding in Texas in November 2000 after Westchester prosecutors reopened the investigation into Kathie Durst's suspected death. He disguised himself as a mute woman and rented an apartment next to Black.

Black was killed because he discovered Durst's identity, Lewin claimed.

But DeGuerin repeated the defense that won over jurors in Galveston in 2003: Black pulled Durst's gun on him and was shot in a struggle for the weapon.

After the killing, Durst smoked pot and drank Jack Daniels whiskey and then went to a hardware store, where he purchased a bow saw, a paring knife, garbage bags and painter's drop cloth to keep things tidy while he hacked up the body, DeGuerin said.

A sickly Durst, 78, seated in a wheelchair in a blue sport coat, faced the jury as DeGuerin described the "awful, awful" dismemberment. Durst blinked occasionally but no outward sign of emotion was discernible behind his white mask.

DeGuerin said Durst then did what he's done much of his life: he ran just as he had from his rich but dysfunctional family's mansion as a child.

He fled to New Orleans but was arrested when he returned to Galveston to pick up a pair of glasses waiting at an optometrist office.

"He doesn't make good decisions," DeGuerin said repeatedly, blaming it partly on a diagnosis that Durst is on the autism spectrum and doesn't interact normally.

Lewin has scoffed at that explanation and played a clip of an interrogation in which Durst acknowledged it was something a psychiatrist made up. Later in the interview, though, Durst said he didn't like communicating with people.

DeGuerin said Durst had nothing to do with Berman's killing.

"Bob Durst did not kill Susan Berman and he doesn't know who did," he said. "Bob Durst had no motive and nothing to gain by the death of Susan Berman."

Berman, the daughter a Las Vegas mobster who was a writer, had been best pals with Durst since they met on the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles, in the 1960s. DeGuerin showed a photo of a younger bearded Durst, his smiling wife and a beaming Berman at one of her book launches.

Lewin said Berman told friends she helped Durst cover up the killing by phoning in sick for Kathie Durst the day after she was last seen — providing evidence she was alive the day after her husband said he put her on a train back to New York City after a weekend at their lakeside cottage.

But DeGuerin said Berman was famous for embellishing stories with lies. Even her friends didn't believe what she told them.

"She was a fabulist. She made up stories," he said. "She told lies day in and day out."

DeGuerin said Durst discovered Berman's body when he showed up at her house in Benedict Canyon just before Christmas. The back door was open and she was lying on her back with blood pooled under her black hair.

Durst "freaked out," fearing the killer might be there and fled, DeGuerin said. But before leaving town, Durst penned a note to police with Berman's address and the word "CADAVER" written in block letters so she'd be found.

Until the admission by his lawyer, Durst had always denied writing the note or being at the crime scene. He even told documentary filmmakers and investigators that only the killer could have written the cadaver note.

DeGuerin tried to discredit the filmmakers and suggest that Durst was "playing" with investigators during an interrogation.

Lewin will get his chance to press Durst on it later in the trial. DeGuerin said he would testify.

## Chicago mayor: Reporters of color get 2-year mark interviews

By DON BABWIN and SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot announced Wednesday that she will grant one-on-one interviews to mark the two-year anniversary of her inauguration solely to journalists of color, saying she has been struck by the "overwhelmingly" white press corps in Chicago.

"I ran to break up the status quo that was failing so many," Lightfoot, who is Black, tweeted, also issuing a detailed letter to City Hall reporters on her decision. "That isn't just in City Hall. It's a shame that in 2021, the City Hall press corps is overwhelmingly White in a city where more than half of the city identifies as Black, Latino, AAPI or Native American."

While the move isn't unprecedented in recent years, it drew fierce scrutiny among the city's press corps and beyond with members of the media quickly taking Lightfoot to task for her decision.

Lightfoot's choice was made public late Tuesday when longtime WMAQ-TV political reporter Mary Ann Ahern, who is white, tweeted about it — a post that drew more than 5,000 comments. Some praised the mayor, while others were angry.

"I am a Latino reporter @chicagotribune whose interview request was granted for today. However, I asked the mayor's office to lift its condition on others and when they said no, we respectfully canceled," tweeted Chicago Tribune City Hall reporter Gregory Pratt. "Politicians don't get to choose who covers them."

Ahern voiced a similar concern about the mayor deciding who she'll talk to and said it looked like Lightfoot was avoiding City Hall reporters she often spars with.

"To choose a reporter based on the color of their skin is really pretty outrageous," Ahern said on WGN Radio. "Does she think I'm racist? Is that what she's saying?"

But others, including The TRiiBE, a Chicago-based digital Black-oriented media platform that offered extensive coverage of civil unrest in the wake of George Floyd's death, among other topics, found the anger over the mayor's decision offensive.

"With this outrage, y'all are implying that Black and Brown journalists aren't capable of asking the hard questions," TRiiBE tweeted Wednesday, saying it got an interview the same day.

Taking office in 2019, Lightfoot's tenure has been marked by racial inequality issues, including a Chicago teachers strike, city violence, the coronavirus pandemic and policing. In her two-page letter she recalled being on the campaign trail and being struck "by the overwhelming whiteness and maleness of Chicago media outlets, editorial boards, the political press corps, and yes, the City Hall press corps specifically."

She noted the nation's reckoning on racism but said it didn't appear "many of the media institutions in Chicago have caught on and truly have not embraced this moment."

"The press corps is the filter through which much of what we do in government is dissected and explained to the public," Lightfoot wrote. "And yet despite the many talents and skills of our reporting corps, I fear this arm of our democratic system is on life support. The Chicago media leadership must evolve with the times in order to be a true reflection of the vibrant, vast diversity of our city."

Journalism has long grappled with lack of racial diversity. More than 75% of newsroom employees are white, according to a 2018 Pew Research Center analysis of census data. In turn, reporters of color note they're often shut out when scoring high profile interviews.

To counteract that, recent leading public officials have been intentional about giving interviews to journalists of color.

U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, the first Native American to lead a Cabinet department, granted

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the first interviews after confirmation to Native American journalists. The first sit-down interview Kamala Harris gave after being named vice presidential candidate was to The 19th, an outlet aimed at "elevating" women's voices, including those of color.

Meanwhile in Chicago, other city leaders were critical of Lightfoot's decision, including Alderman George Cardenas, who represents some largely Latino neighborhoods.

"How is that even true, be serious," he tweeted in response to the announcement, saying it should be "corrected."

Some media organizations said they were still being left out, including South Side Weekly. The nonprofit newspaper covers many heavily Black and Latino neighborhoods.

"Yes, for those who are asking, South Side Weekly did request an interview with @chicagosmayor and unsurprisingly received no response and no fancy letter. But we've never relied on the mayor's script to do our groundbreaking work. So it's just another day over here," tweeted editor-in-chief Jacqueline Serrato.

## Republicans rebel against mask requirement in House chamber

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans are rebelling against the requirement that they wear a mask on the House floor, stoking tensions with majority Democrats who are refusing to change the rules following updated guidance from federal health officials.

Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., led an effort Wednesday to get the Office of the Attending Physician to update its guidance for mask wearing for vaccinated lawmakers and staff while they are in the House chamber and in committee hearing rooms, but Democrats defeated it along a party-line vote of 218-210.

Lawmakers can remove their masks when speaking on the House floor, but otherwise must keep it on when they are in the chamber. There is no requirement for wearing masks in the Senate chamber.

Democratic lawmakers say they are tired of the requirements, too, but they worry that some of their Republican colleagues have declined to be vaccinated and could spread the virus.

Some GOP lawmakers opted to go without a mask during votes Tuesday, with a few taking particular care to stand in the well of the chamber to ensure that spectators, colleagues and C-SPAN's cameras could not miss them.

Their defiance could come at a financial cost. Lawmakers who refuse to wear masks are subject to a fine of \$500 for the first offense. Subsequent offenses can result in a \$2,500 fine. In practice, however, the House sergeant-at-arms is providing a warning for the first offense.

Seven lawmakers will be getting such warnings, according to a list obtained by The Associated Press: Reps. Lauren Boebert of Colorado, Thomas Massie of Kentucky, Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, Chip Roy of Texas, Bob Good of Virginia, Louie Gohmert of Texas and Mary Miller of Illinois

Three more had already received a warning and will be fined \$500. They are Reps. Brian Mast of Florida, Mariannette Miller-Meeks of Iowa and Beth Van Duyne of Texas. They will be subject to a fine of \$2,500 for additional offenses.

