

# Groton Daily Independent

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**WAGE**   
**MEMORIAL**  
**LIBRARY**

**STORY TIME**

**NEW LOCATION!**  
**120 N Main, Groton**

Every Thursday at 10 a.m. from now until July 29  
No Story Time on July 1st

*All are welcome!*



**OPEN:** **Recycling Trailer in Groton**  
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.



## **New S.D. poll reveals economic pessimism and dissatisfaction with democracy**

**Bart Pfankuch**

**South Dakota News Watch**

**Part one of a three-part series.**

As the state emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, some residents of South Dakota are uneasy about what life holds for future generations and many have only limited confidence in the effectiveness of some democratic institutions.

The findings are from a recent poll of 500 South Dakota residents conducted in a partnership between South Dakota News Watch and the Chiesman Center for Democracy at the University of South Dakota. The poll is part of an ongoing, expanding effort by News Watch called "South Dakota Matters," which seeks to use statewide polls and online panel discussions to delve deeply into topics of critical importance to South Dakotans.

The poll questions revealed a mix of widely varying results.

While the economic questions in the poll show that some state residents remain hopeful for the future and have done a good job in saving money and preparing for retirement, a few questions spurred responses that showed a statistically relevant level of pessimism. Meanwhile, questions related to democratic institutions generally did not reveal confidence in federal government, but respondents did show confidence in local police, local government and the military.

The poll was conducted by Pulse Research of Oregon during the week of April 21-27, 2021. Respondents were contacted by phone and were roughly representative of the broader state population in regard to gender, age, and political affiliation. The poll included Native American respondents, though they were under-represented compared with the statewide Native population. The median income of the poll respondents was about 30% higher than that of the entire state. The margin of error is plus or minus four percentage points.

Here are some general findings from the poll; to view all poll results go online to [SDNewsWatch.org](http://SDNewsWatch.org).

— Respondents showed great dissatisfaction with how democracy is working in America right now, and political party division and distrust of competing parties is high. Almost 65% of respondents were very or somewhat dissatisfied with how democracy is working, and nearly a third thought members of the opposing political party posed a "very serious threat" to America and its people.

— Respondents overall have a very little confidence in the effectiveness of the executive branch, of Congress, of political parties and of the press. They have a mixed level of confidence in the courts, state government and colleges and universities. They have very strong confidence in the military, local government and local police.

— Compared with Democrats and Independents, Republicans were much less confident in the executive branch, Congress, the courts, colleges and universities, political parties and the press. Democrats and Independents had far less confidence in state government than Republicans.

— Respondents overall support the citizen ballot initiative process and do not want the state Legislature to make it harder for initiatives to appear on the ballot.

— Compared with Republicans, Democrats and Independents were much more supportive of citizen ballot initiatives as an important part of the democratic process and felt more strongly that the Legislature should not make it more difficult.

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— When asked if life is better for themselves compared with their parents at the same stage of life, nearly half of all respondents said they are doing the same or worse financially. Compared with men, women were less likely to say they were better off financially than their parents.

— When asked if life will be better or worse for their children or future generations, nearly three-quarters of all respondents said life will be the same or worse. Only one in five respondents said they expect life will be better for future generations in South Dakota.

— Compared with Democrats and Independents, Republicans were less likely to expect that life for future generations will be better. Compared with women, men were far more likely to report that life will be the same or worse for future generations.

— Three out of five respondents said they have three months' worth of expenses in a savings account, though it is important to note that the median income of respondents was significantly higher than the rest of the state of South Dakota.

— Only a quarter of respondents felt "very secure" about how much money they have saved for retirement; about three quarters felt only somewhat secure or not secure at all.

— More than half of respondents said they were doing better financially than five years ago; about one in five said they were doing worse.

Here are some facts about the 500 people who responded to the poll.

Median annual household income — \$75,000 (statewide median household income is \$58,000)

Median age — 50 years old

Race/ethnicity — 83% white, 4.5% Native American, 1.3% Hispanic, 0.9% black, 3.1% mixed race

Self-reported political party affiliation — 45.3% Republican, 27.6% Independent, 21.3% Democrat, 5.8% undeclared

Rural/urban residency — 50.9% rural, 45.9% urban, 3.2% undeclared; residents from all counties were represented

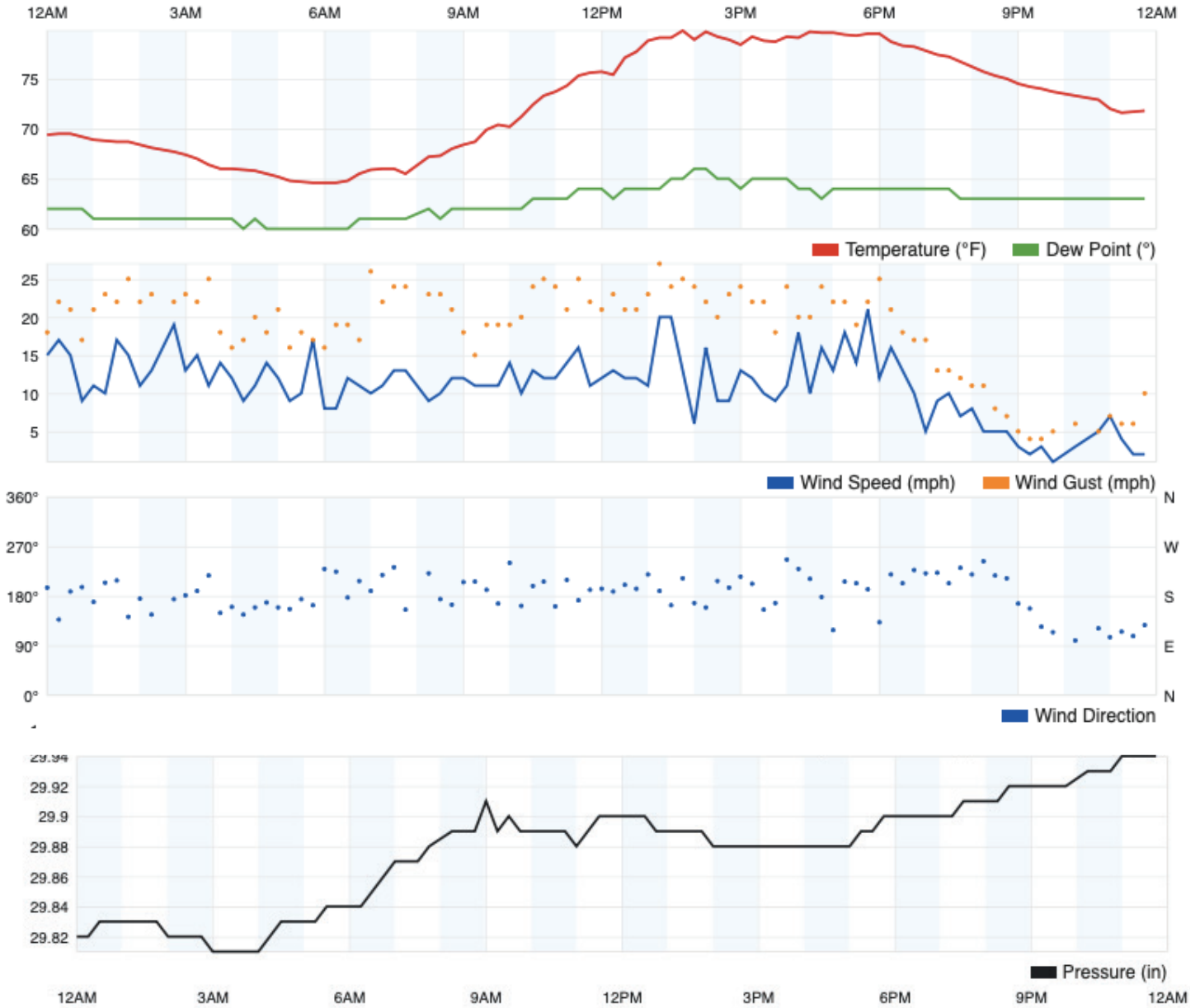
Gender — 50.6% female, 49.4% male

Coming next: Experts discuss poll results showing some pessimism over state's future.

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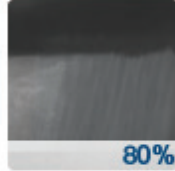

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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| Today   | Tonight   | Sunday  | Sunday Night   | Monday  |
|---|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 30%   | 20%   | 30%   | 80%  |   |
| Partly Sunny then Chance T-storms   | Slight Chance T-storms  | Chance T-storms   | Showers  | Sunny then Sunny and Breezy   |
| High: 81 °F   | Low: 52 °F  | High: 83 °F   | Low: 59 °F   | High: 82 °F   |

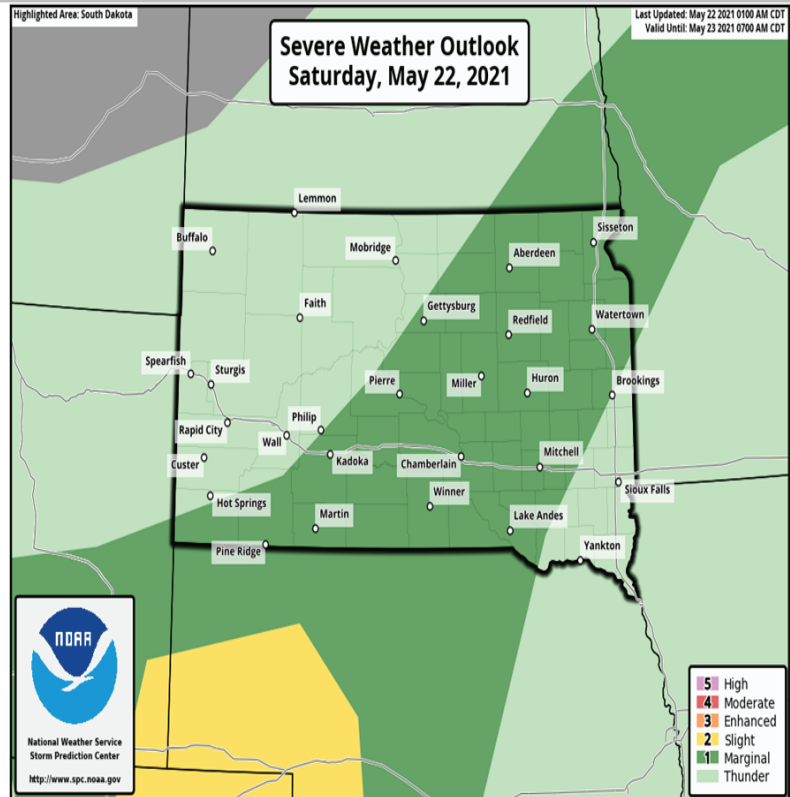


## Marginal Risk Of Severe Weather Today

May 22, 2021  
3:00 AM

### Key Messages

- Isolated severe storms possible this afternoon and tonight
- Hail and gusty winds will be the main threats
- Cooler temperatures today for central SD



Aberdeen, South Dakota

A stationary front stretched across the region may provide for isolated showers and thunderstorms later today into tonight. A severe storm or two is possible. #sdwx #mnwx

## Today in Weather History

May 22, 1963: A late spring freeze impacted many locations reporting lows in the lower 20s. Some low temperatures include: 18 degrees in Andover; 20 degrees in Britton, 4 NW of Gann Valley, Leola and Roscoe; 21 degrees Castlewood, Ipswich, Kennebec, Redfield, 2 NW of Stephen, and 1 west of Summit; 22 degrees in Aberdeen, Eureka, 1 west of Highmore, McLaughlin, and 4 west of Mellette.

May 22, 1993: Nearly stationary thunderstorms dumped five to seven one-half inches of rain and hail within three hours on the southwest side of Sioux Falls causing major urban flooding and a flash flood on an area creek. Water and sewage flooded at least 200 basements as the storm and sewer systems backed up. Water came up to the rooftops of many cars in the Empire Mall area. Power was knocked out at the Empire Mall and to 2600 other customers in southwest Sioux Falls. Rainwater came through the roof of the Empire Mall causing damage to some stores. Hail up to an inch in diameter fell continuously for up to one and one-half hours in parts of southwest Sioux Falls causing considerable damage to hundreds of roofs, trees, and gardens. Thousands of cars received damage from hail or water in Sioux Falls. In the Silver Glen area, a flash flood turned a typically three-foot wide creek to a hundred feet wide in places. At least five houses near this creek had severe damage caused by the rushing waters. The flash flood also tore out a section of a road adjacent to the creek, buckled sidewalks, ripped away 100-year-old trees, and floated a 5500 lb truck down the road.

May 22, 2010: An EF2 tornado in eastern Walworth County crossed into western Edmunds County and intensified into a massive EF4 tornado as it struck several farms in its path. At the first farm, several large cottonwood trees were uprooted along with damage to several trailers. Three-grain bins were also destroyed with debris located several hundred yards to the northeast. The residence suffered some shingle and antenna damage. The tornado then tracked northeast to a second farm where several outbuildings were damaged or destroyed along with widespread tree damage. The primary residence at this location suffered no damage. Several grain cars were also rolled about 100 yards into the trees behind the house. The massive tornado continued to track northeast to a third farm to the north of Bowdle. The main residence suffered major damage to walls with part of the roof structure removed. Widespread tree damage was sustained with many of the trees completely debarked with only the stumps of the largest branches remaining. Two large garages were destroyed with the concrete slab wiped clean. The vehicles in one garage were rolled or tossed from 25 to 100 yards away. It is estimated that one car flew through the air 75 to 100 yards resting in the tree shelter belt to the north of the residence. Several other outbuildings were destroyed. The tornado then toppled six to eight metal power transmission towers as it moved to the north of the farm. One tower was sheared off from the concrete footings and traveled an estimated 400 yards. Ground scouring was visible along the path of these towers. The large tornado continued to track east crossing over State Highway 47 where a state radio tower was toppled. The tornado lifted shortly after that. The highest wind speeds were estimated to be from 166 to 200 mph.

1876: Denver, Colorado was drenched with 6.50 inches of rain in 24 hours, an all-time record for that location.

1986: A devastating hailstorm hit the Sichuan Province of China. Reports indicate that up to 100 people were killed, 35,000 homes destroyed and entire crops devastated.

2011: On this day, one of the most devastating tornadoes in the nation's history directly killed 158 people and injured over 1,000 in Joplin, Missouri. The Joplin EF5 tornado was the first single tornado to result in over 100 fatalities since the June 8, 1953, Flint, Michigan tornado.

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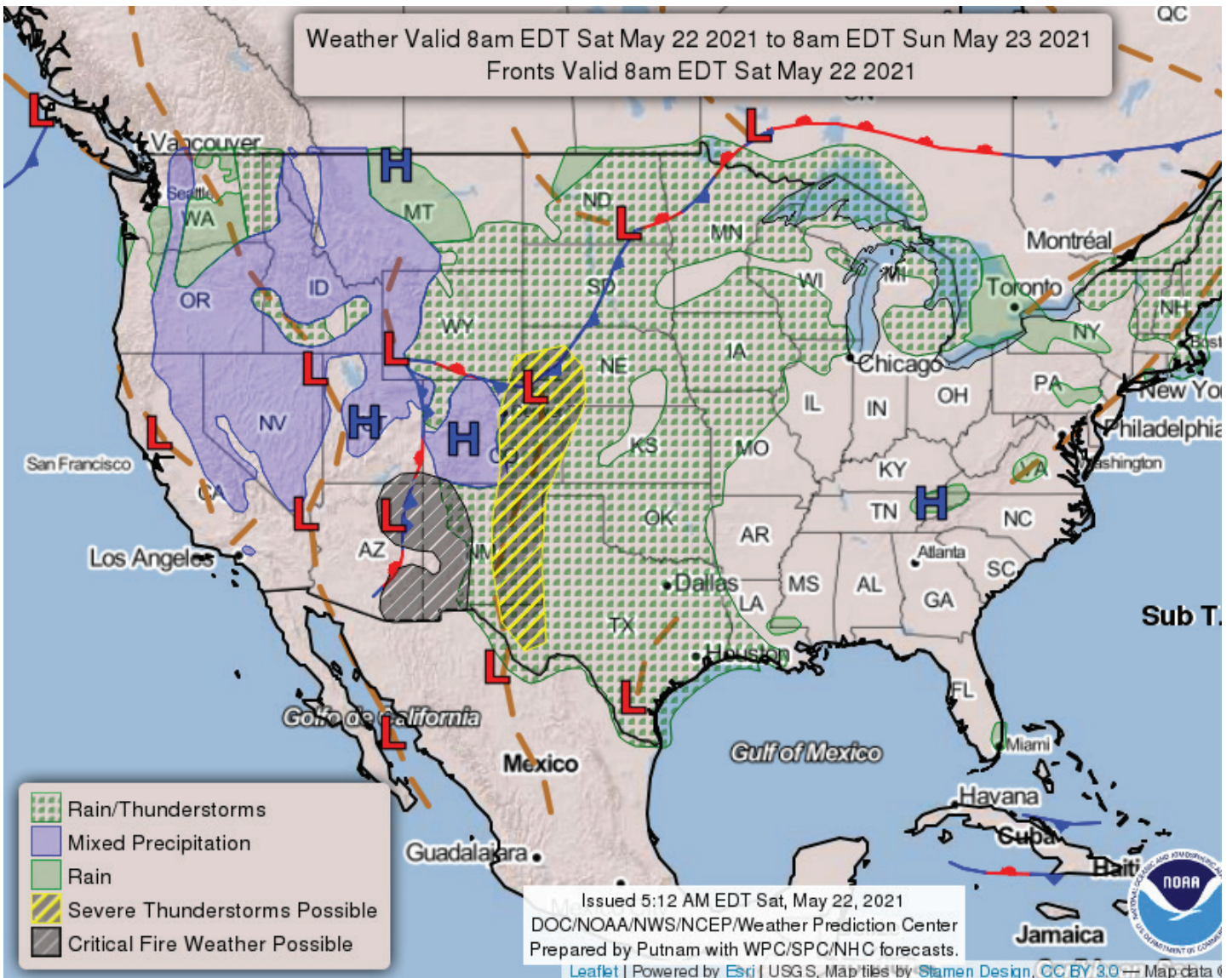
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 80 °F at 1:47 PM**  
**Low Temp: 64 °F at 6:08 AM**  
**Wind: 27 mph at 7:03 AM**  
**Precip: .00**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 92° in 1928**  
**Record Low: 22° in 1963**  
**Average High: 73°F**  
**Average Low: 47°F**  
**Average Precip in May.: 2.31**  
**Precip to date in May.: 0.27**  
**Average Precip to date: 6.28**  
**Precip Year to Date: 3.04**  
**Sunset Tonight: 9:06 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:55 a.m.**



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## THE SOURCE OF PRAISE

Someone recently reminded me that my heart beats 72 times a minute, 100,000 times a day, 3,600,000 times a year. And, if I live what would be considered a "normal life span," it will beat 2.5 billion times. It only weighs about 11 ounces yet will pump about 2,000 gallons of blood through 60,000 miles of blood vessels each day. Rather amazing, to say the least.