McCarthy followed up on their protests with a resolution that stated the mask mandate "hinders the ability of the House to properly and effectively conduct the people's business."

The resolution stated that those who have not received the vaccine "pose no real threat to those who have been vaccinated." And it called on the attending physician of the House to consult with the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and provide updated mask guidelines.

The mask revolt in the House has been brewing for months, with some Republicans chafing at the extra safety precautions imposed during the pandemic and bolstered after the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. Democrats imposed mask requirements last year when many Republicans, defying public health guidance, refused to wear face coverings.

The complaints from some Republicans have grown louder now that the CDC has altered its mask guidelines, saying it's safe for fully vaccinated people to skip face coverings and social distancing in virtually all

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situations.

The CDC guidelines say all people should still wear masks in crowded indoor locations such as airplanes, buses, hospitals and prisons. Lawmakers and others in the Capitol have stopped wearing masks when moving around the building.

Drew Hammill, a spokesman for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, said the Office of the Attending Physician has been consistently conferring with the CDC, and as recently as Tuesday. He said new guidance issued Wednesday states the mask requirement is "entirely consistent" with the CDC's recommendations and has ensured that the House can debate and pass legislation safely and effectively.

"If Minority Leader McCarthy wants to be maskless on the Floor of the House of Representatives, he should get to work vaccinating his Members," Hammill wrote.

At one point Tuesday, Boebert, Taylor-Greene and Massie stood together unmasked for several minutes in the well of the House. Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland went over and spoke with them. The conversation appeared cordial.

Raskin told reporters that he can't wait to take his mask off during House floor proceedings. "The reason we can't take our masks off is because so many Republicans are not vaccinated and are refusing to do it," he said.

After Tuesday's votes, several of the Republicans who declined to wear a mask gathered outside the Capitol for a group picture.

Massie said Wednesday that he had previously contracted COVID-19 and recovered. He said he is "immune" and that "part of the reason you know they're not following the science here is they don't care if you have the antibody."

The CDC states on its website that people should get vaccinated even if they had already had COVID-19.

"That's because experts do not yet know how long you are protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. Even if you have already recovered from COVID-19, it is possible — although rare — that you could be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 again," the CDC says.

Massie said he was prepared to test the mask requirement again.

"I can't afford to be fined into poverty, but if I'm not willing to spend \$500 defending freedom, I don't belong here," he said.

Roy said that if any lawmakers or staff members have health concerns, they have the ability to get vaccinated and to wear a mask. Meanwhile, he said the availability of vaccines and the data about their effectiveness shows "that we can engage out in the world" and Americans should see their lawmakers doing that.

"Contrary to some people's public view and the caricature of myself and others, I'm not looking to, you know, nuke the place," Roy said. "What I'm looking to do is raise issues, consistently sort of push back and represent my constituents who are tired of this."

Taylor-Greene took to the House floor again on Wednesday without her mask. She remained in the chamber for much of the day and at times positioned herself in a chair behind the Republican lawmakers who spoke on the floor, which ensured she would be seen by television viewers.

## '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 could shed their masks in most situations, and restaurants, stores, gyms and many other businesses could go back to full capacity if they ascertain 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.



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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, 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 48% 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 moving toward 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 opened 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."

As the mask requirement eased statewide Wednesday, businesses grappled with enforcing different rules for vaccinated and unvaccinated people. Fitness studio chain SLT planned to start checking vaccine cards Thursday to determine who could work out unmasked.

Still, founder Amanda Freeman applauded the change — "The only complicated part of this is that it's complicated," she said.

Some people bared their faces on the city's streets, while others still wore masks.

City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams urged people to keep masking up, at least indoors.

"We don't want to put people who haven't yet received the vaccine in a position where they could become stigmatized or pressured for not wearing a mask," he said.

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; others already were working in person.

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 considering 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 cor-

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porate 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. "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 returned to his midtown office in July, but just in the last few weeks, 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."

## EXPLAINER: Why has the price of Bitcoin been falling?

The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Even by Bitcoin's standards, Wednesday was pretty wild.

The price of the famously volatile digital currency fell nearly 30% at one point after the China Banking Association warned member banks of the risks associated with digital currencies. The decline narrowed to below 10% in the afternoon, but Bitcoin had still lost about \$70 billion in market value in 24 hours.

Bitcoin has lost about 38% of its value since April 13 when it hit a high of more than \$64,800, according to Coindesk. The China warning was just the latest headwind: Before Wednesday, Tesla's decision to not accept the digital currency as payment for cars — after it said it would — and murmurings in Washington about tighter regulation of digital currencies had put pressure on Bitcoin. The price is still up about 31% in 2021 and nearly 300% from a year ago.

Here's a look at Bitcoin and digital currencies in general:

### HOW BITCOIN WORKS

Bitcoin is a digital currency that is not tied to a bank or government and allows users to spend money anonymously. The coins are created by users who "mine" them by lending computing power to verify other users' transactions. They receive Bitcoins in exchange. The coins also can be bought and sold on exchanges with U.S. dollars and other currencies. Some businesses take Bitcoin as payment, and a number of financial institutions allow it in their clients' portfolios, but overall mainstream acceptance is still limited.

Bitcoins are basically lines of computer code that are digitally signed each time they travel from one owner to the next. Transactions can be made anonymously, making the currency popular with libertarians as well as tech enthusiasts, speculators — and criminals.

Bitcoins have to be stored in a digital wallet, either online through an exchange like Coinbase, or offline on a hard drive using specialized software. According to Coinbase, there are about 18.7 million Bitcoins in circulation and only 21 million will ever exist. The reason for that is unclear, and where all the Bitcoins are is anyone's guess.

### WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PRICE?

On Wednesday, a statement posted on the Chinese Banking Association's website said financial institutions should "resolutely refrain" from providing services using digital currencies because of their volatility.

Virtually every cryptocurrency fell after the industry group's statement.

As of 4:15 p.m. eastern time Wednesday, Bitcoin was down more than 7% at around \$40,310 per coin. Most cryptocurrencies lost between 7% and 22% of their value and shares of Coinbase dropped 5.4%.

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It's not unusual for the value of Bitcoin to change by thousands of dollars in a short time period, though swings totaling around \$20,000 in one day are extreme. On the last trading day of 2020, Bitcoin closed just under \$30,000. In mid-April, it flirted with \$65,000.

## DOESN'T ELON MUSK HAVE A ROLE HERE?

Yes, and a fairly big one. Musk announced in February that his electric car company Tesla had invested \$1.5 billion in Bitcoin. In March, Tesla began accepting Bitcoin as payment. Those actions contributed to the run-up in Bitcoin's price, and Musk also promoted the digital currency Dogecoin, which also spiked in value.

However, Musk reversed course in just a short time, saying last week that Tesla would stop accepting Bitcoin because of the potential environmental damage that can result from Bitcoin mining. The announcement sent Bitcoin falling below \$50,000 and set the tone for the big pullback recently in most cryptocurrencies.

A number of Bitcoin fans pushed back on Musk's reasoning. Fellow billionaire Mark Cuban said that gold mining is much more damaging to the environment than the mining of Bitcoin.

A 2019 study by the Technical University of Munich and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that the Bitcoin network generates an amount of CO2 similar to a large Western city or an entire developing country like Sri Lanka. But a University of Cambridge study last year estimated that on average, 39% of "proof-of-work" crypto mining was powered by renewable energy, primarily hydroelectric energy.

There had been some concern among Bitcoin investors that Tesla would sell some or all of its Bitcoin holdings, but Musk indicated in a tweet Wednesday that Tesla was sticking with its investment.

## BUT SOME COMPANIES ARE USING BITCOIN?

The digital payment company Square and its CEO Jack Dorsey — also the CEO of Twitter — have been big proponents of Bitcoin. Overstock.com also accepts Bitcoin, and in February, BNY Mellon, the oldest bank in the U.S., said it would include digital currencies in the services it provides to clients. And Mastercard said it would start supporting "select crypto currencies" on its network.

Bitcoin has become popular enough that more than 300,000 transactions typically occur in an average day, according to Bitcoin wallet site blockchain.info. Still, its popularity is low compared with cash and credit cards.

## THERE IS SKEPTICISM AROUND BITCOIN?

Yes, plenty of it. Tracking Bitcoin's price is obviously easier than trying to figure out its value, which is why so many institutions, experts and traders are skeptical about it and cryptocurrency in general. Digital currencies were seen as replacements for paper money, but that hasn't happened so far. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has said the central bank prefers to call crypto coins "crypto assets," because their volatility undermines their ability to store value, a basic function of a currency.

While some banks and financial services companies are getting in on it, others are staying away.

## COULD A DIGITAL CURRENCY SELL-OFF CAUSE WIDESPREAD DAMAGE?

Regulators aren't very worried about a possible crash in digital currencies dragging down the rest of the financial system or economy.

Even with the recent sell-off, digital currencies have a market value of about \$1.72 trillion, according to the website coinmarketcap.com. But that pales compared with the \$46.9 trillion stock market, \$41.3 trillion residential real estate market and nearly \$21 trillion Treasury market at the start of the year.

The European Central Bank said Wednesday that the risk of cryptocurrencies affecting the financial system's stability looks "limited at present." In large part, that's because they're still not widely used for payments and institutions under its purview still have little exposure to crypto-linked instruments.

Earlier this month, the Federal Reserve said a survey of market contacts found roughly one in five cited cryptocurrencies as a potential shock to the system over the next 12 to 18 months. That's a turnaround from the fall, when a similar survey found none mentioning cryptocurrencies.

## HOW MUCH OVERSIGHT IS THERE?

Washington officials have been talking about regulating digital currencies more, and worries about a heavier hand have played a role in the recent swoon in prices.

Gary Gensler, who took over as chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission last month, has said that cryptocurrency markets would benefit from more oversight to protect investors.

In a hearing before the House's financial services committee earlier this month, Gensler said neither the SEC nor the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, which he used to head, has a "regulatory framework" for trading on cryptocurrency exchanges yet. He said he thought Congress would ultimately have to address it because "there's really not protection against fraud or manipulation."

## HOW BITCOIN CAME TO BE

It's a mystery. Bitcoin was launched in 2009 by a person or group of people operating under the name Satoshi Nakamoto. Bitcoin was then adopted by a small clutch of enthusiasts. Nakamoto dropped off the map as bitcoin began to attract widespread attention. But proponents say that doesn't matter: The currency obeys its own internal logic.

## **Seller of vaccine disinformation has YouTube channel removed**

By MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

A major online seller of disinformation about COVID-19 and its vaccines has had one of its channels removed from YouTube, days after an Associated Press investigation detailed how they work with other spreaders of false information to make money.

The Truth About Vaccines YouTube channel was taken down this week, Ty and Charlene Bollinger said in a post Tuesday on the messaging app Telegram. The Bollingers' channel had about 75,000 subscribers but some of its videos had a much broader reach, including one that had over 1.5 million views and featured Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., a prominent voice in the anti-vaccine movement.

A message that greets visitors to the channel says the account was "terminated for violating YouTube's Community Guidelines." YouTube said it terminated the account because it violated its policies barring "COVID-19 medical misinformation," and had three strikes in a 90-day period. YouTube started banning anti-vaccine misinformation in October.

Still, the Bollingers operate The Truth About Cancer, another YouTube channel with more than 166,000 subscribers. Anyone who goes to that channel and searches "vaccines" will find videos that sow distrust and fear about vaccines or push disinformation about COVID-19. At least one includes debunked falsehoods about the presidential election.

"While that continues, YouTube can't be said to have taken effective action," said Imran Ahmed, CEO of the Center for Countering Digital Hate, which monitors online disinformation.

"They've taken some action, but they need to act in a comprehensive way against those people they know abuse that platform to spread misinformation that might lead to people not taking cancer medication, not taking crucial vaccines that protect them against disease," he said. "This is life and death stuff."

The group earlier this year named the Tennessee couple among its "The Disinformation Dozen," which it said were responsible for nearly two-thirds of the anti-vaccine content online. Ahmed said Wednesday that the move would disrupt the couple's business, which relies heavily on free videos to generate sales leads.

But he said YouTube parent Google has known for months about the Bollingers pushing misinformation, and that the removal had taken far too long.

Asked why YouTube allowed the Bollingers' The Truth About Cancer channel to remain up while taking down their vaccines channel, YouTube spokesperson Elena Hernandez said on Wednesday the company was reviewing it.

Later Wednesday, after the AP's inquiries, the company said in a written statement that it had taken down videos from the channel that violated its COVID-19 misinformation policies. However, AP found at least one video still up on the channel that pushed anti-vaccine videos, and which questioned the safety



and necessity of masks and COVID-19 vaccines.

The company says it has removed over 900,000 videos since February 2020 for violating medical misinformation policies, and more than 30,000 videos since October for violating COVID-19 rules on vaccine misinformation.

The Bollingers are also operating accounts on other social media platforms that remain up, including a Facebook page that has more than 1.1 million followers.

The couple did not immediately return an email seeking comment, but complained about YouTube's decision in a Tuesday post on Telegram, writing that "I think they are desperate and are losing." It was unclear who they were referring to.

An AP investigation published last week showed how the Bollingers had worked with others in the anti-vaccine movement to make money by selling disinformation, an enterprise that the Bollingers have said generated millions of dollars for themselves and their affiliates. The story also detailed how the Bollingers used connections from their anti-vaccine business, including Kennedy, to raise money for a Super PAC.

Platforms including YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have for years allowed anti-vaccination propaganda to spread and been slow to crack down on misinformation about COVID-19, removing just a fraction of the false content.

Ahmed said that there has now been a series of actions by social media platforms against the people his group identified as the worst anti-vaccine disinformation offenders.

"But it's all too piecemeal," he said. "If they're given any means by which to survive, these bad actors will try to adapt and try to focus on the channels they have available to them."

## Colonial Pipeline confirms it paid \$4.4M to hackers

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The operator of the nation's largest fuel pipeline confirmed it paid \$4.4 million to a gang of hackers who broke into its computer systems.

Colonial Pipeline said Wednesday that after it learned of the May 7 ransomware attack, the company took its pipeline system offline and needed to do everything in its power to restart it quickly and safely, and made the decision then to pay the ransom.

"This decision was not made lightly," but it was one that had to be made, a company spokesman said. "Tens of millions of Americans rely on Colonial — hospitals, emergency medical services, law enforcement agencies, fire departments, airports, truck drivers and the traveling public."

Colonial Pipeline's CEO, Joseph Blount, told The Wall Street Journal he authorized the payment because the company didn't know the extent of the damage and wasn't sure how long it would take to bring the pipeline's systems back.

The FBI discourages making ransom payments to ransomware attackers, because paying encourages criminal networks around the globe who have hit thousands of businesses and health care systems in the U.S. in the past year alone. But many victims of ransomware attacks, where hackers demand large sums of money to decrypt stolen data or to prevent it from being leaked online, opt to pay.

"I know that's a highly controversial decision," Blount told the Journal. "But it was the right thing to do for the country."

Blount said Colonial paid the ransom in consultation with experts who previously dealt with the group behind the attacks, DarkSide, which rents out its ransomware to partners to carry out the actual attacks.

Multiple sources had confirmed to The Associated Press that Colonial Pipeline had paid the criminals who committed the cyberattack a ransom of nearly \$5 million in cryptocurrency for the software decryption key required to unscramble their data network.

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

Blount told the Journal the attack was discovered around 5:30 a.m. on May 7. It took Colonial about

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an hour to shut down the pipeline, which has 260 delivery points across 13 states and Washington, D.C., Blount said. That helped prevent the infection from potentially migrating to the pipeline's operational controls. But there are lingering issues. Blount said Colonial is still unable to bill customers following an outage of that system.

The pipeline system delivers about 45% of the gasoline consumed on the East Coast, and Colonial, which is based in Alpharetta, Georgia, halted fuel supplies for nearly a week. That led to panic-buying and shortages at gas stations from Washington, D.C. to Florida.