Yet I rarely stop to consider those facts. It is God at work in my body taking care of me, watching over me, providing life for me and within me.

Often in life we seek God's presence and power to protect us and provide for our needs. But are we aware of the magnitude of His grace, gifts, and goodness? Are we sincerely thankful for His constant care, concern, and compassion?

Do we ever pause to think of the work our heart does without our head having to do anything to make it "work?" Do we realize that God is alive and involved in our lives without our even mentioning His name?

God gives us life without asking for it and help when we call upon Him when we are having difficult times.

David often needed God's help. He knew that in God's "name" there was help, healing, and hope. He experienced it in the past and knew it was available in the present.

And when God helped him, the first thing he did was to "praise His name." Praise is what we are to "do" when we recognize God at work in our lives. How often we neglect to do this one simple thing: Praise Him!

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to be aware of all that You do in our lives and to praise You for each gift – big or little. May we become alert to every gift You give us every day. THANK YOU! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I will praise your name, Lord, for it is good. Psalm 54:6



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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

### Goals for better housing in Sioux Falls missing the mark

By TREVOR J. MITCHELL Sioux Falls Argus Leader

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — In 2019, officials with the City of Sioux Falls' housing division outlined several benchmarks they'd hope to hit over the next few years, part of a challenge from Mayor Paul TenHaken for city departments to come up with "Big Hairy Audacious Goals," or "BHAGs."

Two years later, the self-imposed deadlines on those goals are drawing closer, and city staff can't guarantee they'll hit them.

The reasons range from disagreements on tactics to the continued effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have contributed to a housing crisis in Sioux Falls as the city tries to lure thousands of new workers to the city, the Argus Leader reported.

For the city's housing division, the goals included the institution of several programs aimed at easing both the financial cost of finding a home, as well as de-tangling the city's complex web of programs meant to help those struggling to find one.

They also looked to create or rehabilitate 1,000 dwelling units to increase the availability of housing within the city.

The challenges of reaching some of the goals, like the 1,000 units by 2022, aren't entirely unexpected, said Al Roettger, the city's housing compliance coordinator.

"I would say that that goal is always set high to begin with to try to force us to, you know, work as hard as we can to create as many housing units as we can," Roettger said. "I don't know that it was designed to be super attainable, but we're doing the best we can."

TenHaken agreed, saying at the time he'd asked the team, "What's a goal that would make us a little uncomfortable based on what we've historically done?" and they said "1,000 over three years would really push us."

He noted the goal stands in stark contrast to comments he made during his State of the City address, setting a goal of 7,000 additional housing units during the next five years.

As of May 13, the city's affordable housing dashboard says 435 of the units have been completed. Roettger added there are a few hundred more currently underway, estimating a combined total between 600-700.

Jeff Eckhoff, the city's director of planning and development, said he thought they'd get close to the goal by 2022, but added supply chain issues and increasing material costs because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic could cause problems.

Then there's the 2021 goal to set up a housing clinic, an effort to simplify the city's housing assistance system that a 2016 report by the Augustana Research Institute called, "so complex and difficult to navigate that people opt out."

The city has hired a housing clinic coordinator, Eckhoff said, adding they have "kind of stepped back and retooled" their vision for the project, which would have seen them taking on a more prominent role

Eckhoff said as they discussed the plan with partners, including Minnehaha County Human Services, they decided that wasn't the right move and are now looking closer at how to provide assistance to existing nonprofits and providers.

"It's the same result, it'll be easier for the client to navigate the system," Eckhoff said. "But is there a way we can help the providers versus being one more, an additional provider ourselves?"

The Housing Fund, originally pitched as a 2022 goal that would have \$1 million in capital to help neighborhoods become or remain affordable to live in, has also had its timeline delayed, Eckhoff said.

"Initially, I think the timeline was to actually have that up and going by now," he said, although they've had several meetings with developers and have built a framework for applications.

"But we're a ways away from getting actual money in there," he said, adding he expects some funding to come from Forward Sioux Falls, a joint venture between the Greater Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce

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and the Sioux Falls Development Foundation and some of the money saved through the CARES Act stimulus hopefully for use in the summer or fall.

"The housing fund has not been stood up like I'd like it to be at this point. So we missed that mark, and for a few reasons," TenHaken said.

One of them, he said, was the fact that several ideas brought before the City Council hadn't gained traction.

"It's important for the residents to realize that I can only do so much," he said. "I need the council to get behind this and support this as well."

Eckhoff added there's no clear agreement on how the fund should be used, whether on single-family housing, multi-family housing, redevelopment.

"And so some of it is just getting all the, you know, herding all the cats and trying to get people to agree," Eckhoff said.

TenHaken said he thought the solution would likely be to take things one step at a time — finding one place, perhaps single-family affordability, to start making a dent instead of waiting for things to be perfect.

With the city continuing to expand at a rapid pace, housing remains a foundational part of both TenHaken's administration and a continually-growing concern.

"What makes me a little nervous is that this wasn't probably my No. 1 concern, two years ago," TenHaken said. "It's quickly become the number one concern I have for our community is the availability of housing."

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

06-09-17-18-48, Mega Ball: 8, Megaplier: 3

(six, nine, seventeen, eighteen, forty-eight; Mega Ball: eight; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$515 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$218 million

## Federal judge: Tribe allowed to join Mount Rushmore lawsuit

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A federal judge will allow a Native American tribe to join legal arguments opposing South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem's efforts to put on a July Fourth fireworks display at Mount Rushmore.

The Republican governor has sued the Department of the Interior after the National Park Service denied the state a permit to hold a fireworks display at the monument. The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe had asked the judge to allow it to join the legal arguments, arguing it had a stake in the decision because the Black Hills, which include Mount Rushmore, are sacred for the tribe. It argued the fireworks event would violate the religious and first amendment rights of Native American people.

Noem's lawyers had opposed the tribe's request in the U.S. District Court for South Dakota. But Chief Judge Roberto Lange, who was appointed by former President Barack Obama, ruled Thursday the tribe could intervene. Lange granted the tribe's request in part because the Park Service cited concerns from local Native American tribes for denying the state's application.

Noem has argued that the permit denial was "arbitrary and capricious" and political punishment from President Joe Biden's administration. The governor successfully pushed last year for a return of the pyrotechnic display after a decadelong hiatus, and the event drew national attention when former President Donald Trump joined Noem on July 3 to give a fiery speech.

The governor and the tribe have also feuded over whether the tribe was consulted before the event last year. The tribe this week charged the governor with falsely claiming that the tribe was consulted on the fireworks event. However, the two sides disagree on what even constitutes a government-to-government consultation.

Court documents show that Steve Vance, the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe's historical preservation officer, attended two days of tribal cultural survey meetings hosted by the Park Service in February 2020 to discuss the event. A tribal council member also attended one of the meetings, which the Park Service listed as tribal consultation meetings in court filings.

But Remi Bald Eagle, a spokesman for the tribe, said that their attendance didn't mean the tribe engaged in a consultation with the Park Service. Only the full tribal council or the tribal chairman are authorized to do that, Bald Eagle said. Representatives from other tribes at the meetings also expressed at the time they were not authorized to engage in a formal consultation.

"Neither were there on behalf of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe," Bald Eagle said.

Lange has indicated he'll likely decide by June 2 whether to issue a preliminary injunction order to force the Park Service to allow the fireworks this summer.

In the order, he summarized Noem's arguments by writing, "From Noem's and the State's perspective, not permitting fireworks for Independence Day weekend at Mount Rushmore is, to put it bluntly, unjustified and un-American."

## Jobs picture relatively stable in South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The latest jobs report in South Dakota shows unemployment claims continuing to decline, but an uptick in first-time claims kept the employment picture relatively stable.

The Department of Labor reported 364 initial weekly claims Thursday, an increase of 59 from the previous week. This number has hovered around 300 in recent weeks.

First-time claims rose to several thousand per week in the early months of the pandemic, then averaged between 500 to 900 through the rest of 2020, KSFY-TV reported. In recent months, first-time claims have held steady near pre-pandemic levels of 200 to 300 per week.

The number of unemployed workers eligible for and receiving benefits after their initial claim fell by 120 to 2,519.

South Dakota's unemployment rate was 2.8% in the month of April, according to the Department of Labor. That's in contrast to April of last year when the effects of the coronavirus pandemic were in full effect and the state's unemployment rate hit 9.2%.

On the national level, unemployment claims fell to 444,000, the lowest point since the beginning of the pandemic.

## Sioux Falls man accused of impersonating an officer

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Sioux Falls man is accused of impersonating a police officer and questioning a woman while intoxicated and armed.

According to police, the 35-year-old man approached the woman wearing a cap and tactical vest marked police and questioned her about suspicious activity in the area Tuesday night.

The woman was suspicious and asked to see a badge. Police said the man told her he was a detective and didn't have a badge on him. The man ran away when the woman told him she was going to call police.

The woman told police she saw a gun in the man's waistband as he fled, KSFY-TV reported.

A few minutes later police stopped a vehicle that was swerving and found the cap and vest marked police in the vehicle, according to authorities.

The man was arrested on possible charges of drunken driving, impersonating an officer, possessing a gun while intoxicated and possession of marijuana and paraphernalia.

## Judge Rules South Dakota Can't Shirk Sinkhole Liability Lawsuit

RAPID CITY, S.D., May 21, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- Black Hawk residents forced by collapsing subsurface mines to risk their lives in unstable homes have won an important legal victory in a lawsuit to hold the state of South Dakota accountable for failing to safely close, remediate and maintain subsurface of mines

owned and operated by the state.

A state court judge on May 14 rejected the argument made by the state of South Dakota that the homeowners lack legal standing to seek damages. The court's ruling means the lawsuit, brought following the 2020 collapse of ground supporting over 150 homes in the Hideaway Hills neighborhood, has overcome an important legal hurdle and will proceed.

"The named Plaintiffs have demonstrated that their injuries likely will be redressed by a favorable decision – i.e., an award of damages, based on their constitutional right to individually bring an inverse condemnation case against the State," wrote Circuit Court Judge Kevin Krull in the ruling.

Hideaway Hills homeowners are seeking class-action status so all affected residents may be compensated for the loss of their homes, said attorney Kathleen Barrow of the Fox Rothschild law firm, who along with Terence Quinn of Rapid City's The Quinn Law Firm, is representing the homeowners.

"South Dakota can't have it both ways," Ms. Barrow said. "You can't make millions off mining and retain the ownership of the subsurface estate, but then say you're not responsible for the damage caused to homes on the surface."

For generations, the state operated gypsum mines throughout the region and still owns the subsurface mineral rights. The lawsuit charges the state failed to properly remediate and maintain unstable land after the mining operation was shuttered in the early 1990s and the surface property was sold to developers who built the Hideaway Hills neighborhood. Homeowners were not informed of the hidden dangers to the land and their homes caused by the state's mining activity and neglect, Ms. Barrow said.

"This is an important ruling for Hideaway Hills homeowners," Ms. Barrow said. "We will now proceed with the class-certification process."

The large sinkholes that opened in April 2020 forced some homeowners in Hideaway Hills to evacuate their homes. Houses in the neighborhood cannot be sold and property values have plummeted. South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem has said the state is not responsible for the destruction, even though a trust fund created with revenue generated from the mining operation is now valued at over \$300 million.

The case is Andrew Morse and John and Emily Clarke et al. v. State of South Dakota et al., No. 46CIV-20-000295 in the Circuit Court, 4th Judicial District, County of Meade, South Dakota.

Fox Rothschild has grown to a 950-lawyer national law firm with 27 offices by focusing on client service and responsiveness, and by attracting bright and creative lawyers who know how to deliver. More information at [foxrothschild.com](http://foxrothschild.com).

## Longtime Missouri River fisheries manager calling it quits

By KIM FUNDINGSLAND Minot Daily News

RIVERDALE, ND. (AP) — After overseeing the production of more than 245 million walleye and bringing back pallid sturgeon from the brink of extinction in the Missouri River system, Rob Holm, Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery manager, has made important and lasting contributions to fisheries in North Dakota and elsewhere.

Effective June 30, Holm is retiring after 25 years of capturing, spawning, tagging, incubating, and caring for many species of fish. He became a nationally recognized leader in pallid sturgeon recovery, helping save the prehistoric fish from extinction.

"My professor at the University of South Dakota, Vermillion, was big on pallid sturgeon," recalled Holm. "Pallids became a passion for me early on."

After graduating with a degree in biology, Holm found himself working in fisheries in Oklahoma. It was there where he helping raise striped bass for release on the Gulf Coast and assisted with paddlefish restoration in Kansas, gaining knowledge that would later prove vital in North Dakota, the Minot Daily News reported.

"We got that going and were stocking out paddlefish. It was kind of cool to be able to do that," recalled Holm. "At the same time we had a huge program for catfish, flatheads and channel, smallmouth and largemouth bass as well. We did a lot of recreational fish."

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Holm took the job as manager of the Garrison Hatchery in March 1996. The facility was vastly different than it is now. Pallid sturgeon had been listed as "endangered" just three years earlier and there was a very real possibility that the river monsters would soon be gone entirely from the Missouri River system. A series of dams on the previously free-flowing river made it impossible for pallids to swim upstream to spawn. Essentially, the population was dying from old age with no natural reproduction to replace older fish.

"The first thing I did when I got here was get the trout barn going," said Holm. "We put a concrete floor in there and soon became the number one producer of pallid sturgeon in the United States."

It wasn't easy, with some real highs and real lows early in the process. The first attempt at capturing pallids for artificial spawning resulted in just one female being brought to the Garrison Hatchery. Saving a species is not easy, but biologists hoped this was a start.

"I remember that female and when we spawned it. It was like high 5's for everybody about 10 o'clock at night, like we had just saved the world!" remembered Holm.

Later that night an underground pipeline carrying warm water from a hatchery boiler burst. When Holm and fellow fisheries biologists checked in on their incubating pallid sturgeon eggs the following morning they discovered frost on the incubators. All of the pallid sturgeon eggs were lost.

In several years to follow though, early problems with pallid restoration were overcome. The Garrison Hatchery, with Holm's hands-on guidance, has stocked out thousands of pallids that brought up the numbers of the large fish that was in serious peril.

Another project that showcased the importance of the Garrison Hatchery was the restoration of sauger in the Wind River in Wyoming. Once plentiful, they were disappearing. The population was so low that biologists and fishermen thought the end was in sight for Wind River sauger.

"That was something I thought was kind of a neat challenge," said Holm. "That's an example of what hatcheries can be. We got into that program and, after four years of stocking, the fish were recovered. Last year they said they were getting recruitment and didn't think they needed stocking anymore. It shows you can take a fishery and, in a short period of time, can make a difference."

While pallids were an early passion for Holm, he quickly learned after arriving in North Dakota that walleyes were in big demand and that the hatchery would be asked to meet that demand. It was a huge undertaking.

"The year before I got here it was like 100,000 walleye," recalled Holm. "Game and Fish asked me if I had ever raised walleyes before. I said no."

Game and Fish was financially contributing to the Federal Hatchery in a cooperative agreement with the USFWS.

"We got a request for 8 or 9 million walleyes," said Holm. "We've been fortunate. Our production has pretty much mirrored what the requests have been ever since, with the exception of a couple of years when we lost fish because of flooding on the outdoor ponds."

Studies have shown that fishing in North Dakota is a \$950 million industry and that many of the walleyes caught in the state came from the hatchery along with all the trout and salmon.

Holm has also been managing smaller hatcheries at Valley City and Bald Hill. Despite their size, says Holm, they too make important contributions to state fisheries.

"Now with Red River restoration and Lake Sturgeon taking off over there, it's a big win for the FWS," remarked Holm. "One day I'd like to see my grandkids fishing lake sturgeon over in the Red. It's possible."

Many such success stories remain somewhat hidden from the general public. Holm has long recognized that and has realized the importance of telling the story of fish hatcheries.

"When I came here our visitors center was so stuffy people would pass out in there. I saw a bunch of mounted fish behind glass. Half the tanks in the building were empty and no eggs in the incubator. What would you think?" said Holm. "You'd think they don't do a whole lot."

Holm determined that reaching out to the public was necessary and took steps to do so. Today a large visitors center at the Garrison Hatchery is used for school tours, classroom gatherings and tells the hatchery story to anyone who steps inside.

"It gives us and our volunteers to show kids and whoever comes in what we do," said Holm. "We added a larger aquarium with the idea of having larger fish. When kids and others see our live fish, that's what gets them going."

While Holm will be stepping aside from his career at the hatchery, the Riverdale resident doesn't plan on leaving the area.

"I like it. For sure," said Holm. "We're Riverdale residents for life. The hatchery has been my career. It's been my life. I've come to a point, like in professional sports, you've done as good as you can but you reach a time for somebody else to take the reins."

Holm says he has been fortunate to have an excellent staff working for him at the hatchery. Maybe too good.

"They understand the place," said Holm. "Now I'm sitting behind a desk more and doing administrative stuff, not really my thing. It's more fun to be out with the fish. I am a biologist."

As for the hatchery's lengthy partnership with North Dakota Game and Fish, Holm called it "amazing" and says "this kind of model for all the states would be a win-win for everybody."