Colonial restarted its pipeline a week ago, but it took time to resume a full delivery schedule, and the panic-buying led to gasoline shortages. More than 9,500 gas stations were out of fuel on Wednesday, including half of the gas stations in D.C. and 40% of stations in North Carolina, according to Gasbuddy.com, which tracks fuel prices and station outages.

## Israel's Netanyahu 'determined' to continue Gaza operation

By FARES AKRAM and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed Wednesday to press ahead with a fierce military offensive in the Gaza Strip, pushing back against calls from the United States to wind down the operation that has left hundreds dead.

Netanyahu's tough comments marked the first public rift between the two close allies since the fighting began last week and could complicate international efforts to reach a cease-fire. His pushback also plunges the pair into a difficult early test of the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Israel continued to pound Hamas targets in Gaza with airstrikes, while Palestinian militants bombarded Israel with rocket fire throughout the day. In another sign of potential escalation, militants in Lebanon fired a rocket barrage into northern Israel.

After a visit to military headquarters, Netanyahu said he appreciated "the support of the American president," but he said Israel would push ahead to return "calm and security" to Israeli citizens.

He said he was "determined to continue this operation until its aim is met."

He spoke shortly after U.S. President Joe Biden told Netanyahu that he expected "a significant de-escalation today on the path to a cease-fire," the White House said.

Biden had previously avoided pressing Israel more directly and publicly for a cease-fire with Gaza's Hamas militant rulers. But pressure has been building for Biden to intervene more forcefully as other diplomatic efforts gather strength.

Egyptian negotiators have also been working to halt the fighting, and an Egyptian diplomat said top officials were waiting for Israel's response to a cease-fire offer. The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

Moussa Abu Marzouk, a top Hamas official, told the Lebanese station Mayadeen TV that he expected a cease-fire in a day or two.

Meanwhile, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said he would fly to the region Thursday for talks with Israelis and Palestinians.

Israel's Foreign Ministry said the foreign ministers of Slovakia and the Czech Republic would join him after being invited "to express their solidarity and support" for Israel.

Earlier in the day, the Israeli military said it was widening its strikes on militant targets in southern Gaza to blunt continuing rocket fire from Hamas. At least nine people were killed Wednesday in the Gaza Strip.

The current round of fighting between Israel and Hamas began May 10, when the militant group 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.

Since then, Israel has launched hundreds of airstrikes that it says have targeted Hamas' infrastructure, and Hamas and other militant groups embedded in residential areas have fired some 4,000 rockets at

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Israeli cities, with hundreds falling short and most of the rest intercepted or landing in open areas.

At least 227 Palestinians have been killed, including 64 children and 38 women, with 1,620 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, a 16-year-old girl and a soldier, have been killed.

The rockets fired by militants in Lebanon into northern Israel threatened to open up a new front in the fighting. The rocket attack, which drew Israeli artillery fire in response but did not cause any injuries, raised the possibility of dragging Israel into renewed conflict with the powerful Lebanese militant group Hezbollah to its north.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack, and Hezbollah, which fought a monthlong war against Israel in 2006, has stayed out of the fighting for now. The rockets were widely believed to be fired by Palestinian factions based in south Lebanon.

But they cannot operate without Hezbollah's tacit consent, and the barrage appears to be carefully calibrated to send a political message that the group, which has tens of thousands of missiles, could join the battle at any time. Israel considers Hezbollah to be its most formidable threat and has threatened widespread destruction in Lebanon if war were to erupt.

In Gaza, one of the Israeli airstrikes destroyed the home of an extended family.

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, with men, women and children racing out of the building.

"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."

Another strike in nearby Deir al-Balah killed a man, his wife and their 2-year-old daughter, witnesses said. Iyad Salha, a brother of the man who was killed, said the family had just sat down for lunch when the missile hit.

Among those killed Wednesday were a reporter for Hamas-run Al-Aqsa radio and two people who died when warning missiles crashed into their apartment.

The Israeli military said it was striking a militant tunnel network in southern Gaza, with 52 aircraft hitting 40 underground targets.

Military officials, meanwhile, said a mysterious explosion that killed eight members of a Palestinian family on the first day of the fighting was caused by a misfired rocket from Gaza. "This wasn't an Israeli attack," said Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, a military spokesman.

Since the fighting began, Gaza's infrastructure, already weakened by a 14-year blockade, has rapidly deteriorated. Medical supplies, water and fuel for electricity are running low in the territory, on which Israel and Egypt imposed the blockade after Hamas seized power in 2007.

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.

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

Netanyahu has 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. The news organization's president, Gary Pruitt, has said the AP had no indication Hamas was present in the building.

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

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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.

## Freaked by cicada swarms? You could just stick a fork in 'em

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Cicadas are poised to infest whole swaths of American backyards this summer. Maybe it's time they invaded your kitchen.

Swarms of the red-eyed bugs, who are reemerging after 17 years below ground, offer a chance for home cooks to turn the tables and make them into snacks.

Full of protein, gluten-free, low-fat and low-carb, cicadas were used as a food source by Native Americans and are still eaten by humans in many countries.

"We really have to get over our dislike of insects, which is really strong and deep-seated in most people in our culture," said David George Gordon, author of "Eat-a-Bug Cookbook" and known as the Bug Chef.

"You could make stir fry. You can mix them into dough to make bread — make banana bread, let's say. You can batter them and deep fry them, which I think would be my favorite way," he said.

This year's group is called Brood X, and they can be seen in 15 Eastern states from Indiana to Georgia to New York. Their cacophonous mating song can drown out the noise of passing jets.

When the soil warms up enough, cicadas emerge from the ground, where they've been sucking moisture from tree roots for the past 13 or 17 years, depending on species. They shed their exoskeletons, attach themselves to branches, mate and lay eggs before dying off in about six weeks.

When eating adult cicadas, it's advised to pull the wings and legs off to reduce the crunchiness. But Gordon advises home cooks to gather the cicadas when they're nymphs, before their body armor hardens and while they are still soft and chewy, like soft shell crab.

He puts them in the freezer, a humane way to kill them. Once defrosted, cicadas can become a pizza topping like sundried tomatoes, or replace shrimp in any recipe. Others have followed his lead, including a University of Maryland cookbook dedicated to the cicada.

"People can't really deal with the idea of looking at a bug and eating it. So that's why I like tempura batter or something that just conceals the features of the nymph," Gordon said. "Plus, I'll eat anything that's deep fried. I have a recipe in my book for a deep-fried tarantula spider and they're really good."

Gordon describes the taste of cicadas as akin to asparagus. University of Maryland entomologist Mike Raupp goes further: "They have a buttery texture, a delicious, nutty flavor, probably from the tannins, from the roots of the trees on which they fed," Raupp said. "And they're going to be really good with a Merlot."

Gordon's "Eat-a-Bug Cookbook" came out in 1998 and was greeted by hostility and jokes from late-night TV hosts. "But of course, over the last 20 years, this is moving in the direction of being normalized," he said.

Gordon pointed to the rise of foodie culture and thrill-seeking eaters like chef Andrew Zimmern, but especially to a 2013 report from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization as a turning point in interest in edible insects. The report estimated that insect-eating is practiced regularly by at least 2 billion people around the world, and that dozens of species have been documented as edible, including cicadas.

It also declared that edible insects are rich in protein and good fats, high in calcium, iron and zinc, emit fewer greenhouse gases than most livestock, and take very little farming space or water.

"Now people were taking what I had been saying all along more seriously," Gordon said. In America, "We're kind of the weirdos: 80% of the world's cultures eat insects, but we're in that 20% that thinks it's an abomination."

The number of mass-produced foods containing insects — from protein bars to chips and pasta sauce — has been rising. In parts of Asia, some insects are sold in bags like salted peanuts or in tubes like stacked potato chips. A German company makes burgers out of mealworms.

"They're a much healthier option for the planet," said Dr. Jenna Jadin, an evolutionary biologist and ecologist who has worked as a climate change adviser for UN agencies like the Food and Agriculture Or-



ganization. "Especially in light of the fact that we will shortly have to feed 9 billion people."

Jadin notes with a laugh that once the mighty, high-cost lobster was deemed so repulsive in the West that it was fed to prisoners. "Perceptions change," she said.

She notes that the Food and Agriculture Organization estimates about 18% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions are due to animal agriculture.

Adventurous eaters might start with insects at the Newport Jerky Company, which has stores in Massachusetts and Rhode Island and a vibrant online presence. Its insect section includes a bag of grasshoppers for \$9.99 or chocolate-covered crickets for \$6.99.

Co-owner Derek Medico said he sells one item — a \$9.99 mixed bag of dehydrated grasshoppers, mole crickets, silkworms, crickets and sago worms — thousands of times a year. "I think a lot of it just the novelty," he said.

And he doesn't expect to see consistent demand for insects anytime soon.

"In other countries and other cultures, that's much more accepted and much more normal," he said. "But here, I just think it's just going to take a while."

## Teacher disarmed school shooter, hugged her until help came

RIGBY, Idaho (AP) — When a student opened fire at an Idaho middle school, teacher Krista Gneiting directed children to safety, rushed to help a wounded victim and then calmly disarmed the sixth-grade shooter, hugging and consoling the girl until police arrived.

Parents credited the math teacher's display of compassion with saving lives. While two students and the school custodian were shot May 6, all three survived, and the gunfire was over within minutes. Gneiting's family says bravery and empathy are just part of who she is.

In an interview with ABC News that aired Wednesday, Gneiting said she was preparing her Rigby Middle School students for their final exams when she heard the first gunshot down the hall. She looked outside her classroom and saw the custodian lying on the floor. She heard two more shots as she closed the door.

"So I just told my students, 'We are going to leave, we're going to run to the high school, you're going to run hard, you're not going to look back and now is the time to get up and go,'" Gneiting said in the interview shown on "Good Morning America."

Police said a sixth-grade girl brought the handgun in her backpack and shot two people inside the school and one outside. All three were wounded in their limbs and released from the hospital within a few days.

Gneiting said she was trying to help one of the students who had been shot when she saw the girl holding the gun. She told the wounded student to stay still and approached the sixth-grader.

"It was a little girl, and my brain couldn't quite grasp that," she said. "I just knew when I saw that gun, I had to get the gun."

She asked the girl, "Are you the shooter?" and then walked closer, putting her hand on the child's arm and sliding it down to the gun.

"I just slowly pulled the gun out of her hand, and she allowed me to. She didn't give it to me, but she didn't fight," Gneiting said. "And then after I got the gun, I just pulled her into a hug because I thought, this little girl has a mom somewhere that doesn't realize she's having a breakdown and she's hurting people."

Gneiting held the girl, consoling her until police arrived.

"After a while, the girl started talking to me, and I could tell she was very unhappy," Gneiting said. "I just kept hugging her and loving her and trying to let her know that we're going to get through this together. I do believe that my being there helped her because she calmed down."

Once police got there, Gneiting told the girl that an officer would need to put her in handcuffs, and the child complied.

"She didn't respond, she just let him. He was very gentle and very kind, and he just went ahead and took her and put her in the police car," she said.

The girl has been charged in the shooting, but because juvenile court proceedings are kept sealed in Idaho, neither her name nor the nature of the charges has been released.

Gneiting's brother-in-law, Layne Gneiting, said that when he first heard about the shooting, he thought Krista Gneiting's inner "mother bear" had sprung into action to protect the students. He soon realized it was another side of her strong parental instinct.

"Krista is a born mother," Layne Gneiting wrote in a Facebook post shortly after the shooting. "Mess with her kids she'll rip you apart. Need a hug she'll hold you for hours, mingling her tears with yours ... Determination pushed her to act, but tenderness and motherly love — not force — lifted the gun from the girl's hands to hers."

Krista Gneiting, meanwhile, said she hopes people can forgive the girl and help her get the support she needs.

"She is just barely starting in life and she just needs some help. Everybody makes mistakes," she told ABC News. "I think we need to make sure we get her help and get her back into where she loves herself so that she can function in society."

## 'I'm scared': AP obtains video of deadly arrest of Black man

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Louisiana state troopers were captured on body camera video stunning, punching and dragging a Black man as he apologized for leading them on a high-speed chase -- footage of the man's last moments alive that The Associated Press obtained after authorities refused to release it for two years.

"I'm your brother! I'm scared! I'm scared!" Ronald Greene can be heard telling the white troopers as the unarmed man is jolted repeatedly with a stun gun before he even gets out of his car along a dark, rural road.

The 2019 arrest outside Monroe, Louisiana, is the subject of a federal civil rights investigation. But unlike other in-custody deaths across the nation where body camera video was released almost immediately, Greene's case has been shrouded in secrecy and accusations of a cover-up.

Louisiana officials have rebuffed repeated calls to release footage and details about what caused the 49-year-old's death. Troopers initially told Greene's family he died on impact after crashing into a tree during the chase. Later, State Police released a one-page statement acknowledging only that Greene struggled with troopers and died on his way to the hospital.

Only now in the footage obtained by the AP from one trooper's body camera can the public see for the first time some of what happened during the arrest.

The 46-minute clip shows one trooper wrestling Greene to the ground, putting him in a chokehold and punching him in the face while another can be heard calling him a "stupid motherf---."

Greene wails "I'm sorry!" as another trooper delivers another stun gun shock to his backside and warns, "Look, you're going to get it again if you don't put your f----- hands behind your back!" Another trooper can be seen briefly dragging the man facedown after his legs had been shackled and his hands cuffed behind him.

Instead of rendering aid, the troopers leave the heavysset man unattended, facedown and moaning for more than nine minutes, as they use sanitizer wipes to wash blood off their hands and faces.

"I hope this guy ain't got f----- AIDS," one of the troopers can be heard saying.

After a several-minute stretch in which Greene is not seen on camera, he appears again, limp, unresponsive and bleeding from his head and face. He is then loaded onto an ambulance gurney, his arm cuffed to the bedrail.

In many parts of the video, Greene is not on screen, and the trooper appears to cut the microphone off about halfway through, making it difficult to piece together exactly what was happening at all times. At least six troopers were on the scene of the arrest but not all had their body cameras on.

"They murdered him. It was set out, it was planned," Greene's mother, Mona Hardin, said Wednesday. "He didn't have a chance. Ronnie didn't have a chance. He wasn't going to live to tell about it."

An attorney for Greene's family, Lee Merritt, said the footage "has some of the same hallmarks of the George Floyd video, the length of it, the sheer brutality of it."

"He apologized in an attempt to surrender," Merritt said.

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Louisiana State Police declined to comment on the contents of the video. In a statement, the agency said the "premature public release of investigative files and video evidence in this case is not authorized and ... undermines the investigative process and compromises the fair and impartial outcome."

State Police brass initially argued the troopers' use of force was justified — "awful but lawful," as ranking officials described it — and did not open an administrative investigation until 474 days after Greene's death.

"Police departments have got to stop putting roadblocks up to information that is, in the public's eye, questionable. They have to reveal all that they know, when they know it," said Andrew Scott, a former Boca Raton, Florida, police chief who testifies as an expert witness in use-of-force cases. "It suggests that you're hiding something."

While noting Greene "was not without fault" and appeared to resist the troopers' orders, Scott said dragging the handcuffed man facedown by his ankle shackles was "malicious, sadistic, completely unnecessary."

"That should never have never happened," he said. "You've got the guy completely compromised. He's not hurting anybody."

Charles Key, another use-of-force expert and former Baltimore police lieutenant, questioned the troopers' decision to leave Greene unattended, handcuffed and prone for several minutes, calling the practice "just dead wrong."

"You don't leave somebody lying on the ground, particularly after you've had this fight," Key said. "The training has been for a number of years that, as soon as you get someone under control, you put them on their side to facilitate their breathing ... and particularly this guy, because he was very heavy."

Gov. John Bel Edwards allowed Greene's family to view the same body camera footage last year and pledged to release it to the public after the federal investigation runs its course.

Greene's family has filed a federal wrongful-death lawsuit alleging troopers "brutalized" Greene, and "left him beaten, bloodied and in cardiac arrest" before covering up the cause of death. His family has released graphic photographs of Greene's body on a gurney, showing deep bruises and cuts on his face and head.

Greene, a barber, failed to pull over for an unspecified traffic violation shortly after midnight on May 10, 2019, about 30 miles south of the Arkansas state line. That's where the video obtained by AP begins, with Trooper Dakota DeMoss chasing Greene's SUV on rural highways at over 115 mph.