## **EXPLAINER: Much about US pullout from Afghanistan is unclear**

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — When he pulled the plug on the American war in Afghanistan, President Joe Biden said the reasons for staying, 10 years after the death of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, had become "increasingly unclear." Now that a final departure is in sight, questions about clarity have shifted to Biden's post-withdrawal plan.

What would the United States do, for example, if the Taliban took advantage of the U.S. military departure by seizing power? And, can the United States and the international community, through diplomacy and financial aid alone, prevent a worsening of the instability in Afghanistan that kept American and coalition troops there for two decades?

The Biden administration acknowledges that a full U.S. troop withdrawal is not without risks, but it argues that waiting for a better time to end U.S. involvement in the war is a recipe for never leaving, while extremist threats fester elsewhere.

"We cannot continue the cycle of extending or expanding our military presence in Afghanistan, hoping to create ideal conditions for the withdrawal, and expecting a different result," Biden said April 14 in announcing that "it's time to end America's longest war."

A look at some of the unanswered questions about Biden's approach to the withdrawal:

### WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE TROOPS ARE GONE?

Predictions range from the disastrous to the merely difficult. Officials don't rule out an intensified civil war that creates a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan which could spill over to other Central Asian nations, including nuclear-armed Pakistan. A more hopeful scenario is that the Kabul government makes peace with the Taliban insurgents.

At a Senate hearing Thursday, a senior Pentagon policy official, David Helvey, was asked how he could remain optimistic when, in just the first few weeks of the U.S. withdrawal, hundreds of Afghans were killed.

"I wouldn't say that I'm optimistic," Helvey replied, adding that a peace agreement is still possible.

### HOW WILL AFGHAN FORCES HOLD UP?

The administration says it will urge Congress to continue authorizing billions of dollars in aid to the Afghan military and police, and the Pentagon says it is working on ways to provide aircraft maintenance support and advice from afar. Much of that work had been done by U.S. contractors, who are departing along with U.S. troops. The U.S. military also might offer to fly some Afghan security forces to a third country for training.

But none of those things — the training, the advising or the financial backing — are assured.

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Also unclear is whether the U.S. will provide air power in support of Afghan ground forces from bases outside the country.

The Afghan air force is central to the ongoing conflict, yet it remains dependent on U.S. contractors and technology. The Afghans, for example, have drones but not the kind that are armed, making them less effective in battle.

## WILL THE TALIBAN ENLIST OR ASSIST AL-QAIDA?

In a February 2020 agreement with the Trump administration, the Taliban pledged to disavow al-Qaida, but that promise is yet to be tested. This is important in light of the Taliban's willingness during their years in power in the 1990s to provide haven for bin Laden and his al-Qaida colleagues.

Joseph J. Collins, a retired Army colonel who has studied the U.S. war in Afghanistan since it began, notes that as recently as two years ago the Pentagon was alerting Congress to enduring links between al-Qaida and the Taliban. In a June 2019 report, the Pentagon said al-Qaida and its Pakistan-based affiliate, al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent, "routinely support, train, work, and operate with Taliban fighters and commanders."

Collins is skeptical that the Taliban have genuinely renounced ties to al-Qaida.

"I don't think that leopard has changed its spots at all," he said in an interview.

Earlier this month, the U.S. government watchdog for Afghanistan reported to Congress that al-Qaida relies on the Taliban for protection. The report, citing information provided by the Defense Intelligence Agency in April, said, "the two groups have reinforced ties over the past decades, likely making it difficult for an organizational split to occur."

## WHAT BECOMES OF U.S. COUNTERTERRORIST EFFORTS?

The Pentagon says that all U.S. special operations forces will leave no later than Sept. 11. That will make counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan, including the collecting of intelligence on al-Qaida and other extremist groups, more difficult but not impossible.

The administration's answer to this problem is to continue the fight from "over the horizon." This is a concept familiar to the military, whose geographic reach has expanded with the advent of armed drones and other technologies.

But will it work? The administration has yet to make any basing or access agreements with countries bordering Afghanistan, such as Uzbekistan. So it might have to rely, at least at the start, on forces positioned in and around the Persian Gulf, meaning response times will be much longer.

## WHAT ABOUT DIPLOMACY?

The administration says it will retain a U.S. Embassy presence, but that will become more difficult if the military's departure leads to a collapse of Afghan governance.

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters this past week that securing access to the Kabul international airport will be key to enabling the United States and other nations to maintain embassies. He said the U.S. and NATO allies are considering an international effort to secure that airport.

A related problem is the fate of Afghan civilians who might be targeted by the Taliban or other groups for aiding the U.S. war effort. Interpreters and others who worked for the U.S. government or NATO can get what is known as a special immigrant visa, or SIV, but the application process can take years.

Washington's special envoy to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, has told Congress the administration wants to protect those civilians, but that it is trying to avoid the panic that might erupt if it appeared the United States was encouraging "the departure of all educated Afghans" in a way that undermined the morale of Afghan security forces.

## **Biden betting on wage growth, while GOP warns of inflation**

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press



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WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration recently gave a bit of simple advice to businesses that are unable to find workers: Offer them more money.

This recommendation, included in a White House memo about the state of the economy, gets at a fundamental tension in an economy that is returning to full health after the coronavirus pandemic. Businesses are coping with spiking prices for goods such as steel, plywood, plastics and asphalt. Yet workers, after enduring a year of job losses, business closures and social distancing, are no longer interested in accepting low wages.

Administration officials say the White House is not trying to target a specific wage level for workers. But officials say higher wages are a goal of President Joe Biden and a byproduct of his \$1.9 trillion relief package and at least \$3.5 trillion in additional spending being proposed for infrastructure and education.

Boosting wages gets at the central promise of the Biden presidency to improve the lives of everyday Americans and restore the country's competitive edge in the world. Republicans say that Biden's policies have already let loose a torrent of inflation that will hurt the economy. The outcome of these competing forces could decide the trajectory of the U.S. economy as well as the factors weighing on voters in next year's elections.

White House economic adviser Jared Bernstein said the goal is "to pull forward a robust, inclusive recovery that provides good employment opportunities to people who have been the heroes of this pandemic, folks who are in the bottom half, who went to work, often in unsafe conditions, or had to stay home to take care of their families and deal with school closures and childcare constraints."

The New York Federal Reserve reported this month that there has been a 26% increase over the past year in wage expectations by noncollege graduates. The lowest average salary they expect for a new job is \$61,483, up more than \$12,700 from a year ago.

The wage pressures feeds into some anxiety about inflation. The Biden team sees the 0.8% month-over-month jump in consumer prices in April as temporary, a sign of consumer demand and the bottlenecks that naturally occur when an economy restarts. But newly released minutes from the Fed's April meeting suggest the U.S. central bank could possibly raise interest rates earlier than previously indicated to stamp down inflation and potentially limit economic growth.

The monthly jobs and inflation data can be volatile as the economy restarts, such that a single month could be an outlier instead of an underlying trend. Biden's aides are choosing to look at moving three-month averages on economic data and they see the situation as positive. They also said more people will accept jobs as vaccinations increase.

The Senate's Republican leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, says he has seen enough from the data so far. He has told voters that Biden's decision to provide an additional \$300 a week in unemployment benefits and the spending in his relief package are hurting the economy.

He said Thursday on Fox Business that the package "Democrats jammed through on a party-line vote" is "producing both people not wanting to work and raging inflation."

What makes the current situation unique is that wage pressures generally build when the unemployment rate is low. But the rate is 6.1% and the country is 8.2 million jobs below its pre-pandemic levels, historically the kind of numbers that might lead workers to settle for lower earnings.

The difference this time is that the government spent a combined \$6 trillion over the past year, including relief packages passed under President Donald Trump, to minimize the economic damage from the pandemic. Biden's own relief package was geared toward helping to boost wages, with enhanced unemployment benefits, new monthly payments to parents, aid to restaurants and money for state and local governments to increase pay for essential workers.

"We're in uncharted waters across the board," said Tyler Goodspeed, an economic adviser for Trump who is now a fellow at the Hoover Institution. "We've never had a recession like this. We've never had a recovery like this."

Goodspeed said the best way to raise wages is to reduce the unemployment rate closer to its pre-pandemic level of 3.5%, which would signal a genuine shortage of available workers that would then lead employers to pay more.

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Part of the dispute between Biden and Republicans is a more fundamental one on how economies grow. The administration has embraced a philosophy of investing in workers and providing them with benefits to make it easier for them to juggle life responsibilities and jobs.

By contrast, Republicans believe the key is to minimize taxes and other barriers for employers so that lower operating costs lead them to invest and hire. Republicans see the \$300-a-week federal unemployment payment as discouraging people from working because they can earn more money by staying unemployed.

It's not clear how much of a deterrent the added payments are, but there are early indications that the impact might be modest so far on people accepting jobs.

An analysis this month by economists at the San Francisco Fed found that "each month in early 2021, about seven out of 28 unemployed individuals receive job offers that they would normally accept, but one of the seven decides to decline the offer due to the availability of the extra \$300 per week" in unemployment benefits.

There are 23 states — all with Republican governors and GOP-controlled legislatures — that plan to block the enhanced federal benefits in June, under the belief that the loss of income will cause people to take jobs.

Aaron Sojourner, a labor economist at the University of Minnesota, warned that scrapping the benefits could reduce families' incomes and encourage employers to pay less, which could be both an economic and political problem.

"Lower wages is exactly the premise of the Republican position," Sojourner said.

## China's Mars rover touches ground on red planet

BEIJING (AP) — China's first Mars rover has driven down from its landing platform and is now roaming the surface of the red planet, China's space administration said Saturday.

The solar-powered rover touched Martian soil at 10:40 a.m. Saturday Beijing time (0240 GMT), the China National Space Administration said.

China landed the spacecraft carrying the rover on Mars last Saturday, a technically challenging feat more difficult than a moon landing, in a first for the country. It is the second country to do so, after the United States.

Named after the Chinese god of fire, Zhurong, the rover has been running diagnostics tests for several days before it began its exploration Saturday. It is expected to be deployed for 90 days to search of evidence of life.

The U.S. also has an ongoing Mars mission, with the Perseverance rover and a tiny helicopter exploring the planet. NASA expects the rover to collect its first sample in July for return to Earth as early as 2031.

China has ambitious space plans that include launching a crewed orbital station and landing a human on the moon. China in 2019 became the first country to land a space probe on the little-explored far side of the moon, and in December returned lunar rocks to Earth for the first time since the 1970s.

## The Latest: Gaza official: 2k housing units destroyed in war

By The Associated Press undefined

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — A Palestinian official says an initial assessment shows at least 2,000 housing units were destroyed in the fighting between Israel and Palestinian militant groups in Gaza.

Naji Sarhan, deputy of Gaza's works and housing ministry, tells The Associated Press on Saturday that more than 15,000 other units were partly destroyed in the 11-day war.

Israel launched hundreds of airstrikes on the overcrowded strip, targeting residential, commercial and government buildings. It said it was going after locations where Hamas had offices and resources.

Sarhan says four mosques were destroyed along with dozens of police offices in Gaza. He says most of the factories in Gaza's industrial zone were destroyed or damaged.

Meanwhile, police inspected unexploded Israeli ordinance collected during the campaign. Police chief

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Mahmoud Salah said nearly 300 Israeli rockets and shells did not explode.

Sarhan put the estimated financial losses from the fighting at \$150 million. He says assessment is still ongoing.

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — The United Nations says approximately 800,000 people in Gaza do not have regular access to clean piped water, as nearly 50% of the water network was damaged in the recent fighting.

Quoting Gaza's public works and housing ministry, the U.N.'s office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said nearly 17,000 residential and commercial units have been damaged or destroyed in the 11-day campaign.

These include 769 housing and commercial units that have been rendered uninhabitable, at least 1,042 units in some 258 buildings which have been destroyed and another 14,538 units that have suffered minor damage.

A cease-fire took effect Friday after an 11-day campaign that left more than 250 dead — the vast majority Palestinians — and brought widespread devastation to the already impoverished Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip.

The U.N. said 53 education facilities, six hospitals and 11 primary health care centers have been damaged since May 10. One health center was severely damaged, the U.N. said, while one hospital is not operational because of lack of electricity. Schools in Gaza remain closed, affecting almost 600,000 children.

CAIRO — An Egyptian diplomat says two teams of Egyptian mediators are in Israel and the Palestinian territories to continue talks on firming up a cease-fire deal — and securing a long-term calm.

The diplomat said Saturday discussions include implementing agreed-on measures in Gaza and Jerusalem, including ways to prevent practices that led to the latest fighting.

The official did not elaborate. He was apparently referring to violence at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the planned eviction of Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in east Jerusalem.

The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss behind-the-scenes deliberations.

The cease-fire took effect Friday. The 11-day war left more than 250 dead — the vast majority Palestinians — and brought widespread devastation to the already impoverished Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip.

The diplomat also said Israel has given a green light to Gaza fishermen to return to sea Saturday as part of the cease-fire deal.

The Egyptian delegations arrived in Israel and the Palestinian territories Friday, according to Egypt's official MENA news agency. The delegations met with Palestinian factions in Gaza directly after they arrived, MENA reported.

Hussein Sheikh, a senior aide to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, tweeted that one of the Egyptian delegation planned to hold talks with the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah on Saturday.

— By Samy Magdy

CAIRO — Egypt Foreign Minister Sameh Shukry has spoken with his Israeli counterpart, Gabi Ashkenazi, about stabilizing the Cairo-brokered Gaza cease-fire deal.

A statement by Egypt's Foreign Ministry said the two diplomats on Friday discussed shoring up the deal, which has mostly brought a halt to fighting between Israel and the Palestinians. They hope that will facilitate the reconstruction of Gaza.

The statement said the ministers also agreed on the importance of coordination between the two nations, the Palestinian Authority and international partners on securing communication channels to achieve peace. It did not provide further details.

The Egyptian government, meanwhile, said it would send a 130-truck convoy carrying humanitarian aid and medical supplies to Gaza, according to the presidency.

The convoy is expected to enter the territory Saturday.

**New voter ID rules raise concerns of fraud, ballot rejection**

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By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — When voters in Florida and Georgia want to vote by mail in next year's races for governor, they will have to make sure they take one more step to ensure they receive a ballot: providing their identification.

Just two states had ID requirements in 2020 for voters requesting a mailed ballot. This year, Republicans across the country have zeroed in on mail voting and enacted new limits on a process that exploded in popularity during the coronavirus pandemic.

In addition to Florida and Georgia, legislation to require additional identification for mail voting was introduced in Arizona, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Ohio, South Carolina and Texas, according to information compiled by the Voting Rights Lab, which advocates for expanded voter access.

Republicans, seizing on false claims by former President Donald Trump of widespread fraud in last year's White House election, say identification is needed for mailed ballots to deter fraud and improve confidence in elections. There is no evidence of widespread fraud in the 2020 election. Courts rejected multiple claims by Trump and his allies, a coalition of federal, state and local election officials called it the most secure election in U.S. history, and Trump's own attorney general said he had seen nothing that would change the outcome.

Critics say adding ID requirements to request a mailed ballot is not only unnecessary but creates one more opportunity for voters to make a mistake that could leave them unable to vote absentee. Identification, they say, is already required when registering to vote and when voting in person for the first time.

When ID also is required to cast a mailed ballot, as is now the case in Georgia, critics say it will only result in more ballots being rejected. It also is expected to disproportionately affect poor, minority and college-age voters -- groups more likely not to have an ID or to have one with a different address.

"Every additional requirement you add will lead to more ballot rejections, people who inadvertently fail to comply or don't comply correctly with those requirements," said Wendy Weiser, director of the democracy program at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU's School of Law, which supports expanded voter access.

A Republican proposal in Michigan has drawn particular concern from Democrats because it would require voters to submit a printed copy of their ID when requesting a mailed ballot. Although the state's governor, a Democrat, is likely to veto any voting restriction, the state has a unique process that could allow this and other voting bills to become law if enough citizens petition for it and the GOP-controlled Legislature passes it.

Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, a Democrat, has pushed back against GOP claims that IDs are more secure than the current process, which relies on matching a voter's signature on ballot applications or return envelopes to the signature on file at the election office.

"There is no evidence this change reduces or deters fraud," Benson said. "It actually makes it harder to detect fraud because those seeking to fraudulently request an absentee ballot need only to submit a copy of a fake ID to do so, whereas it's much more difficult to forge a signature."

The Michigan Senate's majority leader, Republican Mike Shirkey, has said voters favor ID requirements and that it was important to ensure registered voters are Michigan residents. "The best way to do that is through a state-issued ID," he said.

Benson noted that 130,000 of some 7 million registered voters in Michigan don't have a state ID or driver's license. Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, a Democrat, said that one-quarter of Black residents in his city don't own a car and many don't have printers at home.

"If your family has got a car, has got a personal computer, has got a printer copier at home, these bills are not so bad," Duggan said. "This is what is wrong: They have constructed a series of bills that a poorer family without computers, without a car, has a far harder time voting than the other families. This is voter suppression at its core."

Voter ID requirements have long been a flashpoint in the battle over voting, with past efforts focused on rules surrounding in-person voting. As of 2020, 36 states had ID requirements for voting at polling places, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

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Most allow a wide range of nonphoto identification such as a bank or utility statement. Many states allow voters to sign an affidavit under penalty of perjury that they are who they say they are.

Democrats have said they are not opposed to ID requirements as long as multiple forms of identification are accepted and there is an option for voters to sign an affidavit should they not have an ID or forget to bring it to the polls. Federal legislation being pushed this year by Democrats in Congress would make an affidavit mandatory in any state with a voter ID law.

What's new this year are the additional ID requirements to request or submit mailed ballots. Previously, only Alabama and Wisconsin required identification to request a mailed ballot.

Under a recently signed law, Florida voters will have to provide their driver's license number, state ID number or last four digits of their Social Security number to request a mailed ballot. In South Dakota, those seeking to vote by mail must submit a copy of a photo ID or a notarized oath.