Seconds before the chase ended, DeMoss warned on his radio: "We got to do something. He's going to kill somebody."

As DeMoss and Master Trooper Chris Hollingsworth rush Greene's SUV, he can be seen appearing to raise his hands and saying over and over, "OK, OK. I'm sorry."

Hollingsworth shocks Greene with a stun gun within seconds through the driver's side window as both troopers demand he get out of the vehicle.

Greene exits through the passenger side as the troopers wrestle him to the ground. One trooper can be heard saying "He's grabbing me" as they try to handcuff him. "Put your hands behind your back, bitch," one trooper says.

Hollingsworth strikes Greene multiple times and appears to lie on one of his arms before he is finally handcuffed.

At one point, Trooper Kory York yanks Greene's leg shackles and briefly drags the man on his stomach even though he isn't resisting.

York was suspended without pay for 50 hours for the dragging and for improperly deactivating his body camera. York told investigators the device was beeping loudly and his "mind was on other things."

Hollingsworth, in a separate recording obtained by AP, can be heard telling a colleague at the office that "he beat the ever-living f--- out of" Greene.

"Choked him and everything else trying to get him under control," Hollingsworth is heard saying. "He was spitting blood everywhere, and all of a sudden he just went limp."

Hollingsworth later died in a single-vehicle highway crash that happened hours after he learned he would be fired for his role in the Greene case.

DeMoss, meanwhile, was arrested in connection with a separate police pursuit last year in which he and two other troopers allegedly used excessive force while handcuffing a motorist.

Exactly what caused Greene's death remains unclear. Union Parish Coroner Renee Smith told AP last year his death was ruled accidental and attributed to cardiac arrest. Smith, who was not in office when that determination was made, said her office's file on Greene attributed his death to a car crash and made no mention of a struggle with State Police.

The AP last year also obtained a medical report showing an emergency room doctor noted Greene arrived dead at the hospital, bruised and bloodied with two stun-gun prongs in his back. That led the doctor to question troopers' initial account that Greene had "died on impact" after crashing into a tree.

"Does not add up," the doctor wrote.

## Pioneering comic Paul Mooney, a writer for Pryor, dies at 79

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Paul Mooney, the boundary-pushing comedian who was Richard Pryor's longtime writing partner and whose bold, incisive musings on racism and American life made him a revered figure in stand-up, has died. He was 79.

Cassandra Williams, Mooney's publicist, said he died Wednesday morning at his home in Oakland, California, from a heart attack.

Mooney's friendship and collaboration with Pryor began in 1968 and lasted until Pryor's death in 2005. Together, they confronted racism perhaps more directly than it ever had been before onstage.

Mooney wasn't as widely known as Pryor, but his influence on comedy was ubiquitous. As head writer on "In Living Color," Mooney helped create and inspire the Homey D. Clown character. He played the future-foretelling Negrodamus on "Chappelle's Show."

In any forum, Mooney was uniquely fearless as a comedian. His blunt confrontations with racism and power in white America could be hysterical or simply defiantly unflinching. In his 2012 special "The Godfather of Comedy," he said the only way to end racism was to "kill every white person on this planet." Mooney considered himself "the first comic to bring a 'just between us' Black voice to the stage."

"I say what I feel. White folks got their freedom. I'm going to be free, white and 21, too," Mooney said in 2010.

Mooney chronicled his partnership with Pryor in his 2007 memoir "Black Is the New White." They first met, Mooney recalled, when Pryor showed up at a party at Mooney's apartment on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood and suggested an orgy. Mooney threw him out.

They were opposites in many ways. Mooney didn't drink or do drugs. But they found they shared a natural connection.

"Even though I have a feeling that sooner or later it's all going to crash, I still accept Richard's friendship," Mooney wrote in "Black Is the New White." "He is irresistible."

At a time when nearly all television writers were white, Mooney and Pryor first wrote episodes for the sitcom "Sanford and Son" together. They continued on the short-lived 1978 variety program "The Richard Pryor Show." Mooney helped write many of Pryor's classic comedy albums, including "...Is It Something I Said?" (1976) and "Live on the Sunset Strip" (1983).

Mooney also penned Pryor's famous word association sketch on "Saturday Night Live" with Chevy Chase. (Some words said in the sketch: "Fast." "Rain." "Negro." "Honky.") The sketch, in which Chase interviews Pryor for a job, Mooney said, was a product of a tense lead-up to showtime during which NBC executives were nervous about having Pryor on the air and Lorne Michaels was skeptical about having Mooney there to write. Pryor insisted on it.

"After all the bull — I've been put through to get here, the f — cross-examination Lorne subjects me to, I decide to do a job interview of my own," Mooney later said. "Chevy's the boss, interviewing Richard for a janitor's job. The white personnel interviewer suggests they do some word association, so he can test if the Black man's fit to employ."

Later generations of Black comics gravitated to Mooney. In the 1980s, he opened for Eddie Murphy on his "Raw" tour. Chappelle, who also hired him as a writer on "Chappelle's Show" wrote the forward to Mooney's memoir.



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Mooney wouldn't make his first solo stand-up special until the 1993 album "Race." In its torrid opening, he mocks white people for being discomfited by the N-word, a word Mooney used liberally in his act. "You made it up! You shouldn't have made it up!" he says. "I say it, you think it."

"I recall listening to his 'Race' album in college and how formative it was," filmmaker Ava DuVernay wrote on Twitter. "Yeah, the jokes. But more so, the freedom. He spoke freely and fearlessly about feelings and experiences others found difficult to express."

Born Paul Gladney in Shreveport, Louisiana, Mooney was raised largely by his grandmother in Oakland. He competed in dance contests as a teenager and appeared on the TV show "Dance Party." He was drawn to stand-up, he said, after seeing Lenny Bruce perform in the early '60s. He took the stage name of Mooney from "Scarface" actor Paul Muni.

Mooney was also an actor who played Sam Cooke in 1978's "The Buddy Holly Story" and Junebug in Spike Lee's 2000 film "Bamboozled." Mooney, suggesting the opportunities might have been more, said the film industry was frightened of "a proud black man like me."

In 2006, Mooney said he would give up using the N-word after Michael Richards' outburst at a comedy club. Mooney continued to perform as recently as 2014, even after being diagnosed with prostate cancer. Some said he continued too long. In 2016, New York magazine wrote that it was "hard to discern the defiant figure of Mooney's prime in the man audiences are seeing onstage these days."

"I was lucky enough to open for Paul Mooney several times," the comedian W. Kamau Bell said on Twitter. "It was a master class. It was like a Malcolm X speech that had been punched up by Redd Foxx and then in the middle of everything he'd go off on a tangent about Jane Fonda. He was one of the greats."

## Texas governor signs law banning abortions early as 6 weeks

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Republican Gov. Greg Abbott on Wednesday signed a law that bans abortions in Texas before many women even know they are pregnant and differs singularly from similar efforts nationwide: leaving enforcement to private citizens, who can sue doctors or anyone who helps a woman get an abortion.

The law puts Texas in line with more than a dozen other states that ban abortions after a fetal heartbeat can be detected, possibly as early as six weeks. It would take effect in September, but federal courts have mostly blocked states from enforcing similar measures.

But with the Supreme Court this week agreeing to take up a Mississippi law that bans abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy, abortion rights activists worry that a ruling favorable to the state could lay the groundwork for allowing even more restrictions, including so-called heartbeat bills.

"The life of every unborn child with a heartbeat will be saved from the ravages of abortion," Abbott said in a bill signing at his office.

Texas' version is unique in that it prohibits state officials from enforcing the ban. Instead, it allows anyone — even someone outside Texas — to sue an abortion provider or anyone else who may have helped someone get an abortion after the limit, and seek financial damages of up to \$10,000 per defendant.

Critics say that provision would allow abortion opponents to flood the courts with lawsuits to harass doctors, patients, nurses, domestic violence counselors, a friend who drove a woman to a clinic, or even a parent who paid for a procedure.

Before the bill reached Abbott's desk, abortion rights groups signaled they would challenge the law.

"The goal is clear: to relentlessly attack our reproductive rights until abortion is a right in name only. Passing these bills is not leadership, it is cruelty and extremism," said Alexis McGill Johnson, president of Planned Parenthood Action Fund.

Advanced technology can detect an electric signal flutter as early as six weeks into a pregnancy, even though the embryo isn't yet a fetus and doesn't have a heart. An embryo is termed a fetus beginning in the 11th week of pregnancy, medical experts say.

Texas law currently bans abortion after 20 weeks, with exceptions for a woman with a life-threatening

medical condition or if the fetus has a severe abnormality. More than 90% of abortions take place in the first 13 weeks of a woman's pregnancy, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Supreme Court will probably hear the Mississippi case in the fall, with a decision likely in spring 2022.

## Medicare for 60-year-olds not guaranteed to be a better deal

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and progressive Democrats have proposed to lower Medicare's eligibility age to 60, to help older adults get affordable coverage. But a new study finds that Medicare can be more expensive than other options, particularly for many people of modest means.

There are two reasons: Traditional Medicare has gaps in coverage that most people fill by purchasing supplemental plans, which means they pay added premiums. And premiums for the Obama-era Affordable Care Act have come way down recently due to Biden's COVID relief bill. That's made the ACA more attractive for older adults who haven't reached Medicare's eligibility age of 65.

"Simply expanding Medicare eligibility does not guarantee premium affordability," concluded the study by Avalere Health for The Associated Press.

It found that many older adults with low to modest incomes can already find cheaper premiums in Obamacare's markets, while those in the solid middle class would be more likely to benefit if they could get into Medicare.

Lowering the Medicare eligibility age to 60 is politically popular, with nearly 2 in 3 Americans backing the idea in a Kaiser Family Foundation poll late last year. That included about half of Republicans. But in Congress the proposal has little support from Republicans, meaning that it would be up to Democrats to try to advance it. Liberals are enthusiastic, but moderates worry that tinkering with Medicare's complex financing could have unintended political consequences.

The Avalere analysis did find that traditional Medicare has an important advantage over Obamacare because hospitals and doctors nationwide accept it, whereas coverage through private insurers generally relies on restrictive networks. Another potential plus: the combination of traditional Medicare and a supplemental "Medigap" policy provides more generous coverage than the ACA's midlevel plans.

Avalere, a market analysis and consulting firm, compared Obamacare premiums to premiums for Medicare coverage in Houston, Miami, Los Angeles, and Chicago for a hypothetical 60-year-old nonsmoker and a 65-year-old enrolled in Medicare. Because the ACA's financial assistance is keyed to income, the study looked at individuals making about \$18,000 a year, those making about \$32,000, and those around \$52,000. It also took into account Medicare Advantage, the private insurance option that nearly 4 in 10 Medicare enrollees pick.

Medicare was generally the better deal for those in the solid middle class, those around \$52,000.

In Houston, a 60-year-old making \$32,000 can get a midlevel ACA "silver" plan for \$88 a month, compared with either \$284 for traditional Medicare plus a Medigap supplement and a prescription plan, or a Medicare Advantage plan starting at \$149. For a resident of the same city making \$52,000, the Obamacare plan would cost \$344, making Medicare the better deal.

A hypothetical 60-year-old in Los Angeles making \$18,000 can now get a silver plan for a monthly premium of \$1, compared with \$277 for traditional Medicare and its added wrap-around coverage. But for an Angeleno making \$52,000, traditional Medicare would work out to about \$70 less per month than the ACA plan.

"Simply expanding Medicare as it is to younger people does not always mean those patients are getting a better deal," said Chris Sloan, an industry analyst at Avalere. "The things that the Biden administration has done to increase the Obamacare subsidies thru 2022 have made it really affordable."

Biden is asking Congress to permanently extend the more generous financial assistance that has brought down the cost Obamacare premiums.

The Avalere analysis also found that uninsured people make up only 8% of the 24.5 million adults ages 60-64 who would qualify for Medicare by lowering the eligibility age. Of the total, about 6 in 10 currently

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have employer coverage.

The Biden administration, through the Department of Health and Human Services, had no comment.

Economist John Holahan of the Urban Institute think thank said the new research "illustrates an important point."

"Medicare as it stands right now is a sort of complicated beast with a separate drug plan and no out-of-pocket caps," he said. "The nation has that in the ACA, and at a pretty heavily subsidized amount."

Without other changes, lowering the Medicare eligibility age may not really solve coverage or affordability problems, said health policy expert Katherine Hempstead of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

"It's hard to see a lot of obvious situations where 'Wow, this is a great deal' for someone, or a big improvement over the status quo," she said.

But Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., a progressive advocating a "Medicare for All" national health insurance plan, said the study framed the question too narrowly. A new tax-financed plan modeled on Medicare and offering comprehensive coverage with no premiums or deductibles would be better for consumers, he said. And the U.S. would reduce health care spending because Medicare pays doctors and hospitals less than private insurance.

"The ACA is still basically a subsidy for private insurance," said Khanna. "What we don't want to be doing is entrenching private insurance companies that are a drain on American competitiveness and have failed to deliver comprehensive coverage to Americans."

In other findings, the study showed that in Miami, the ACA could offer slightly lower premiums than traditional Medicare even for a solid middle-class individual making \$52,000, a potential savings of about \$40 a month.

And in Chicago, the traditional Medicare combination would cost a lower-income person \$268 a month. But they could find ACA coverage starting at \$1.

## A pizza recipe with artichoke, mozzarella — and cicadas

By The Associated Press undefined

David George Gordon, author of the "Eat-a-Bug Cookbook," says periodical cicadas should be harvested immediately after they have undergone their final molt — usually within minutes of their appearance above ground.

Clinging by their claws to the bark of trees, these freshly formed adults have yet to develop fully functional wings. As such, they are sitting ducks, easily captured by hand or with a small net. To arrest any further development, he recommends plunging these captives into ice water or freezing them. Otherwise you may have to mount an aerial search to recapture your ingredients.

In 1987, when Gordon found himself up to his elbows in a previous brood of cicadas, he took the advice of University of Chicago professor emeritus Monte Lloyd and prepared the catch as a topping for pizza. It was a hit in his kitchen.

### CICADA PIZZA

Yield: 4 servings

Dough:

1 teaspoon active dried yeast

1 teaspoon sugar

3/4 cup warm water

1 tablespoon olive oil

2 1/4 cups bread flour

1/3 cup cornmeal

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Tomato sauce:

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 onion, finely chopped

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1 clove garlic, crushed  
1 pound peeled tomatoes, sliced into 3/4-inch chunks  
1 tablespoon tomato paste  
1/2 teaspoon sugar  
1/2 teaspoon chopped fresh oregano  
1/2 teaspoon chopped fresh basil  
Salt and pepper to taste

—  
Toppings:

1/2 cup grated mozzarella cheese  
6 marinated artichoke hearts  
8 sundried tomatoes in oil  
8 subadult periodical cicadas, thawed from frozen or freshly caught  
1 teaspoon red pepper flakes

—  
Directions:

1. To make the dough, combine the yeast, sugar, and 1/4 cup water. Add this liquid, the 1 tablespoon olive oil, and remaining water to the flour and cornmeal. Mix to a soft dough, then knead on a lightly floured board until smooth and elastic, about 10 minutes.
2. Place dough in a greased bowl and cover with a cloth or plastic wrap. Let rise for 45 minutes or until doubled in size.
3. While waiting for the dough to rise, begin making the tomato sauce. Heat the olive oil in a medium saucepan. Add onion and garlic, and cook until soft.
4. Stir in tomatoes, tomato paste, sugar, oregano and basil. Season with salt and pepper. Cover the saucepan and simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from flame.
5. Punch down the risen dough and knead briefly. Place in the center of an oiled 12-inch pizza pan. Press outward, using the knuckles, until dough is evenly spread, filling the pan. Pinch a lip around the edge to contain the sauce. Brush the dough with olive oil.
6. Preheat oven to 425 degrees F.
7. Spoon tomato sauce over the dough. Spread mozzarella cheese uniformly over the sauce.
8. Drain the sundried tomatoes, reserving the oil. Coarsely chop them and the artichoke hearts, artfully arranging the two items over the cheese.
9. Top with fresh or thawed-from-frozen periodic cicadas.
10. Sprinkle the completed pie with 1 or 2 tablespoons of the reserved oil. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, until the cheese has melted and dough is crisp and golden. Dust with red pepper flakes and serve.
11. Wait 13 to 17 years and repeat this entire sequence.