Georgia's new elections law requires voters to provide their name, date of birth, address and driver's license or state ID card number when requesting an absentee ballot and when returning it.

Georgia state Sen. Brian Strickland, a Republican whose district is south of Atlanta, told reporters last month that the goal of the requirement was to move away from having to rely on local election officials to match voter signatures on file to applications and ballots, which he described as "not a workable process."

"This was a big complaint we heard from both sides," Strickland said.

Georgia's secretary of state, Republican Brad Raffensperger, said he has long supported an ID requirement. He said he has faced lawsuits from both Democrats and Republicans over signature matching, and said the process is subjective.

"When you go to photo ID, it's very objective," he said.

In response to challenges by Democrats, legal settlements in several states have assured voters they will have an opportunity to fix problems that arise with a missing or mismatched signature.

The Georgia law already is facing multiple court challenges, including one claiming the ID requirement creates the potential for fraud and identity theft. The required personal identification information can be easily stolen, creating the possibility for ballots to be requested and cast using voters' names and information without their knowledge, according to a federal lawsuit filed by a group of county election board members, voters and others.

Georgia state Sen. Jen Jordan, a Democrat who represents a metro Atlanta district, said the legislation was built on lies spread by Trump and his allies and will end up harming voters.

"At the end of the day, we can't ignore the origins of the bill, the intent behind it and how a lot of these new provisions can be used to invalidate the will of the voter," Jordan said.

## **EXPLAINER: Why 'world's pharmacy' India is short on shots**

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL AP Science Writer

NEW DELHI (AP) — Last year, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi told the United Nations his country would make enough COVID-19 vaccines "to help all humanity." Now India is struggling to meet its own domestic needs for the shots amid a startling surge of infections.

As the world's largest maker of vaccines, India always was expected to play a pivotal role in global efforts to immunize against COVID-19. But a mixture of overconfidence, poor planning and bad luck has prevented that from happening.

Here's a look at what went wrong:

### **CAUGHT OFF GUARD**

Officials in India seemed to have been caught off guard by several things, including the speed at which vaccines were approved for use around the world. India like many other countries had been working under the assumption that vaccines wouldn't be ready for use until mid-2021.

Instead, they started being greenlit in some countries in December — upping the pressure to not only produce but deliver promised shots as soon as possible. India, which approved two vaccines in January, turned out to not be ready for the eventual demand either at home or abroad.

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The government's plan had been to vaccinate 300 million of the India's nearly 1.4 billion people by August. But it hadn't actually reserved even close to enough shots to do so. It had just assumed — partly based on projections from the country's vaccine makers — that there would be enough doses to both vaccinate people at home and fulfill promised orders abroad.

There also was little domestic urgency because India's infections had been declining consistently for months. In fact, in January, just days after India kicked off its domestic vaccination campaign and also started exporting shots, Modi declared victory over the pandemic at a virtual gathering of the World Economic Forum.

Modi's government seemed to bask in the early success of its so-called "vaccine diplomacy" and the Foreign Ministry reiterated time and again that exports were calibrated according to the needs of the domestic immunization program.

Experts say that turned out to be a dangerous miscalculation as an explosion of domestic cases was just around the corner.

Dr. Vineeta Bal, who studies immune systems at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research in Pune city, said the government should've been planning for the future instead of celebrating its "victory" over the virus.

"I've no idea why people didn't think about it," she said. "Did no one do the calculation ... of how many doses will be needed in India?"

## PRODUCTION PROBLEMS

India has two main COVID-19 vaccine producers: the Serum Institute of India, which is making the AstraZeneca vaccine, and Bharat Biotech, which is making its own local vaccine.

India allowed the companies to start producing their shots last year as they waited for formal approval from regulators. Both the government and the companies thought that by the time the shots were approved they would have larger stockpiles of the vaccines than they did.

Scaling up manufacturing has turned out to be a problem for both companies.

Serum Institute's chief executive, Adar Poonawalla, told The Associated Press in December that the target was to make up to 100 million shots monthly by January and to split them equally between India and the world. But the federal government told states last month that the company was producing just 60 million shots a month.

The company has said that a fire in its facilities in January and a U.S. embargo on exporting raw materials needed to make the jabs has hobbled production. Poonawalla told AP that pivoting away from suppliers in the U.S. could result in a delay of up to six months.

Bharat Biotech chairman Krishna Ella told reporters in January that the company was aiming to make 700 million shots in 2021. But India's federal government told states last month that the company was producing just 10 million shots a month.

The government said last month that it was giving the company millions of dollars in grants to try to help it ramp up production.

Neither company nor India's Health Ministry responded to requests for comment.

## WHAT NEXT?

With India recording hundreds of thousands of new infections each day, the government on May 1 opened up vaccination to all adults. That caused a surge in demand that has laid bare the extent of the shortage.

India has so far received just 196 million shots, including 10 million as a part of COVAX, a worldwide initiative aimed at providing equitable access to vaccines. Just 41 million people have been fully vaccinated, while 104 million more have received the first shot.

But the number of shots administered has declined from an average of 3.6 million a day on April 10 to about 1.4 million a day on May 20.

To help with the shortage, India has greenlit the Russian vaccine Sputnik V, and 200,000 doses of it arrived last week.

The government says supplies will improve soon and expects more than 2 billion shots to be available

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between August and December, according to Dr. V.K. Paul, a government adviser. That would include 750 million shots made by Serum Institute, 550 million shots made by Bharat Biotech and 156 million shots from Russia.

There also are plans for five Indian companies to make the Russian vaccine locally and for Serum Institute to make a version of the Novavax vaccine and vaccines from five other Indian companies whose shots are still being tested.

But experts warn that such estimates are once again too optimistic.

"These are optimistic estimates ... there are many ifs and buts that one needs to consider," said Bal.

## Get the party started! Live audience for Eurovision final

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

ROTTERDAM, Netherlands (AP) — After more than a week of rehearsals, two semifinals and 53,000 COVID-19 tests for fans, staff and performers, the Eurovision Song Contest that was canceled last year because of the pandemic goes live Saturday in front of 3,500 fans and a global television audience.

While the hugely popular music festival that oozes flamboyance is seen as a significant step toward a post-pandemic return to live entertainment, not everybody managed to avoid the virus.

The popular Icelandic band Dadi og Gagnamagnid with their kitsch dance moves and green leisurewear are in the final, but cannot perform live because one member tested positive. Instead viewers will see a recording of one of the band's dress rehearsals.

"The point was to go and actually experience how it was to compete in Eurovision and that's just really not happening," lead singer Dadi Freyr said from isolation in Rotterdam.

While the entertainment world has changed in the pandemic, the Eurovision final formula familiar to its worldwide legion of fans has not. The event is being hosted as usual by the last winner, the Netherlands, except that it won in 2019.

After acts from 26 countries perform their songs Saturday night, they are awarded points by panels of music industry experts in each competing nation and by members of the public voting by phone, text message or via the contest's app. The winner takes home a glass microphone trophy and a potential career boost.

The two favorites among bookmakers couldn't be more different. One is Maneskin, an Italian band whose blend of funk and rock channels the Red Hot Chili Peppers. The other is Barbara Pravi, a French singer whose style harks back to Edith Piaf.

Pravi's song "Voilà," is a restrained ballad, but there is still plenty of the over-the-top spectacle that has become Eurovision's trademark.

Norway's singer Andreas Haukeland, whose stage name TIX is a reference to growing up with Tourette syndrome, sings his song "Fallen Angel" in a pair of giant white wings while chained to four prancing devils.

Cyprus' Elena Tsagrinou is flanked by four dancers in skin-tight red costumes as she performs "El Diablo," a song that has ignited protests among Orthodox Christians on the Mediterranean island, who claim it glorifies satanic worship. Tsagrinou says it's about an abusive relationship.

San Marino has enlisted the help of U.S. rapper Flo Rida to join performer Senhit in her bid to win the title for the first time for the tiny city-state surrounded by Italy.

Members of Iceland's entry are hoping to be allowed out of isolation to watch the final at Rotterdam's Ahoy Arena.

"I don't see why we shouldn't, because we've been quarantining for a week and we all tested negative except for one member," Freyr said.

## Cardinal Pell eyes a Vatican scandal he suspected long ago

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Cardinal George Pell is enjoying his first Roman spring since being exonerated of sex abuse charges in his native Australia: He receives visitors to his Vatican flat, sips midday Aperol spritzes

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at the outdoor cafe downstairs and keeps up religiously with news of a Holy See financial scandal that he suspected years ago.

Pell, who turns 80 in June, is buoyed by the perks of being a retired Vatican cardinal even as he tries to put back together a life and career that were upended by his criminal trials and 404 days spent in solitary confinement in a Melbourne lockup.

"I've become very Italian," Pell tells a visitor one morning, referring to his daily routine checking coronavirus cases in Italy. "I check the stats every day. But I'm regional: I go immediately to Lazio," which surrounds Rome.

Pell left his job as prefect of the Vatican's economy ministry in 2017 to return home to face charges that he sexually molested two 13-year-old choir boys in the sacristy of the Melbourne cathedral in 1996.

After a first jury deadlocked, a second convicted him and he was sentenced to six years in prison. The conviction was upheld on appeal only to be thrown out by Australia's High Court, which in April 2020 found there was reasonable doubt in the testimony of his lone accuser.

Pell and his supporters strongly denied the charges and believe he was scapegoated for all the crimes of the Australian Catholic Church's botched response to clergy sexual abuse. Yet victims and critics say Pell epitomizes everything wrong with how the church has dealt with the sex abuse problem and have denounced his exoneration.

Pell spoke to The Associated Press ahead of the U.S. release of the second volume of his jailhouse memoir, "Prison Journal, Volume 2," chronicling the middle four months of his term. The book charts his emotional low after the appeals court upheld his initial conviction, and ends with a sign of hope after Australia's High Court agreed to hear his case.

"Looking back, I was probably excessively optimistic that I'd get bail," Pell says now, crediting his "glass half-full" attitude to his Christian faith.

Pell still has many detractors — he freely uses the term "enemies" — who think him guilty. But in Rome, even many of his critics believed in his innocence, and since returning in September he has enjoyed a well-publicized papal audience and participates regularly in Vatican events.

Pell had returned to Rome to clean out his apartment, intending to make Sydney his permanent home.

But he never left. As Italy's COVID-19 resurgence hit, Pell spent the winter watching as the scandal over Vatican corruption and incompetence that he tried to uncover as Pope Francis' finance czar exploded publicly in ways he admits he never saw coming.

For the three years that Pell was in charge of the Vatican's finances, he tried to get a handle on just how much money the Secretariat of State had in its asset portfolio, what its investments were and what it did with the tens of millions of dollars in donations to the pope from the faithful.

He largely failed, as his nemesis in the Secretariat of State, Cardinal Angelo Becciu, blocked his efforts to impose international accounting and auditing standards. But now Becciu has been sacked, Francis has stripped the secretariat of its ability to manage the money and Vatican prosecutors are investigating the office's 350 million euro investment in a London real estate venture.

No indictments have been handed down after two years of investigation. But in court documents, prosecutors have accused an Italian broker involved in the London deal of trying to extort the Holy See of 15 million euros in fees, and they have accused a handful of Vatican officials of involvement.

Those same court documents, however, have made clear the entire venture was approved by top officials in the Secretariat of State, and witnesses say Francis himself approved a "just" compensation for the broker. Yet only low-ranking Vatican officials and external businessmen are known to be under investigation.

Pell said he is heartened that Vatican prosecutors are on the case, given the tens of millions of euros that were lost in the deal. But he expressed concerns about possible problems in the investigation and wondered if the truth will ever come out.

He noted a British judge recently issued a devastating ruling against the Vatican in a related asset seizure case against the broker, Gianluigi Torzi. The judge said Vatican prosecutors had made "appalling" omissions and misrepresentations in their request for judicial assistance, and his ruling essentially dismantled



much of their case against Torzi.

"He used the word 'appalling' about the level of competence," Pell said. The issues flagged in the British ruling are "a matter for concern," said Pell, for whom matters of due process are particularly dear.

"It's a matter of basic competence and justice," Pell said. "We must act within the norms of justice."

## Queen Elizabeth II visits carrier ahead of maiden deployment

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Queen Elizabeth II made a quick visit Saturday to the Royal Navy's flagship aircraft carrier that bears the name of her eponymous forebear, ahead of its maiden operational deployment.

The HMS Queen Elizabeth, named after the Tudor-era monarch who vanquished the Spanish Armada, will be leading a 28-week deployment to the Far East that Prime Minister Boris Johnson has insisted is not confrontational towards China.

The 3 billion-pound (\$4.2 billion) ship, which has eight RAF F35B stealth fighter jets on board, will depart from Portsmouth Naval Base in southern England later Saturday. It will be accompanied by six Royal Navy ships, a submarine, 14 naval helicopters and a company of Royal Marines.

Arriving by helicopter, the 95-year-old monarch was greeted by the ship's commanding officer Captain Angus Essenhigh and Commodore Stephen Moorhouse, commander of the U.K. Carrier Strike Group.

The carrier group will travel through the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea, then from the Gulf of Aden to the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean to the Philippine Sea.

It will carry out visits to 40 countries including India, Japan, South Korea and Singapore with more than 70 engagements, including sailing alongside the French carrier Charles De Gaulle in the Mediterranean. A total of 3,700 sailors, aviators and marines are involved in the deployment which will cover 25,000 nautical miles.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace has said the deployment "will be flying the flag for Global Britain — projecting our influence, signalling our power, engaging with our friends and reaffirming our commitment to addressing the security challenges of today and tomorrow."

The trip comes after the British government's review of defense and foreign policy recommended that the U.K. "tilt" its focus towards the Indo-Pacific region, in response to China's growing influence on the world stage.

"One of the things we'll be doing clearly is showing to our friends in China that we believe in the international law of the sea and, in a confident but not a confrontational way, we will be vindicating that point," Johnson said when visiting the ship on Friday.

## As US schools resume testing, large numbers are opting out

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

Standardized tests are returning to the nation's schools this spring, but millions of students will face shorter exams that carry lower stakes, and most families are being given the option to forgo testing entirely.

With new flexibility from the Biden administration, states are adopting a patchwork of testing plans that aim to curb the stress of exams while still capturing some data on student learning. The lenient approach means large swaths of students will go untested, shattering hopes for a full picture of how much learning has been set back by the pandemic.

"We will end up with a highly imperfect set of data," said Robin Lake, director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington. "This is something our country will have to commit to tracking and learning about for at least the next few years, and maybe the next decade."

Some of the nation's largest districts plan to test only a fraction of their students as many continue to learn remotely. In New York City, students must opt in to be tested this year. In Los Angeles, most students are not being asked to take state exams this year. Other districts are scaling back questions or testing in fewer subjects.

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It's the latest episode in a long-fought battle over school testing and, as in the past, parents are polarized. Some are demanding tests to get a sense of their children's progress. Others see no need to put their children through that kind of stress.

As a teacher, Jay Wamsted believes there's value in testing. But when his sixth-grade daughter Kira asked to opt out this year, he saw no reason to object. He already knows she needs to catch up on math after months of remote learning. And as a teacher at her school, he knew that many other students were also backing out, undermining the value of the results.

"I know she's a little behind, and I don't need that data," said Wamsted, who lives in Smyrna, Georgia. "To take a month to gather data that is not going to mean anything to any of their teachers next year — it seems like a waste of time."

Parent Abby Norman found her third-grade daughter crying in her bedroom the morning tests were scheduled to begin at her school near Atlanta. Priscilla, 9, had just returned to the classroom after learning remotely and was worried she wasn't prepared.

"She was so nervous about this test that I don't care about at all, that does not matter to me," said Norman, who is a preacher. "I literally ended up telling her, 'If you want to lick the test and give it back, I don't care.'"

With that reassurance, Abby agreed to take the tests and scored "almost off the charts," her mom said. Still, Norman resents that students were put in that situation at all.

Several states lobbied the Biden administration to cancel standardized tests entirely for a second year, but the Education Department aimed for a middle ground: It told states to test as many students as possible without requiring them to come in just for exams. The goal, the agency said, should be to measure the pandemic's impact and identify how to help students recover.

Acknowledging the challenges of the pandemic, the agency invited states to shorten or delay tests, and it urged them to ease the stakes for students. But the department later granted additional leniency to certain states, prompting criticism that it failed to set a clear bar.

Washington, D.C., was granted permission to cancel tests because 88% of students were learning remotely, but the agency rejected similar requests from Michigan, New York and Georgia. Requests to scale back testing were granted in Colorado and Oregon, but a plan to narrow the testing pool in Washington state was rejected.

Those who opposed testing say it's the last thing students need after such a challenging year. Schools have other ways to evaluate students, they say, and testing only takes away from classroom time.

Michigan's education chief has blasted the uneven flexibility granted to states. Schools across Michigan have already used other tests to assess students, he said, and more exams "will inform precisely nothing about our children's needs." State officials in New York argued that testing is unlikely to produce useful data given the variability in instruction during the pandemic.

"In fact, the students most in need of state assessments — those receiving remote instruction — are the very children who are not required to take the test," the state's top education officials wrote in an April statement.

Testing advocates counter that there's still value in collecting as much data as possible. Lake, at the University of Washington, said even imperfect results can help illuminate the scope of the problem schools face as they help students recover.

"Standardized tests at the state level are the most consistent data we've had to track academic progress, so it would be a huge missed opportunity to forgo those tests this year," she said. "Flying blind is not a responsible position for a public official to take."

Some critics blame the Biden administration for allowing halfhearted attempts at evaluations. They point to places like New York City, where the outgoing schools chief urged parents in February to consider opting out of tests. Oregon's two largest districts have voted to defy state orders and skip testing. The state says their penalty will be to submit a plan to come into compliance next year.

"These states are simply playing games. They're not even pretending to make an effort to test students, and the Biden administration is letting them get away with it," said Michael Petrilli, president of the Thomas

B. Fordham Institute, a conservative education think tank.

If testing isn't feasible now, Petrilli said, it should be done in the fall. Maryland, New Jersey and Washington state have postponed tests, and it's an option for districts in California.

In some states, officials are pushing ahead with tests much as they have in the past. In Tennessee and Arkansas, education officials have said all healthy students are expected to take state exams, which are only being offered in-person. More than 1.4 million tests have already been given in Arkansas this spring, and the state is on track to test at least 95% of students, according to the state's education department.

In normal years, the federally required tests are used to gauge school effectiveness and chart the progress of students, both as individuals and in demographic groups. In some states, students must pass certain tests to move to the next grade or graduate from high school. But this year, most states are focusing on measuring student growth and letting schools and students off the hook for the results.

After last year's tests were canceled, there was hope that this year's exams would provide the most comprehensive look yet at the pandemic's impact on education. But the inconsistency between states now makes a broad analysis impossible, said Scott Marion, executive director of the nonprofit Center for Assessment, which helps states design and evaluate tests.

Still, he believes the results will have value. As schools begin the long process to help students recover, he said, this year's data will provide a foundation to measure against.

"I do think the data can be a useful baseline going forward," he said. "If this is the low point, or close to it, how are our kids going to come out of it going forward?"

## Egyptian mediators hold talks to firm up Israel-Hamas truce

By WAFAA SHURAF and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Egyptian mediators held talks Saturday to firm up an Israel-Hamas cease-fire as Palestinians in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip began to assess the damage from 11 days of intense Israeli bombardment. A 130-truck convoy carrying urgently needed aid was headed to Gaza.

Saturday marked the first full day of a truce that ended the fourth Israel-Hamas war in just over a decade. In the fighting, Israel unleashed hundreds of airstrikes against militant targets in Gaza, while Hamas and other militants fired more than 4,000 rockets toward Israel. More than 250 people were killed, the vast majority of them Palestinians.

Gaza City's busiest commercial area, Omar al-Mukhtar Street, was covered in debris, smashed cars and twisted metal after a 13-floor building in its center was flattened in an Israeli airstrike. Merchandise was covered in soot and strewn inside smashed stores and on the pavement. Municipal workers removed broken glass and twisted metal from streets and sidewalks.

"We really didn't expect this amount of damage," said Ashour Subeih, who sells baby clothes. "We thought the strike was a bit further from us. But as you can see not an area of the shop is intact." Having been in business for one year, Subeih estimated his losses were double what he has made so far.

Both Israel and Hamas have claimed victory. There was a widespread expectation that the cease-fire would stick for now, but that another round of fighting at some point seems inevitable. Underlying issues remain unresolved, including an Israeli-Egyptian border blockade, now in its 14th year, that is choking Gaza's more than 2 million residents and a refusal by the Islamic militant Hamas to disarm.

The fighting began May 10, when Hamas militants in Gaza fired long-range rockets toward Jerusalem. The barrage came after days of clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. Heavy-handed police tactics at the compound and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers had inflamed tensions.

The war has further sidelined Hamas' main political rival, the internationally backed Palestinian Authority, which oversees autonomous enclaves in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. It appeared that Hamas increasingly positioned itself as a defender of Jerusalem in Palestinian public opinion.

On Friday, hours after the cease-fire took effect, thousands of Palestinians in the Al-Aqsa compound chanted against Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and his self-rule government. "Dogs of the Palestin-

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ian Authority, out, out," they shouted, and "The people want the president to leave."

It was an unprecedented display of anger against Abbas. The conflict also brought to the surface deep frustration among Palestinians, whether in the occupied West Bank, Gaza or within Israel, over the status quo, with the Israeli-Palestinian peace process all but abandoned for years.

Despite his weakened status, Abbas will be the point of contact for any renewed U.S. diplomacy, since Israel and the West, including the United States, consider Hamas a terrorist organization.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is to meet with Abbas and Israeli leaders when he visits in the coming week. Abbas is expected to raise demands that any Gaza reconstruction plans go through the Palestinian Authority to avoid strengthening Hamas.

Meanwhile, two teams of Egyptian mediators are in Israel and the Palestinian territories to continue talks on firming up a cease-fire deal — and securing a long-term calm, an Egyptian diplomat said Saturday.

The diplomat said discussions include implementing agreed-on measures in Gaza and Jerusalem, including ways to prevent practices that led to the latest fighting. The official did not elaborate. He was apparently referring to violence at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the planned eviction of Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in east Jerusalem.

The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss behind-the-scenes deliberations.

Separately, Egypt said it would send a 130-truck convoy carrying humanitarian aid and medical supplies to Gaza. The convoy is expected to enter Gaza on Saturday.

The bombardment struck a blow to the already decrepit infrastructure in the small coastal territory, home to more than 2 million Palestinians. It flattened high-rises and houses, tore up roads and wrecked water systems. At least 30 health facilities were damaged, forcing a halt to coronavirus testing in the territory.

The Gaza Health Ministry says at least 243 Palestinians were killed, including 66 children, with 1,910 people wounded. It does not differentiate between fighters and civilians. Twelve people were killed in Israel, all but one of them civilians, including a 5-year-old boy and 16-year-old girl.

Israel has accused Hamas and the smaller militant group of Islamic Jihad of hiding the actual number of fighters killed in the war. Prime Minister Netanyahu said Friday that more than 200 militants were killed, including 25 senior commanders.

Islamic Jihad on Saturday gave a first account of deaths within its ranks, saying that 19 of its commanders and fighters were killed, including the head of the rocket unit in northern Gaza.

## Return of Iraqis seen as easing threat from Syria camp

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

SHADDADI, Syria (AP) — The Iraqi government is expected to bring home about 100 Iraqi families from a sprawling camp in Syria next week, a first-time move that U.S. officials see as a hopeful sign in a long-frustrated effort to repatriate thousands from a site known as a breeding ground for young insurgents.

During a visit Friday to Syria, where he met with troops and commanders, the top U.S. general for the Middle East expressed optimism that the transfer from the al-Hol camp will happen. Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie has repeatedly warned that the youth in the camps are being radicalized and will become the next generation of dangerous militants.

"It would be the first step in many such repatriations, and I think that's going to be the key to bringing down the population in the al-Hol camp, and indeed in other camps across the region," McKenzie told reporters traveling with him, "Nations need to bring back their citizens, repatriate them, reintegrate them, deradicalize them when necessary and make them productive elements of society."

A U.S. official said the transfer of people from the camp in northeast Syria is one of a number of issues the U.S. and Iraqi governments are discussing as they work out a road map for future diplomatic and military relations. The issue came up during meetings on Thursday, when McKenzie stopped in Baghdad, the Iraqi capital. The official was not authorized to public discuss internal deliberations and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Iraqi leaders earlier this year talked about repatriating some of their citizens, but did not follow through.

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So the plans for next week have been met with a bit of skepticism, and it appeared unclear whether it might be more than a one-time deal.

The al-Hol camp is home to as many as 70,000 people — mostly women and children — who have been displaced by the civil war in Syria and the battle against the Islamic State group. As many as half are Iraqis. About 10,000 foreigners are housed in a secure annex, and many in the camp remain die-hard IS supporters.

Many countries have refused to repatriate their citizens who were among those from around the world who came to join IS after the extremists declared their caliphate in 2014. The group's physical hold on territory was ended in 2017, but many countries balk at repatriating their citizens, fearing their links to IS.

In late March, the main U.S.-backed Kurdish-led force in northeast Syria conducted a five-day sweep inside al-Hol that was assisted by U.S. forces. At least 125 suspects were arrested.

Since then, McKenzie said, security has gotten better at the camp. But, he added, security has no real impact on the radicalization of the youth there.

"That's what concerns me," he said as he stood at a base in northeast Syria, not far from the Turkish border. "The ability of ISIS to reach out, touch these young people and turn them — in a way that unless we can find a way to take it back it's going to make us pay a steep price down the road."

As McKenzie crisscrossed eastern Syria, stopping at four U.S. outposts, his message was short and direct: U.S. forces remain in Syria to fight the remnants of IS, so the militants can't regroup. Pockets of IS are still active, particularly west of the Euphrates River in vast stretches of ungoverned territory that are controlled by the Syrian government led by President Bashar Assad.

Out there and in the camps, the underlying conditions of poverty and sectarianism that gave rise to IS still exist, said British Brig. Gen. Richard Bell, the deputy commanding general for the coalition fight against IS in Iraq and Syria, who traveled with McKenzie.

McKenzie said it was important to keep the pressure on IS because the militants still have "an aspirational goal to attack the United States homeland. We want to prevent that from happening."

He spoke to reporters from The Associated Press and ABC News who agreed because of security concerns not to report on the Syria trip until they left the country. As he spoke, a row of M-2 Bradley fighting vehicles were lined up behind him — a reminder of clashes U.S. forces had last year with Russian troops in the north. At the time, McKenzie requested and got more troops and armored vehicles to deter what the U.S. said was Russian aggression against patrols by U.S. and Syrian Democratic Forces.

But he said they also represented America's continued commitment to the mission in Syria, to assist the SDF in the battle against IS.

"Look at the Bradleys behind me, look at the base that we're sitting in right now," McKenzie said. "I think it's a pretty strong testament to our commitment."

Bell said the ongoing coalition commitment is a concern the SDF asks about. The answer, he said, is a political decision for nation's leaders, but the coalition is in Syria to ensure the enduring defeat of IS.

"They are attempting to reconstitute themselves," Bell said. "Until the last remnants are completely defeated, and that their will is also broken to stop them from trying to come back, then I think there's going to be requirements to assist our partner forces."

But when asked how long U.S. troops will stay, he quickly says it is up to President Joe Biden.

During his daylong visit, McKenzie met with the SDF commander, Mazloum Abdi, at an undisclosed military base in eastern Syria. In a tweet Saturday, Abdi said they discussed security and economic challenges in the region. He added that "we have received messages about the continued presence of Coalition forces, joint cooperation to combat ISIS & efforts to protect & stabilize the region."

Biden has ordered a full withdrawal from Afghanistan, but so far has said little about the close to 1,000 U.S. troops in Syria and the roughly 2,500 in Iraq. America's presence in Syria is part of a global posture review now being done by the Pentagon.

**2 separate China quakes cause damage; 3 dead, dozens hurt**

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BEIJING (AP) — A strong, shallow earthquake shook southwestern China near the border with Myanmar, killing at least three people and injuring more than two dozen, while a separate, more intense quake early Saturday collapsed a bridge and caused other damage in central China.

The first, 6.4 magnitude earthquake hit Yunnan province late Friday. The second 7.3 magnitude quake occurred hours later in the southern part of Qinghai province, about 1,000 kilometers (621 miles) to the south, according to Chinese measurements.

U.S. Geological Survey geophysicist Jonathan Tytell said the two quakes were not related.

The Qinghai earthquake was followed by 453 aftershocks throughout the early morning into midday, according to the official People's Daily newspaper. At least eight people were injured.

While no deaths have been reported so far in Qinghai province, the quakes tore up roads and bridges, with one collapsing completely, broken into segments.

The Yunnan province seismological bureau gave the magnitude of Friday night's quake and said it struck 8 kilometers (5 miles) below the surface northwest of the city of Dali.

Shallow quakes often cause more damage, especially in populated areas.

The earthquake caused strong shaking around Dali, but Chinese news reports showed relatively little damage.

Three people died and 28 were injured, Yunan province's publicity department said Saturday.

Relief efforts were underway, with the provincial authorities sending emergency rations and tents to the affected areas. In Qinghai, authorities set up temporary safety shelters due to continuous aftershocks.

Last year, a magnitude 5 earthquake in Yunnan killed four people and injured 23.

China's worst earthquake in recent years struck the mountainous western portion of Sichuan province to the north of Yunnan in 2008, killing nearly 90,000 people.

## Food, shelter, beatings: Border city divided over migrants

By RENATA BRITO and BERNAT ARMANGUÉ Associated Press

CEUTA, Spain (AP) — Residents of Spain's multi-ethnic city of Ceuta are used to being in the news every time the fragile alliance between Spain and Morocco shakes up.

For many "Ceutis," as locals are known, that comes with being a speck of a European nation in North Africa. The city is culturally closely intertwined with Morocco, with Muslims making over 40% of its population, but also separated from it by high perimeter fences that set apart the two extremes of poverty and prosperity.

But when relations hit a two-decade low this week over Spain's help to one of Morocco's top enemies, "Ceutis" confronted the sudden arrival of thousands of African migrants with sympathy, concern and in some cases hostility.

In one neighborhood, Muslim women, moved by the plight of young Moroccan men, gathered in a traditional house to sort out and distribute donated clothes. They also cooked food and offered migrants sleeping in the streets a place to shower.

The women said the migrants could be their children — and that their plight brought memories of past times when the migrant flow was in the opposite direction.

"I remember my mother telling me they were migrating too, people didn't have anything to eat and were going to Morocco," said 75-year-old Aisha Ali Mohammed, who was among those sorting through garments. "Now they are migrating here."

Dozens of migrants gathered for respite outside of Nawal Ben Chalout's family home, where she had shifted around to give shelter to three young men.

"The boys are very confused, very scared, I talk to them and they ask for food," Ben Chalout said, adding that her neighbors were also opening their doors to offer a place to sleep and eat. "Sometimes they don't even want food. They have questions, they want information."

But the solidarity has not been unanimous. Several migrants spoke of attacks by groups of locals at night as they slept in the streets or fields.

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Fouad, an Algerian man who was in Morocco and crossed into Ceuta earlier this week, said armed men woke him up pointing a gun at him. They beat him and others with a stick, used pepper spray on him and took his phone and money.

One migrant was taken to hospital after the beating, said Fouad, who declined to give his last name for fear of reprisal and deportation.

The arrival of 8,000 migrants in just 48 hours in a city of 85,000 was more than the result of strained relations between allies. It was a reminder of the sheer inequality between the two sides. While per capita GDP in 2019 was \$30,000 on the Spanish side, it drops to \$3,200 across the border, according to the World Bank.

But the bustling businesses of Spain's Ceuta and Fnideq, the closest Moroccan town, have taken a big hit during the pandemic. With the border closed, over 30,000 workers who used to commute across it daily have been jobless for much of the past year.

Even before the pandemic hit, nationalist voices in Rabat were reviving old claims on Ceuta and Melilla, Spain's second coastal enclave in North Africa.

That has fueled anti-Moroccan sentiment in Ceuta, a feeling tapped into by Spain's new far-right party Vox, which became the city's most popular party in Spain's 2019 vote.

Vox has referred to the influx of migrants as an "invasion," but the term has been also used by some conservatives, including the autonomous city's president, Juan Jesús Vivas.

His government said more than half of the city's children skipped school on Tuesday because their parents feared instability in the streets and some shops closed, fearing looting from cashless migrants.

But Fouad and others directed their anger at the Moroccan government for using them as pawns in the diplomatic impasse with Spain.

The government in Rabat has denied that it loosened border control to allow the migrants to cross, blaming it on the weather and the post-Ramadan "exhaustion" of its border guards. It has also criticized Spain for providing COVID-19 treatment to Brahim Ghail, the head of the Polisario Front that is fighting to make Western Sahara independent of Morocco, which annexed it in the 1970s.

"This was not improvised, it was planned. Morocco benefits by sending us," said an 18-year-old Moroccan who crossed into Ceuta and feared deportation if his identity was published. "We are Morocco's experiment, we are like lab rats."

The man told how he had lost his mother years ago in a stampede at the Ceuta border, where many women earned their living as porters before authorities closed the border.

Many from Morocco said they wanted to reach mainland Spain to find work and stability. Yaser, a 26-year-old from Tetouan, said those he knew brought skills and education with them.

"We have boys with lots of education, baccalaureates, lots of diplomas, but they don't have work," he said. "That is the basis of all the problems, work, rights, good life ... that is all people want."

## Climbing guide says at least 100 virus cases on Everest

By BINAJ GURUBACHARYA Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — An expert climbing guide said Saturday that a coronavirus outbreak on Mount Everest has infected at least 100 climbers and support staff, giving the first comprehensive estimate amid official Nepalese denials of a COVID-19 cluster on the world's highest peak.

Lukas Furtenbach of Austria, who last week became the only prominent outfitter to halt his Everest expedition due to virus fears, said one of his foreign guides and six Nepali Sherpa guides have tested positive.

"I think with all the confirmed cases we know now — confirmed from (rescue) pilots, from insurance, from doctors, from expedition leaders — I have the positive tests so we can prove this," Furtenbach told The Associated Press in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu.

"We have at least 100 people minimum positive for COVID in base camp, and then the numbers might be something like 150 or 200," he said.

He said it was obvious there were many cases at the Everest base camp because he could visibly see

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people were sick, and could hear people coughing in their tents.

A total of 408 foreign climbers were issued permits to climb Everest this season, aided by several hundred Sherpa guides and support staff who've been stationed at base camp since April.

Nepalese mountaineering officials have denied there are any active cases this season among climbers and support staff at all base camps for the country's Himalayan mountains. Mountaineering was closed last year due to the pandemic.

Nepalese officials could not immediately be reached for comment Saturday. Other climbing teams have not announced any COVID-19 infections among their members or staff. Several climbers have reported testing positive after they were brought down from the Everest base camp.

Furtenbach said most teams on the mountain were not carrying virus testing kits, and that before his team pulled out, they had helped conduct tests and had confirmed two cases.

Most teams are still at base camp, hoping for clear weather next week so they can make a final push to the summit before the climbing season closes at the end of the month, Furtenbach said.

In late April, a Norwegian climber became the first to test positive at the Everest base camp. He was flown by helicopter to Kathmandu, where he was treated and later returned home.

Nepal is experiencing a virus surge, with record numbers of new infections and deaths. China last week canceled climbing from its side of Mount Everest due to fears the virus could be spread from the Nepalese side.

Nepal reported 8,607 new infections and 177 deaths on Friday, bringing the nation's totals since the pandemic began to more than 497,000 infections and 6,024 deaths.

## Daily readings at tomb honor Dante 700 years after his death

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

RAVENNA, Italy (AP) — As she has each evening for the last eight months, Giuliana Turati opened her well-worn copy of Dante's "Divine Comedy" as the last of 13 peels of a church bell reverberated around the tomb of the great Italian poet.