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

By ELAINE GANLEY and THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press

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 "joie de vivre" — sipping coffee and red 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 world famous lifestyle. 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 took a seat at a café terrace, chatting with customers. Prime Minister Jean Castex, who planned to attend a cinema later Wednesday, projected a mood of measured optimism.

"Let's get used to try and live together," Macron told reporters. "If we manage to get well organized col-



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lectively and continue vaccinating, have a common discipline as citizens, there's no reason why we can't continue moving forward."

Actor Emmanuelle Beart went to a movie theater opening in Paris where her latest film "L'Étreinte" ("The Embrace") was showing. The appetite for seeing movies was such that many in Paris lined up at breakfast to see a movie instead of getting their morning croissant.

Moviegoer Michael Souhaite, who works in the industry, set his alarm clock to make sure he would make a 9 a.m. showing of "Drunk."

"I really need to go to the movies," he said. "I go to movies maybe twice a week, minimum. So for me, it was really, really, really important... Today, it's almost emotional to be here."

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 allow outdoor dining while drinking and eating indoors began Monday in Britain.

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.

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

Top figures in France's restaurant industry were frustrated over the government's perceived failure to protect their prized gastronomy from the worst. Yet many, like Michelin-starred chef Alain Ducasse, have chosen to hold their ire over the crippling six-month closures to imagine instead the future of buzzing dining areas and swilled bottles of wine.

"Has (the government) done enough? The answer is 'No'... (But) optimism is a decision. We have decided to be optimistic. French gastronomy will continue," he said.

Starting on June 9, the French government plans to move the curfew back to 11 p.m. and to permit indoor dining. Also on that date, France will begin to welcome tourists from non-EU destinations provided they have some sort of coronavirus passport or health pass. 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 plans to bring France out of the pandemic aren't just about bringing long-closed restaurants, boutiques and museums back to life, 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 with excitement and palpable emotion as the cordon around the world's most visited museum and home of the "Mona Lisa," the Louvre, was finally lifted.

"I am extremely moved. In fact, just as I entered the Louvre, really just in the gallery, I immediately started crying. Real tears of joy," said Pauline Lacroix, a psychotherapist.

"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 another visitor, Walid Hneini.

Paris resident Benoit Puez was more understated about the opening up, giving it a Gallic shrug.

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

## 'I am proud.' Demi Lovato comes out as nonbinary

By The Associated Press undefined

Singer Demi Lovato revealed on Wednesday they identify as nonbinary and are changing their pronouns, telling fans the decision came after "self-reflective work."

"Today is a day I'm so happy to share more of my life with you all — I am proud to let you know that I identify as non-binary," Lovato announced on Twitter and in an accompanying video, adding they will "officially be changing my pronouns to they/them moving forward."

Lovato said they picked gender-neutral pronouns as "this best represents the fluidity I feel in my gender expression." They added, "I'm doing this for those out there that haven't been able to share who they truly are with their loved ones."

Anthony Allen Ramos of GLAAD said nonbinary people live outside the categories of male or female and should be respected for who they are.

"Demi has always been one of the loudest and proudest advocates for LGBTQ people and issues. In sharing their story today, they will educate countless people around the world and reach other nonbinary people with a message of pride," Ramos said in a statement.

The singer behind such hits as "Sorry Not Sorry," "Heart Attack" and "Stone Cold" recently shared their personal struggles with mental health and addiction in a YouTube documentary, which followed their journey prior to and following a near-fatal overdose in 2018.

## 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. Most were Moroccans, though there were also migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.

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, though it was widely seen as retaliation

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against Spain for having allowed the leader of a militant group, Brahim Ghali, to receive medical treatment in a Spanish hospital.

Two Moroccan officials made that link in public comments on Wednesday. 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.

## 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 239, while Taiwan, considered a major success in battling the virus, has recorded more than 1,200 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

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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 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



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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.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, May 20, the 140th day of 2021. There are 225 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 20, 1927, Charles Lindbergh took off from Roosevelt Field on Long Island, New York, aboard the Spirit of St. Louis on his historic solo flight to France.

On this date:

In 1506, explorer Christopher Columbus died in Spain.

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act, which was intended to encourage settlements west of the Mississippi River by making federal land available for farming.

In 1932, Amelia Earhart took off from Newfoundland to become the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic. (Because of weather and equipment problems, Earhart set down in Northern Ireland instead of her intended destination, France.)

In 1948, Chiang Kai-shek (chang ky-shehk) was inaugurated as the first president of the Republic of China (Taiwan).

In 1956, the United States exploded the first airborne hydrogen bomb over Bikini Atoll in the Pacific.

In 1959, nearly 5,000 Japanese-Americans had their U.S. citizenships restored after choosing to renounce them during World War II.

In 1961, a white mob attacked a busload of Freedom Riders in Montgomery, Alabama, prompting the federal government to send in U.S. marshals to restore order.

In 1978, Japan's Narita International Airport began operations after years of protests over its construction by local residents.

In 1985, Radio Marti, operated by the U.S. government, began broadcasting; Cuba responded by attempting to jam its signal.

In 1995, President Bill Clinton announced that the two-block stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House would be permanently closed to motor vehicles as a security measure.

In 2009, suspended NFL star Michael Vick was released after 19 months in prison for running a dogfighting ring to begin two months' home confinement.

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In 2015, four of the world's biggest banks — JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup's banking unit Citicorp, Barclays and the Royal Bank of Scotland — agreed to pay more than \$5 billion in penalties and plead guilty to rigging the currency markets.

Ten years ago: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected the idea of using his country's 1967 boundaries as the basis for a neighboring Palestinian state, declaring his objections during a face-to-face meeting with President Barack Obama, who had raised the idea in an effort to revive stalled Mideast peace talks. Randy "Macho Man" Savage, 58, a larger-than-life personality from professional wrestling's 1980s heyday, died in Pinellas County, Florida.

Five years ago: A U.S. Secret Service officer shot a man with a gun who had approached a checkpoint outside the White House and refused to drop his weapon; Jesse Olivieri of Ashland, Pennsylvania, was later sentenced to eight months' confinement.

One year ago: President Donald Trump threatened to hold up federal funds for two election battleground states (Michigan and Nevada) that were making it easier to vote by mail during the pandemic. Police ticketed seven people for cutting hair during a protest against coronavirus restrictions outside the Michigan Capitol, where about a dozen barbers and hair stylists defied stay-at-home orders to give free haircuts. Apple and Google released smartphone technology that could notify people if they might have been exposed to the coronavirus. Former Green Beret Michael Taylor and his son Peter were arrested in Massachusetts on charges that they had smuggled Nissan Chairman Carlos Ghosn from Japan to Lebanon in a box as he faced financial misconduct charges. (The Taylors were extradited to Japan in March 2021.) Government figures showed that U.S. births continued to fall in 2019, leading to the lowest number of newborns in 35 years.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-author James McEachin is 91. Actor Anthony Zerbe is 85. Actor David Proval is 79. Singer-actor Cher is 75. Actor-comedian Dave Thomas is 73. Rock musician Warren Cann is 71. Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, is 70. Former New York Gov. David Paterson is 67. Delaware Gov. John Carney is 65. Actor Dean Butler is 65. TV-radio personality Ron Reagan is 63. Rock musician Jane Wiedlin (The Go-Go's) is 63. Actor Bronson Pinchot is 62. Singer Susan Cowsill is 62. Actor John Billingsley is 61. Actor Tony Goldwyn is 61. Singer Nick Heyward is 60. TV personality Ted Allen is 56. Actor Mindy Cohn is 55. Rock musician Tom Gorman (Belly) is 55. Actor Gina Ravera is 55. Actor Timothy Olyphant is 53. Former race car driver Tony Stewart is 50. Rapper Busta Rhymes is 49. Actor Daya Vaidya is 48. Actor Matt Czuchry (zoo-KREE') is 44. Actor Angela Goethals is 44. Actor-singer Naturi Naughton is 37. Country singer Jon Pardi is 36.