Italy is honoring Dante Alighieri — who died in exile from Florence on Sept. 13, 1321 — in myriad ways on the 700th anniversary of his death. Those include new musical scores and gala concerts, exhibits and dramatic readings against stunning backgrounds in every corner of the country. Pope Francis has written an Apostolic letter, the latest by a pope examining Dante's relationship with the Roman Catholic Church.

But nowhere is the tribute more intimate than before his tomb, which was restored for the anniversary, as dusk falls each day in the city of Ravenna, a former Byzantine capital.

Turati, a life-long Ravenna resident, comes to listen as volunteer Dante-lovers read a single canton, following along in the copy of the "Divine Comedy" inscribed with the year she studied the poet's masterwork in school: 1967.

"There is always something new," Turati said. "Even if you have read and reread it, Dante always has something new to tell us."

The daily reading, part of a yearlong celebration of Dante that started in September, is intended to connect ordinary people -- residents and tourists, scholars and the uninitiated -- with the "Divine Comedy" as an appreciation by the city he adopted while in exile.

Copies of the "Divine Comedy" in 60 languages are housed nearby, and organizers envision they also will be read by foreign tourists as soon as post-pandemic travel resumes.

"Reading Dante is perhaps the truest and most profound homage that we can offer," said Francesca Masi, secretary general for Ravenna's Dante 700 organizing committee. "It requires everyone to make an effort to go toward Dante, while too often we ask Dante to come toward us, perhaps stretching a little without understanding him, ideologizing him. Instead, this solemn way of reading, without comment, is respectful."

Dante spent years composing "Divine Comedy" during his banishment from his native Florence, the home of the vernacular he elevated to a literary language through his poetry.

While Dante was embraced as a symbol of Italy's unification in 1861, Florence and Ravenna continue to



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battle for Dante's legacy. Disputes over who has the right to claim his remains still erupt in newspapers seven centuries after his death.

Florence, so it seems, would have given up its claim by sentencing Dante to exile, his return punishable by death.

The sentence is written in a 14th-century court ledger on display through Aug. 8 as part of an exhibition on Dante's relationship with Florence at the Bargello National Museum. The museum is housed in a medieval palace that Dante would have known and visited as the seat of the highest judicial magistrate, and where he was sentenced in absentia in the same vaulted room that now displays a famous bronze of David by Renaissance sculptor Donatello.

The museum also holds a fresco of Dante, painted by his contemporary Giotto after the poet's death, and also of Lucifer, depicted with Dante's own imagery — three heads and the wings of a bat.

"It is very important, because it means that the iconography introduced by Dante was immediately received in Florence in the figurative arts," Bargello National Museum Director Paola D'Agostino.

Another exhibit in the San Domenico Museum, near Ravenna in Forli, brings together 300 works from all over the world to tell the story of Dante through the ages, from pieces that influenced him to ones he influenced, museum director Gianfranco Brunelli said.

The exhibit, put on in conjunction with Florence's Uffizi and running through July 4, includes art contemporary to Dante, elaborate manuscripts of his work, portraits of the poet and pieces inspired by his epic, monumental poem by artists such as Picasso, Giotto, Tintoretto and Michelangelo.

Brunelli said it's no surprise that Dante has continued to fascinate people through the centuries.

"Dante's themes are those of heaven and earth. He speaks of salvation and pardon, of things very fundamental to human life," Brunelli said. "For this reason, art couldn't do other than return an infinite number of times to Dante and his themes."

After being sentenced to exile in 1302, Dante spent much of the rest of his life in Verona and then Ravenna, where he arrived in 1318 or 1319. He died of malaria after a diplomatic mission to the Republic of Venice, 100 kilometers (60 miles) to the north.

In Ravenna, Dante would have visited the city's ancient Byzantine basilicas and famed mosaics, and it is believed that he took inspiration for some passages of his masterpiece. Masi, on a recent tour, indicated the "Procession of the Virgins" inside the Basilica of Sant'Appolinare Nuovo, which is reflected in a verse from "Purgatory," his masterpiece's second section: "And they wore white-whiteness, that, in this world has never been."

For the anniversary, another notable adopted citizen of Ravenna, Riccardo Muti, plans to conduct a new orchestral musical score inspired by "Purgatory" and written by Armenian composer Tigran Mansurian on Sept. 12, as part of the Ravennal Festival dedicated to Dante. It will be followed by performances in Florence and Verona.

The closing festivities in September are to include an annual pilgrimage by officials from Florence, who arrive in Ravenna with an offering of oil to keep the flame above Dante's mausoleum tomb lit for another year.

"Dante found his peace in this city," Muti told The Associated Press, adding that he found it "a comfort" to live just 200 meters (yards) from the final resting place "of this extraordinary soul."

"I personally feel this closeness to his bones as a privilege, as if from that tomb emerges a sense of honesty, of righteousness, of a good omen for the Italian people from Ravenna to the world," Muti said.

## Cricket gear donation brings joy to migrants stuck in Bosnia

By ELDAR EMRIC Associated Press

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Joyful cheers echoed through an asylum-seekers camp in Bosnia this week as dozens of teenagers and young men put their daily struggles aside for a game of cricket.

Players absorbed in the match ran over an improvised pitch clutching wooden bats or throwing balls. Others supported the teams by clapping from the side, their faces radiant.

"It was a good game!" Sifet, an asylum-seeker from Afghanistan, said.

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"Tomorrow we have the final tournament!" Mohammad Jahanzeb, who is from Pakistan, chimed in.

The opportunity for relaxation and fun at the Blazuj camp in Bosnia's capital, Sarajevo, was made possible by a Rome-based humanitarian group which brought in donated cricket gear for refugees and migrants in the Balkan country.

Andrea Costa, president of the Baobab Experience association, told the Associated Press that activists got the idea from the asylum-seekers themselves, particularly those coming from Pakistan, Bangladesh or India, where cricket is a national sport.

Thousands of people fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East, Africa or Asia have been stranded for months, if not years, in Bosnia while waiting for a chance to move toward Western Europe. From Bosnia, migrants try first to cross to neighboring European Union nation Croatia, before continuing on toward wealthier EU countries.

"Speaking with many young people ... it came naturally to ask them what they were missing the most, what would they want," Costa said. "Exactly as an Italian boy would ask for a football, to play some football, they say they are missing cricket."

Costa and his team drove to Bosnia after collecting donations from the U.K., Indian and Pakistani embassies in Rome and those countries' communities in Italy, Costa said. Along with Sarajevo, gear was delivered to the central Bosnian town of Tuzla.

"Our next step with the cricket will be going back to Italy, going back to Europe, and saying that the migrants were very happy," Costa said.

Among those who waited eagerly for the packages to arrive was Ali Cheema, who said he started playing cricket when he was 7 and used to play for several clubs in his native Pakistan.

Now 24, Cheema has been in Bosnia for two years. As the car carrying the cricket equipment pulled over in Tuzla, he was there to open the bags filled with bats, poles, gloves, jerseys and caps.

"We are going to play a cricket match as soon as possible," he said, explaining that previously "we cut some wood" to make bats. A day later, Cheema and his friends could be seen practicing on a playground in Tuzla.

"I decided to go from Pakistan to follow my dreams," Cheema said. "I would like to go to England and continue to play cricket, because I was a cricket player in Pakistan and I didn't get enough opportunity."

Costa said his organization plans to do more to help the young foreigners in Bosnia migrants get engaged in sports and "pass the day with the things that they like."

"First of all, we believe it is their right to reach their goal, that it is their right to reach Europe," Costa said. "And second of all, our organization thinks that since while they are transiting these countries, every effort has to be done to help them feel welcome and stay in good condition."

## Mississippi's last abortion clinic at center of US debate

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — The bright pink building in an eclectic neighborhood of Mississippi's capital goes by different names. To the anti-abortion protesters whose demonstrations have sparked a noise ordinance, it is an "abortion mill." To those who work and volunteer there, the facility known as the "pink house" provides the last safe haven in Mississippi for women who choose to have an abortion.

Now, the only abortion clinic in Mississippi is facing what could be its biggest challenge. The U.S. Supreme Court said Monday that it will hear arguments this fall over a Mississippi law that would limit abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy — a case designed to test how far a court remade under former President Donald Trump is willing to go to restrict the right to an abortion.

The 2018 Mississippi law has been on hold because of the court fight. If justices allow it to take effect, that wouldn't have a huge impact on who can get an abortion in Mississippi. Health care providers at Jackson Women's Health Organization don't perform abortions after 16 weeks. But clinic director Shannon Brewer said upholding the ban would prompt lawmakers in conservative states to push to more restrictions.

"They'll steadily chip away at it. And then once they know they can, they're going to constantly do it," Brewer said Tuesday.

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As states have enacted stricter laws and the number of clinics has declined, thousands of women have crossed state lines for abortion. A 2019 analysis by The Associated Press found at least 276,000 women terminated pregnancies outside their home state between 2012 and 2017. In pockets of the Midwest, South and Mountain West, the number of women terminating a pregnancy in another state rose considerably, particularly where a lack of clinics meant the closest provider was in another state or where less restrictive policies made it easier and quicker to have an abortion there.

With no doctors in Mississippi willing to do abortions, five out-of-state doctors rotate through Jackson. Some patients travel hours from small towns in one of the poorest states of the country — first for counseling and then 24 hours later for the abortion.

One woman who has ended two pregnancies at the clinic said she has never had a moment's regret over those decisions. At the time, she was in her 30s and did what was best for herself and her young child, she said.

While at the clinic, she and the other women talked to each other as they waited. She recalled their stories: One had been raped by her own father; another had been raped by her boss; another was in medical school.

"I want women to understand that it's OK and it's not something that you have to feel guilty about," she said. She spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because she's in a court dispute with her child's father and she believes speaking publicly about her abortions could hurt her in that case.

Outside the clinic, anti-abortion protesters face off against volunteer escorts. Demonstrators often try to block cars from entering the clinic parking lot. Some pray, sing or hold posters with graphic photos of aborted fetuses. Others climb ladders to look over a fence that surrounds the clinic, yelling at the volunteer escorts who call themselves "pink house defenders" and the patients they accompany inside.

Doug Lane, president of Pastors for Life, is a frequent presence in front of the pink building where he tries to persuade women and girls to forgo abortion. He said he and other protesters are exercising their free-speech rights and they sometimes change women's minds, directing them to a nearby crisis pregnancy center that offers ultrasounds and baby clothing.

"We have a right to be heard, even by people who disagree with us and object to us," Lane said.

The protests outside the clinic have become a flashpoint in its Jackson neighborhood.

Two restaurants sit directly across a street from the building. Some days, protesters are silent or pray quietly to themselves. Other times, they use bullhorns that can be heard inside the restaurants, even with doors closed. Cars driving by honk in support or admonishment.

On a recent day, families at one of the restaurants ate outside at a cluster of tables no more than 20 feet (6 meters) from two children sitting silently holding signs saying, "We are ambassadors of Jesus Christ." A woman passed back and forth praying under her breath and holding a sign: "Pray to end abortion."

In 2019, the Jackson City Council enacted an ordinance to limit noise outside medical facilities. Some council members said their action was in response to complaints about activity outside the abortion clinic, but the city backed down and repealed the ordinance a year later after a lawsuit challenged the rule.

Nathan Glenn co-owns the two restaurants across from the clinic. He said his family has been in business there about 20 years, and when the restaurants opened he didn't know they were near an abortion clinic. He said he respects people's right to protest but they block the entrance to the restaurants and yell at diners.

Clinic director Brewer said all the restrictions and protests aren't going to stop abortions in Mississippi — they just serve to make it more dangerous. She said the people who oppose abortion pretend to care about the women and their future children but if they really cared, they'd spend more time taking care of children once they're born by paying for things like better health care or child care.

"It's not going to stop abortions in Mississippi. Abortions were going on in Mississippi before Roe v. Wade," Brewer said. "So I think that they're not thinking it through, or they just really don't care."

**Infrastructure deal slips, GOP pans \$1.7T White House offer**

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By LISA MASCARO and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The prospects for an ambitious infrastructure deal have been thrown into serious doubt after the White House reduced President Joe Biden's sweeping proposal to \$1.7 trillion but Republican senators rejected the compromise as disappointing, saying "vast differences" remain.

While talks have not collapsed, the downbeat assessment is certain to mean new worries from Democrats that time is slipping to strike a deal. The president's team is holding to a soft Memorial Day deadline to determine whether a compromise is within reach. Skepticism had been rising on all sides over the lack of significant movement off Biden's \$2.3 trillion plan or the GOP's proposed \$568 billion alternative.

"This proposal exhibits a willingness to come down in size," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki, disclosing the new offer Friday as talks were underway between key Cabinet secretaries and GOP senators at a crucial stage toward a deal.

But after the hourlong meeting, the Republicans quickly rejected the new approach as "well above the range" of a proposal that could win bipartisan support.

The two sides "seem further apart" than when negotiations began, according to a statement from an aide to Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., the lead negotiator for the group of six GOP senators.

The White House and the Republican senators have been in talks ever since Biden met with a core group of Republican negotiators over the possibility of working together on an infrastructure plan. The White House dispatched the transportation and commerce secretaries and top aides to Capitol Hill to meet with the Republicans earlier this week, and they had a follow-up video call Friday.

According to a memo obtained by The Associated Press, the administration's new approach is cutting more than \$550 billion from the president's initial offer.

But the memo makes clear Biden is not interested in the Republicans' idea of having consumers pay for the new investments through tolls, gas taxes or other fees. Instead, the administration is sticking with his proposal to raise corporate taxes to pay for the new investment, which is a red line for Republicans.

"Our approach should ensure that corporations are paying their fair share," said the memo from the administration's negotiators to the GOP senators.

But Republicans dismissed the new White House offer as "very marginal movement" on the topline without much difference in policy, according to a Republican aide familiar with the negotiations and granted anonymity to discuss them.

The new offer was "disappointing," the aide said.

Securing a vast infrastructure plan is Biden's top priority as he seeks to make good on his campaign pledge to "build back better" in the aftermath of the coronavirus crisis and the economic churn from a shifting economy. With narrow Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, the president is reaching out to Republicans for support on a potentially bipartisan approach rather than relying simply on his own party to muscle the proposal to passage.

But Republicans are adamantly opposed to Biden's proposed corporate tax increase to pay for the package, refusing to undo the 2017 tax cuts, the party's signature domestic accomplishment under President Donald Trump. They reduced the corporate rate from 35% to 21%. Biden proposes lifting the corporate tax to 28%.

"If they're willing to settle on target a infrastructure bill without revisiting the 2017 tax bill we'll work with them," McConnell told Fox's Larry Kudlow, a former Trump adviser.

Psaki said the new proposal drops the president's proposed expenditures on broadband as well as roads, bridges and other major investments to meet the Republicans' lower level. She said the administration's proposal also involved "shifting investments in research and development, supply chains, manufacturing and small business" out of the infrastructure talks, since they could be considered elsewhere, noting in Endless Frontiers Act, which is a separate bipartisan bill pending in the Senate.

But Psaki said the president's team is still pushing for investments in new veterans hospitals, rail projects and green energy investments to fight climate change that Republicans have excluded from their offers.

In all, the White House cut broadband from \$100 billion to \$65 billion, as Republicans proposed. It also

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reduced road and bridges spending by \$39 billion, from \$159 billion to \$120 billion, to move closer to the GOP's proposal of \$48 billion in new funds.

Removing the research and development funds would cut a whopping \$480 billion, the aides said.

The White House characterized the GOP's initial \$568 billion "Roadmap" proposal as amounting to an estimated \$175 billion to \$225 billion in "new investment, above current levels Congress has traditionally funded," according to the memo.

The GOP senators have not publicly disclosed their latest offer.

The statement from Capito's office said there continue to be vast differences between the White House and Senate Republicans on "the definition of infrastructure, the magnitude of proposed spending, and how to pay for it."

The new offer from the White House was intended to make a good faith effort at compromise, and to prod Republicans to put a more substantive counteroffer on the table, the officials said.

In earlier talks, latest offer from GOP lawmakers left some dismay in the administration that there wasn't more movement from their initial \$568 billion proposal.

The White House's hopes for a bipartisan deal on infrastructure have cooled but they have not abandoned the effort, one of the officials said.

Biden has reveled in the face-to-face negotiations, aides said, and has expressed hope to bring Republicans along.

But the outward talks of progress have not translated into the two sides getting much closer to a deal. Beyond the significant gap in the two sides' visions for the size of the package, there has been little discussion of how to reach an agreement on how to pay for it.

One GOP senator in the talks suggested tapping unspent funds from the massive COVID-19 aid package to help pay for the infrastructure investment. Other funds could be tapped from uncollected tax revenues or public-private partnerships.

One strategy that had gained momentum would be for Biden to negotiate a more limited, traditional infrastructure bill of roads, highways, bridges and broadband as a bipartisan effort. Then, Democrats could try to muscle through the remainder of Biden's priorities on climate investments and the so-called human infrastructure of child care, education and hospitals on their own.

But, administration aides believe, if such an "infrastructure only" bipartisan deal is far smaller than Biden's original proposal, the White House risks a rebellion from Democrats who could claim that the president made a bad deal and missed the moment to pass a sweeping, transformational package.

## Kennedy Center honorees still relish slimmed-down tribute

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — This year's Kennedy Center Honors may be a slimmed-down affair as the nation emerges from the coronavirus pandemic — but honoree Dick Van Dyke still says it's "the capper on my career."

The 43rd class of honorees also includes country music legend Garth Brooks, dancer and choreographer Debbie Allen, singer-songwriter Joan Baez and violinist Midori. They were honored Friday night at a medallion ceremony that had been delayed from December 2020.

All the honorees called the lifetime artistic achievement award a unique honor, even for an accomplished artist.

Brooks joked: "I don't mind being the weak link on the chain. I'm in the chain!"

Normally the medallion ceremony is held at the State Department, but this year it was moved to the Kennedy Center's opera house, with about 120 people spread out at tables on the stage and backstage area looking out at the empty rows of seats. Singer Gloria Estefan hosted the ceremony and cellist Yo Yo Ma performed; both are previous Kennedy Center Honors recipients.

The recipients received short tributes and spoke after getting the iconic medallion placed around their necks. Several of the artists said they hoped their modified ceremony would be one of a series of bench-

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marks in the country's cultural reopening.

Midori said it made her happy, "coming out of these very dark times, to be able to see the arts coming back."

Allen is a veteran of tribute programs for previous Kennedy Center Honors recipients. She said this year's process was uniquely intimate. "We're spending a lot more time together than other groups of honorees," she said.

Baez brought an unexpected guest: Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Baez paints portraits and posts them online, and she painted one of Fauci last year. They started talking and "struck up a mutual fan-ship," Baez said.

Prior to the ceremony Friday evening, several attendees visibly scrambled to put on their masks properly when Baez and the masked Fauci entered together.

Instead of the usual several-hour black-tie event, followed by dinner, Friday's festivities ran just 90 minutes with a limited audience. The musical performances and tributes — traditionally the centerpiece of the event — were split into two other nights; one took place Thursday and the second is scheduled for Saturday.

Kennedy Center President Deborah Rutter Rutter told reporters they "had been filming tributes all over campus." All the events will be edited into a television special, which will be broadcast on CBS on June 6.

The honorees met with President Joe Biden on Thursday, marking a return to tradition after former President Donald Trump avoided the celebration during his tenure. Trump's presence in the White House hung over the annual events from the start, with several 2017 honorees threatening to boycott if he attended.

Trump chose to stay away for the entirety of his time in office, to the quiet relief of administrators who otherwise may have faced an uprising from the artists.

The performing arts center is planning a full-scale reopening in September with events slowly ramping up until then. The 44th Kennedy Center Honors program should take place, back on its usual schedule, in December.

## Shock of Jan. 6 insurrection devolves into political fight

By STEVEN SLOAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In one of the most chilling scenes from the Jan. 6 insurrection, a violent mob surged through the halls of the U.S. Capitol chanting "hang Mike Pence." But when the House moved this week to create an independent commission to investigate the tragedy, the former vice president's brother voted no.

Pressed to explain his decision, Rep. Greg Pence of Indiana praised his brother as a "hero" and turned his ire on Democrats, calling the commission a "coverup about the failed Biden administration." He was even more aggressive in a baseless statement labeling House Speaker Nancy Pelosi a "hanging judge" who "is hellbent on pushing her version of partisan justice complete with a hand-picked jury that will carry out her predetermined political execution of Donald Trump."

Pence's swift pivot to attacking Democrats and defending the former president about a riot that threatened his brother's life is a stark measure of how the horror of Jan. 6 has been reduced from a violent assault on American democracy to a purely political fight.

Rather than uniting behind a bipartisan investigation like the ones that followed the 9/11 terror attacks, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy or Pearl Harbor, Republicans are calculating they can regain at least partial control of Congress if they put the issue behind them as quickly as possible without antagonizing Trump or his supporters.

"There's no reason to be doing this," said Sen. Rick Scott of Florida, who is leading the GOP's efforts to win a Senate majority next year.

The Republican resistance to an independent commission comes as many in the GOP attempt to rewrite the history of Jan. 6, minimizing the haunting events of the day when a mob of Trump supporters used flagpoles as weapons and brutally beat police officers.

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The issue could come to a head next week if the legislation creating the commission, which passed the House, gets a vote in the Senate. Democrats will need at least 10 Republicans to join them in backing the measure, a dim prospect after Senate GOP Leader Mitch McConnell expressed opposition this week.

The partisan fight over the new panel is alarming to historians who say an independent record of that dark day is needed to understand what happened and hold those involved accountable.

"If you don't have follow-up, it reaffirms that folks are right in their wrongness," said Carol Anderson, a professor of African American studies at Emory University.

The debate is unfolding as lawmakers prepare to spend much of the summer at home in their districts and attention gradually shifts to next year's campaign. On the cusp of majorities in both chambers of Congress, Republicans are eager to make sure the races become a referendum on President Joe Biden — not their response to the insurrection.

"I want our midterm message to be about the kinds of issues that the American people are dealing with," said Sen. John Thune of South Dakota. "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."

That's why even some of Trump's most fervent critics in the GOP want to make sure that if a commission is formed, its work is done by the end of 2021 to avoid overlap with an election year, a provision included in the House legislation.

Without a firm deadline, the commission would be "a political event as opposed to a legitimate endeavor to determine how we can avoid attacks of this nature in the future," said GOP Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah, who voted to convict Trump in both of his impeachment trials.

The 9/11 commission published its report in July 2004, just months before a presidential election, and included some criticisms of George W. Bush's administration as the then-president was seeking reelection. But Romney said that was different because the 2001 terror attacks were not so directly linked to domestic politics, unlike the insurrection, which was led by Trump supporters seeking to block certification of Biden's election victory.

"Clearly the people who attacked the Capitol were arguing for President Trump and therefore Republican," Romney said. That leaves "the potential to have very significant political overtones in an election year."

Lee Hamilton, the former Indiana Democratic congressman who co-chaired the 9/11 commission with Republican Tom Kean, the former governor of New Jersey, acknowledged that such investigations are inherently political because they are created by elected members of Congress. But he rejected firm deadlines, especially those created with upcoming elections in mind.

"You just have to take the time it requires," he said. "If you have the right people, they're going to do the right thing regardless of the political environment."

The investigation of the insurrection would also be aided by the hundreds of prosecutions of rioters that are playing out in federal court, and the trail of evidence those proceedings lay out could hasten a commission investigation in ways not possible after 9/11.

The political environment, however, is much different now than it was when the 9/11 commission released its report. Trump insists the 2020 election was stolen, an argument roundly rejected by Republican election officials, dozens of federal judges and Trump's own attorney general, William Barr.

Yet the lie is having an impact, with 70% of Republicans saying they don't believe Biden legitimately won enough votes to be elected, according to a CNN poll released earlier this month.

The GOP insists it isn't ignoring the attack, pointing to ongoing investigations by law enforcement and congressional committees. Trump and his senior aides, however, have not been interviewed by the congressional committees, meaning investigators have not been able to glean crucial information about the former president's state of mind during crucial moments of the riot.

Sen. John Kennedy, Republican of Louisiana, said the public doesn't need a commission to understand what happened at the Capitol and dismissed the idea that Republicans may pay a political price if they block the legislation.

"The American people are smart enough to figure out what's going on," he said.

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That leaves Democrats, many of whom are astounded that such a violent attack on their workplace has devolved into a political brawl, grappling with how to proceed. Democratic pollster Geoff Garin acknowledged the attack may fade in the minds of many voters by the next election. But he said the party could make a bigger argument that Republicans are still doing the bidding of Trump.

"When Republicans behave in a way that shows they dance to whatever tune Trump happens to call, that is clearly damaging to the Republican Party brand," he said.

Sen. Gary Peters of Michigan, who is leading Democrats in their effort to expand the Senate majority, said that if Republicans block the commission, it will send the message that "they are not interested in the truth."

But Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia, a former chair of the Democratic National Committee and the party's 2016 vice presidential nominee, said the party should focus on its broader accomplishments, even if the push for an independent commission reaches a disappointing conclusion.

"Democrats are more likely to use, 'hey we got the American rescue plan passed and vaccinations are proceeding at pace and Americans are living better and feeling happier and more economically prosperous,'" he said. "That the Republicans are still stuck in a fantasy land where they're trying to whitewash history and pretend things didn't happen that did, I think that could be a minor note."

## **New vibe at White House: Hugs are in; masks are (mostly) out**

BY JONATHAN LEMIRE and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A smiling crowd of unmasked people filling the largest room in the White House. A visiting head of state welcomed with pomp, circumstance and handshakes. A 94-year old Medal of Honor recipient receiving a joyous hug from Vice President Kamala Harris.

The White House is springing back to life.

Thanks to growing availability of the coronavirus vaccine and a recent relaxation of federal guidance on masks and distancing, the Biden administration is embracing the look and feel of pre-pandemic days on Pennsylvania Avenue. More West Wing staffers are turning up there for work and more reporters will be doing so as well, as the White House spreads the message that a return to normal is possible with vaccinations.

There are lingering concerns about safety and mixed messaging — the same contradictions and confusions that are popping up across a nation that is gingerly re-opening. But the images of a reopened, relaxed White House stand in striking contrast to the days when it was the site of several COVID-19 outbreaks last year, a sign of just how far the pandemic has begun to recede in the United States.

"We're back," White House press secretary Jen Psaki declared at Friday's daily briefing. "I can confirm we're a warm and fuzzy crew and we like to hug around here."

The changes within the White House over the past week were swift and sweeping. Hugs were in, masks were (mostly) out. There was no need to stand six feet apart. And no one seemed to enjoy the shift more than Biden, the most back-slapping and tactile of politicians.

The president had been happy to announce the relaxed mask guidance when he appeared in the Rose Garden on May 13 without a mask, just hours after the CDC said those who are fully vaccinated don't need to wear masks in most settings. That cheerfulness carried over this past week into a series of larger public events that would have been out of bounds earlier in Biden's presidency.

For the second straight day, the White House on Friday opened the East Room — the executive mansion's largest room — to scores of outside guests. Smiling broadly, Biden awarded the Medal of Honor for the first time as commander in chief, giving it to 94-year-old retired Col. Ralph Puckett Jr. for acts of bravery during the Korean War some 70 years ago.

The White House timed Friday's ceremony to coincide with the visit of South Korea's president, Moon Jae-in, who joined Biden at the event before their policy meetings. Both world leaders repeatedly clasped Puckett's hands and crowded in for a photo with the war hero's extended family.

A day earlier, an even larger group of lawmakers and other guests were on hand to witness Biden sign



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legislation to counter an alarming spike in crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, were among the lawmakers trading hugs and kisses.

"The nicest part is being able to shake hands again and to see people's smiles," Collins marveled at one point.

Afterward, lawmakers who helped shepherd the legislation through Congress surrounded Biden as he signed the measure into law. The president also engaged in an act that had largely disappeared from official Washington during the pandemic: He shook hands with a few guests before leaving.

Earlier that day, he had welcomed the newest Kennedy Center honorees to the White House for a visit that marked the return of celebrity wattage to the property.

By multiple accounts from Kennedy Center Honors recipients, the White House event was high-spirited, with Biden seemingly thrilled to have visitors.

Debbie Allen called the president, "so engaging and open. He spent a lot more time with us than I expected."

Joan Baez said the official visit "turned into a jolly romp," included a tour of the Rose Garden and culminated in Baez singing for Biden.

Due to social distancing guidelines, the number of journalists allowed inside the White House shrunk once the pandemic hit, with the briefing room only about a quarter full for Psaki's daily question-and-answer sessions.

Capacity is slated to go to 50 percent soon, with the goal of a full return by summer. The daily COVID-19 testing requirement for staff and most journalists was also expected to soon be waived for the fully vaccinated. And the parking spaces around the West Wing and Eisenhower Executive Office Building have been fuller as of late.

Psaki said the effort to return to a more normal vibe was part of "continuing to open the White House up, the people's house up to the American people."

But questions remain about protocol.

Abiding by the safety guidelines is a matter of the honor system. And Psaki acknowledged Friday that the White House did not have plans to verify vaccination status. Members of the administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have continued, at times, to offer confusing guidance on exactly when, and by whom, a mask should still be worn.

Yet in most ways, the mood has changed dramatically.

The first image that Americans saw of Biden at the White House as president was on Inauguration Day, as he sat behind the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office wearing a mask. Aiming to draw a stark contrast with the Trump White House, which took a cavalier attitude toward the virus within the building, the Democratic administration consistently erred on the side of caution, at times exceeding precautions recommended by the CDC.

For months, Biden had privately grouched that the pandemic prevented him from having face-to-face meetings with lawmakers and world leaders alike, and he chafed at having to conduct diplomacy by Zoom.

On Friday, the White House unfurled all of its traditional in-person pageantry for Moon's visit and the two men were able to sit across from each other in the State Dining Room and, later, answer questions before a mask-free audience of diplomats, officials and reporters.

## Infrastructure deal slips, GOP pans \$1.7T White House offer

By LISA MASCARO and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Prospects for an ambitious infrastructure deal were thrown into serious doubt late Friday after the White House reduced President Joe Biden's sweeping proposal to \$1.7 trillion but Republican senators rejected the compromise as disappointing, saying "vast differences" remain.

While talks have not collapsed, the downbeat assessment is certain to mean new worries from Democrats that time is slipping to strike a deal. The president's team is holding to a soft Memorial Day deadline to

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determine whether a compromise is within reach. Skepticism had been rising on all sides over the lack of significant movement off Biden's \$2.3 trillion plan or the GOP's proposed \$568 billion alternative.

"This proposal exhibits a willingness to come down in size," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki, disclosing the new offer as talks were underway between key Cabinet secretaries and GOP senators at a crucial stage toward a deal.

But after the hourlong meeting, the Republicans quickly rejected the new approach as "well above the range" of a proposal that could win bipartisan support.

The two sides "seem further apart" than when negotiations began, according to a statement from an aide to Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., the lead negotiator for the group of six GOP senators.

The White House and the Republican senators have been in talks ever since Biden met with a core group of Republican negotiators over the possibility of working together on an infrastructure plan. The White House dispatched the transportation and commerce secretaries and top aides to Capitol Hill to meet with the Republicans earlier this week, and they had a follow-up video call Friday.

According to a memo obtained by The Associated Press, the administration's new approach is cutting more than \$550 billion from the president's initial offer.

But the memo makes clear Biden is not interested in the Republicans' idea of having consumers pay for the new investments through tolls, gas taxes or other fees. Instead, the administration is sticking with his proposal to raise corporate taxes to pay for the new investment, which is a red line for Republicans.

"Our approach should ensure that corporations are paying their fair share," said the memo from the administration's negotiators to the GOP senators.

But Republicans dismissed the new White House offer as "very marginal movement" on the topline without much difference in policy, according to a Republican aide familiar with the negotiations and granted anonymity to discuss them.

The new offer was "disappointing," the aide said.

Securing a vast infrastructure plan is Biden's top priority as he seeks to make good on his campaign pledge to "build back better" in the aftermath of the coronavirus crisis and the economic churn from a shifting economy. With narrow Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, the president is reaching out to Republicans for support on a potentially bipartisan approach rather than relying simply on his own party to muscle the proposal to passage.

But Republicans are adamantly opposed to Biden's proposed corporate tax increase to pay for the package, refusing to undo the 2017 tax cuts, the party's signature domestic accomplishment under President Donald Trump. They reduced the corporate rate from 35% to 21%. Biden proposes lifting the corporate tax to 28%.

"If they're willing to settle on target a infrastructure bill without revisiting the 2017 tax bill we'll work with them," McConnell told Fox's Larry Kudlow, a former Trump adviser.

Psaki said the new proposal drops the president's proposed expenditures on broadband as well as roads, bridges and other major investments to meet the Republicans' lower level. She said the administration's proposal also involved "shifting investments in research and development, supply chains, manufacturing and small business" out of the infrastructure talks, since they could be considered elsewhere, noting in Endless Frontiers Act, which is a separate bipartisan bill pending in the Senate.

But Psaki said the president's team is still pushing for investments in new veterans hospitals, rail projects and green energy investments to fight climate change that Republicans have excluded from their offers.

In all, the White House cut broadband from \$100 billion to \$65 billion, as Republicans proposed. It also reduced road and bridges spending by \$39 billion, from \$159 billion to \$120 billion, to move closer to the GOP's proposal of \$48 billion in new funds.

Removing the research and development funds would cut a whopping \$480 billion, the aides said.

The White House characterized the GOP's initial \$568 billion "Roadmap" proposal as amounting to an estimated \$175 billion to \$225 billion in "new investment, above current levels Congress has traditionally funded," according to the memo.

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The GOP senators have not publicly disclosed their latest offer.

The statement from Capito's office said there continue to be vast differences between the White House and Senate Republicans on "the definition of infrastructure, the magnitude of proposed spending, and how to pay for it."

The new offer from the White House was intended to make a good faith effort at compromise, and to prod Republicans to put a more substantive counteroffer on the table, the officials said.

In earlier talks, latest offer from GOP lawmakers left some dismay in the administration that there wasn't more movement from their initial \$568 billion proposal.

The White House's hopes for a bipartisan deal on infrastructure have cooled but they have not abandoned the effort, one of the officials said.

Biden has reveled in the face-to-face negotiations, aides said, and has expressed hope to bring Republicans along.

But the outward talks of progress have not translated into the two sides getting much closer to a deal. Beyond the significant gap in the two sides' visions for the size of the package, there has been little discussion of how to reach an agreement on how to pay for it.

One GOP senator in the talks suggested tapping unspent funds from the massive COVID-19 aid package to help pay for the infrastructure investment. Other funds could be tapped from uncollected tax revenues or public-private partnerships.

One strategy that had gained momentum would be for Biden to negotiate a more limited, traditional infrastructure bill of roads, highways, bridges and broadband as a bipartisan effort. Then, Democrats could try to muscle through the remainder of Biden's priorities on climate investments and the so-called human infrastructure of child care, education and hospitals on their own.

But, administration aides believe, if such an "infrastructure only" bipartisan deal is far smaller than Biden's original proposal, the White House risks a rebellion from Democrats who could claim that the president made a bad deal and missed the moment to pass a sweeping, transformational package.

## Kennedy Center honorees still relish slimmed-down tribute

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — This year's Kennedy Center Honors may be a slimmed-down affair as the nation emerges from the coronavirus pandemic — but honoree Dick Van Dyke still says it's "the capper on my career."

The 43rd class also includes country music legend Garth Brooks, dancer and choreographer Debbie Allen, singer-songwriter Joan Baez and violinist Midori. They were honored Friday night at a medallion ceremony that had been delayed from December 2020.

All the honorees called the lifetime artistic achievement award a unique honor, even for an accomplished artist.

Brooks joked: "I don't mind being the weak link on the chain. I'm in the chain!"

Normally the medallion ceremony is held at the State Department, but this year it was moved to the Kennedy Center's opera house, with about 120 people spread out at tables on the stage and backstage area looking out at the empty rows of seats. Singer Gloria Estefan hosted the ceremony and cellist Yo Yo Ma performed; both are previous Kennedy Center Honors recipients.

The recipients received short tributes and spoke after getting the iconic medallion placed around their necks. Several of the artists said they hoped their modified ceremony would be one of a series of benchmarks in the country's cultural reopening.

Midori said it made her happy, "coming out of these very dark times, to be able to see the arts coming back."

Allen is a veteran of tribute programs for previous Kennedy Center Honors recipients. She said this year's process was uniquely intimate. "We're spending a lot more time together than other groups of honorees," she said.

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Baez brought an unexpected guest: Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Baez paints portraits and posts them online, and she painted one of Fauci last year. They started talking and "struck up a mutual fan-ship," Baez said.

Prior to the ceremony Friday evening, several attendees visibly scrambled to put on their masks properly when Baez and the masked Fauci entered together.

Instead of the usual several-hour black-tie event, followed by dinner, Friday's festivities ran just 90 minutes with a limited audience. The musical performances and tributes — traditionally the centerpiece of the event — were split into two other nights; one took place Thursday and the second is scheduled for Saturday.

Kennedy Center President Deborah Rutter told reporters they "had been filming tributes all over campus." All the events will be edited into a television special, which will be broadcast on CBS on June 6.

The honorees met with President Joe Biden on Thursday, marking a return to tradition after former President Donald Trump avoided the celebration during his tenure. Trump's presence in the White House hung over the annual events from the start, with several 2017 honorees threatening to boycott if he attended.

Trump chose to stay away for the entirety of his time in office, to the quiet relief of administrators who otherwise may have faced an uprising from the artists.

The performing arts center is planning a full-scale reopening in September with events slowly ramping up until then. The 44th Kennedy Center Honors program should take place, back on its usual schedule, in December.

## Epstein guards to skirt jail time in deal with prosecutors

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The two Bureau of Prisons workers tasked with guarding Jeffrey Epstein the night he killed himself in a New York jail have admitted they falsified records, but they will skirt any time behind bars under a deal with federal prosecutors, authorities said Friday.

The prison workers, Tova Noel and Michael Thomas, were accused of sleeping and browsing the internet instead of monitoring Epstein the night he took his own life in August 2019.

They were charged with lying on prison records to make it seem as though they had made required checks on the financier before he was found in his cell. New York City's medical examiner ruled Epstein's death a suicide.

As part of the deal with prosecutors, they will enter into a deferred prosecution agreement with the Justice Department and will serve no time behind bars, according to a letter from federal prosecutors that was filed in court papers Friday. Noel and Thomas would instead be subjected to supervised release, would be required to complete 100 hours of community service and would be required to fully cooperate with an ongoing probe by the Justice Department's inspector general, it says.

The two have "admitted that they willfully and knowingly completed materially false count and round slips regarding required counts and rounds" in the housing unit where Epstein was being held, the letter says.

The deal would need to be approved by a judge, which could happen as soon as next week. Attorneys for the guards did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

Sen. Ben Sasse, a Republican member of the Senate Judiciary Committee who has been a vocal critic of the Justice Department's handling of Epstein's case, called the deal "unacceptable" and said the public deserves to see a report detailing the prison agency's failures.

"One hundred hours of community service is a joke — this isn't traffic court," Sasse said in a statement. "The leader of an international child sex trafficking ring escaped justice, his co-conspirators had their secrets go to the grave with him, and these guards are going to be picking up trash on the side of the road."

Prosecutors alleged that Noel and Thomas sat at their desks just 15 feet from Epstein's cell, shopped online for furniture and motorcycles, and walked around the unit's common area instead of making required rounds every 30 minutes.

During one two-hour period, both appeared to have been asleep, according to the indictment filed

against them.

Both officers who were guarding Epstein were working overtime because of staffing shortages. One of the guards, who did not primarily work as a correctional officer, was working a fifth straight day of overtime. The other guard was working mandatory overtime, meaning a second eight-hour shift of the day.

Before they were arrested, both officers had declined a plea deal with federal prosecutors.

Epstein's death and the revelation that he was able to kill himself while behind bars at one of the most secure jails in America was a major embarrassment for the Bureau of Prisons and cast a spotlight on the agency, which has also been besieged by serious misconduct in recent years.

Staffing shortages at the agency are so severe that guards often work overtime day after day or are forced to work mandatory double shifts. Violence leads to regular lockdowns at federal prison compounds across the U.S. And a congressional report released in 2019 found that "bad behavior is ignored or covered up on a regular basis."

The falsification of records has been a problem throughout the federal prison system. Union officials have long argued that the reduction of staff is putting both guards and inmates in danger, but they've faced an uphill battle getting attention.

## Phil being Phil: Mickelson shares lead in PGA Championship

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

KIAWAH ISLAND, S.C. (AP) — The short jab with his left fist to celebrate birdies and even a few pars. A thumbs-up to the gallery. Phil Mickelson at times looked to be about the only one having fun Friday in a PGA Championship that has become the ultimate test without being extreme.

But then, what's not to enjoy?

The 50-year-old Mickelson looked like the Mickelson of old on another windswept grind around the Ocean Course at Kiawah Island, running off five birdies over his last eight holes, the last one giving him a 3-under 69 and a share of the lead.

"To know I'm playing well heading into the weekend, to be in contention, to have a good opportunity, I'm having a blast," Mickelson said.

Mickelson shared the lead with Louis Oosthuizen, the South African with the sweet swing and hard luck in getting that second major. Oosthuizen didn't make a bogey until his final hole, and his 68 allowed him to join Mickelson at 5-under 139.

It was the highest 36-hole score to lead a PGA Championship since the last time at Kiawah Island in 2012.

The opportunity for Mickelson includes his bid to become golf's oldest major champion — the record was set by 48-year-old Julius Boros in the 1968 PGA Championship — and to show he can still beat the best in the world.

Mickelson has not won on the PGA Tour in two years. His last major championship was the 2013 British Open at Muirfield. He no longer is among the top 100 in the world.

But he's Phil Mickelson, and has spent a career leaving fans wondering what he'll do next.

"I think he has the bit between his teeth," said three-time major champion Padraig Harrington, who played alongside Mickelson for two days. "I think he believes he can do it in these conditions. He's not here to make the cut."

Mickelson is the oldest player to have a share of the 36-hole lead in a major since Fred Couples (52) at the 2012 Masters.

Brooks Koepka had a pair of eagles offset by four bogeys and scrambled for par on the 18th hole for a 1-under 71 that left him one shot behind in conditions he loves.

"It's a major, man. It's going to be tough, especially with the wind blowing," he said. "It doesn't matter, just go out and go play."

Masters champion Hideki Matsuyama dropped a shot on the 18th hole and still shot 68, leaving him in the group two shots behind.

The casualties included the top two players in the world — Dustin Johnson and Justin Thomas missed

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the cut — and a tee marker on the 17th that Erik van Rooyen smashed when his shot went into the water. The head also came off his club.

There were so many more examples of players having reason to lose their mind.

Cameron Tringale was two shots off the lead going to the 14th hole and 15 shots behind when he walked off the 18th green. That included a bogey, double bogey, triple bogey, quadruple bogey and quintuple bogey, not in that order. He rallied for an 82.

Shane Lowry hit one so far to the right on the par-5 16th that he was on the beach. A picket fence in his way, he was able to get back on grass and saved par on his way to a 71.

"It's not very enjoyable out there because it's so hard, and every hole is a disaster waiting to happen," British Open champion Shane Lowry said. "So it's very stressful and there's a lot of anxiety and a lot of nerves and a lot of tension out there, but you just have to get on with it and try and hit the best shots you can, and that's all I've been doing."

Ian Poulter was 6 under for his round through 12 holes when he noticed a video board behind the green that suggested he had a shot at the course record. It's a wonder Poulter's eyes didn't pop out of his head.

"I just started laughing to myself like, 'Who in the world would write that and put that on a board with that last five holes to play?'" Poulter said.

He bogeyed four of his last six, which feature the four hardest holes on the course, for a 70.

"Every single shot you hit, you have to be focused and diligent and not take anything for granted. It's a piece of work," Paul Casey said after a 71 left him in the group three behind. "But I quite enjoy it in a sick and twisted kind of way."

Branden Grace had a bogey-free round and was in the lead at 6 under until he hit his tee shot into the water on the par-3 17th and made double bogey, and then made bogey on the closing hole for a 71. He was tied with Koepka at 3-under 141, along with Christiaan Bezuidenhout (70).

Mickelson was being interviewed on TV when Grace fell back with his double bogey, and this development immediately was conveyed to him with dramatic effect.

Lefty was not overly excited.

"If you were to tell me that Sunday night, I'd really enjoy that," Mickelson said. "But right now there's a lot of work to do. ... The fact is I'm heading into the weekend with an opportunity and I'm playing really well and I'm having a lot of fun doing it."

Only 18 players remained under par, which included U.S. Open champion Bryson DeChambeau, who looked exhausted walking off the course after a 71 that featured no birdies on the back nine. He went to the range and then said he would do a like workout with heavy weights.

Mickelson has shown glimpses in recent weeks, but he is concerned about losing focus. This had his attention. He also has a 2-wood in the bag that helps him control his accuracy, at least with the wind at his back. Mickelson missed only three fairways.

"If he can keep it straight and hit it the way that he's been hitting, he's going to be around on Sunday for sure," Jason Day said. "With Phil, you kind of get some off-the-map drives that make it very interesting, and he's kept it very, very straight over the last two days."

## Video: Shackled Black man ordered facedown in deadly arrest

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Beaten and shackled by Louisiana state troopers, Black motorist Ronald Greene desperately tried to roll over in what may have been a struggle to breathe but was ordered to stay on his belly, according to body-camera video newly obtained by The Associated Press.

And the long-secret autopsy report, also newly secured, cited Greene's head injuries and the way he was restrained as factors in his 2019 death. It also noted he had high levels of cocaine and alcohol in his system as well as a broken breastbone and a torn aorta.

"I beat the ever-living f--- out of him, choked him and everything else trying to get him under control," Trooper Chris Hollingsworth can be heard telling a fellow officer in the newly obtained batch of video. "All of a sudden he just went limp. ... I thought he was dead."

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"You all got that on bodycam?" the other officer asks over the phone, at which point Hollingsworth switches his camera off.

The footage and the autopsy report add to the growing wealth of details about Greene's death, which has long been surrounded by allegations of a cover-up and is now the subject of a federal civil rights investigation. Louisiana State Police initially blamed his death on a car crash and made no mention of use of force by officers.

On Friday, after two years of refusing to explain Greene's death and under mounting public pressure, the state police released all body camera footage related to Greene's arrest, despite the ongoing investigations. Gov. John Bel Edwards, in an about-face, said he "strongly supported" the release, calling the video "disturbing and difficult to watch."

But the AP had already obtained those materials and this week published previously unreleased body-camera footage that showed troopers converging on Greene's car outside Monroe, Louisiana, after a high-speed chase, repeatedly jolting the 49-year-old unarmed man with stun guns, putting him in a chokehold, punching him in the head and dragging him by his ankle shackles.

Use-of-force experts say the most dangerous and troubling parts of the arrest came after the struggle, when officers left the heavyset Greene facedown on the ground with his hands and feet restrained for more than nine minutes.

At one point in a new 30-minute video, Greene can be seen struggling to prop himself up on his side.

"Don't you turn over! Lay on your belly! Lay on your belly!" Trooper Kory York yells before briefly dragging Greene by the chain that connects his ankle shackles.

York then kneels on Greene's back and tells him again, "You better lay on your f----- belly like I told you to! You understand?"

"Yes, sir," Greene replies.

"The trooper's wrong and what he did is excessive," said Charles Key, a use-of-force expert and former Baltimore police lieutenant. "It's a mistake because he can't breathe. You see Greene drawing his legs up, and that may be because he can't freaking breathe."

Police are highly discouraged from leaving handcuffed suspects in a prone position, particularly when they aren't resisting, because it can greatly hinder their breathing — a point made repeatedly at the trial this spring of the former Minneapolis officer convicted of murder in the death of George Floyd.

State Police Superintendent Col. Lamar Davis, who was not in charge at the time of Greene's death, wouldn't comment on the conduct of the troopers involved or whether he believed they should be charged. But he said he'd spoken with Greene's family and offered his condolences: "I can feel their pain and feel it in my heart."

"The officers who are subject to these investigations are afforded due process," Davis said. "You have my commitment that we will follow the facts and hold our personnel accountable."

While the autopsy on Greene listed his cause of death as "cocaine induced agitated delirium complicated by motor vehicle collision, physical struggle, inflicted head injury and restraint," it did not specify the manner of death — a highly unusual move that did not make it clear whether Greene's death could be deemed a homicide, an accident or undetermined.

Arkansas State Crime Lab pathologists Jennifer Forsyth and Frank J. Paretti, who conducted the autopsy in May 2019 for the Union Parish Coroner's Office, found Greene had a "significant" level of cocaine in his system — 1,700 nanograms per milliliter — and a blood-alcohol content of 0.106, just above the 0.08 level that amounts to drunken driving in Louisiana.

They said it "cannot be stated with certainty" whether many of Greene's injuries — including a fracture of the sternum, or breastbone, and a laceration of his aorta — were attributable to the car crash or the struggle with troopers.

"There were lacerations of the head inconsistent with motor vehicle collision injury," they wrote. "These injuries are most consistent with multiple impact sites from a blunt object."

In the latest video, Greene, his legs shackled and his hands cuffed behind his back, is prone on the

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ground, and two troopers can be seen hovering over him before he suddenly cries out. One of the officers tells him, "Yeah, yeah, that s— hurts, doesn't it?"

"OK! Oh, Lord Jesus. Oh, Lord!" Greene screams out. "OK, OK. Lord Jesus! OK, I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

It's not clear from the video what the officer is describing, but several law enforcement officials who reviewed the footage indicated this might be the moment when one of them sprays Greene with pepper spray. A use-of-force document not previously made public shows pepper spray was used in the arrest.

"If they pepper-sprayed him at that point, that's excessive," Key said. "There has to be some threat. He's handcuffed."

Minutes after Greene's outburst, he begins to moan and make gurgling noises as two troopers keep holding him down.

The new video, recorded on Lt. John Clary's body camera, remained under wraps for months even within State Police but was recently turned over to the FBI as part of its investigation, according to three law enforcement officials. They were not authorized to discuss the investigation and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

At one point, after medical help arrives, a paramedic is heard saying, "He's not getting enough air" and appears to put his blood oxygen level at 86, which Key described as critically low. Yet nobody appears to be giving Greene oxygen.

Louisiana officials had for two years rebuffed repeated calls to release footage and details about what caused Greene's death after the chase, which began over an unspecified traffic violation. Troopers initially told his family he died on impact after crashing into a tree. State Police later released a brief statement acknowledging only that Greene struggled with troopers and died on his way to the hospital.

That secrecy extended to the autopsy, which pathologists said was hindered by the State Police's failure to provide even the most routine documents relating to Greene's arrest, including police reports, collision details or emergency medical records.

Andrew Scott, a former Boca Raton, Florida, police chief who testifies as an expert use-of-force witness, said Greene's case is an example of how "stonewalling is the Achilles' heel of law enforcement."

"The only reason I can even conjecture that this information would not be provided to the medical examiner's office is because they didn't want them to see it," Scott said. "They intentionally thwarted the facts of this case to be truly revealed."

## County tells Arizona Senate to keep files, threatens lawsuit

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Maricopa County officials on Friday directed the Arizona Senate and the auditors it hired to review the county's 2020 election count to preserve documents for a possible lawsuit.

The county made the demand in a letter after the auditors refused to back down from their claim that the county destroyed evidence by deleting an election database. The GOP-controlled Board of Supervisors and Republican Recorder Stephen Richer, one of the top election officials, say the claim is false.

County officials earlier this week said they might consider filing a defamation lawsuit if the Senate President Karen Fann and the auditors don't retract the allegation files were deleted.

"Because of the wrongful accusations that the County destroyed evidence, the County or its elected officers may now be subject to, or have, legal claims," the county's chief litigation attorney, Tom Liddy, wrote in a letter to Senate President Karen Fann, a Republican from Prescott.

Senate Republicans are overseeing an unprecedented partisan audit of the 2020 election in Maricopa County, including a hand recount of 2.1 million ballots and a review of voting machines and other data. Fann claimed the database was deleted, which a twitter account tied to the audit called "spoliation of evidence." Former President Donald Trump amplified the claim in a statement last weekend.

County officials said Monday that no databases or directories were deleted and laid out a detailed explanation for why they believe the auditors couldn't find them, accusing the auditors of ineptitude. The next day, a data forensics consultant on the audit team said he was able to "recover" the files, and the



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audit's Twitter account later repeated the claim that files were deleted.

The letter directs Fann and anyone working on the audit to preserve any records related to it, including emails and text messages, computer files, cellphones and other devices.

The audit will not change the election result. But Trump and many of his supporters believe it will support their baseless claim that Trump's loss was marred by fraud.

## **Biden, South Korea's Moon 'deeply concerned' about NKorea**

By AAMER MADHANI, DARLENE SUPERVILLE, and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Friday said he and South Korean President Moon Jae-in remain "deeply concerned" about the situation with North Korea, and announced he will deploy a new special envoy to the region to help refocus efforts on pressing Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear weapons program.

Moon, meanwhile, welcomed "America's return" to the world stage and said both leaders pledged in their meeting to work closely toward denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Biden told a joint news conference with Moon that he was dispatching career diplomat Sung Kim, who previously served as ambassador to South Korea, to serve as the special envoy to the region. Moon said the move by Biden "reflects the firm commitment of the U.S. for exploring diplomacy and its readiness for dialogue with North Korea."

Biden also announced that the U.S. would vaccinate 550,000 South Korean servicemembers who serve alongside U.S. forces on the peninsula.

This marks the first commitment by the Biden administration for what it plans to do with the 80 million vaccine doses it aims to distribute globally in the next six weeks. Biden has said he hopes to use domestically produced vaccines as a modern-day "arsenal of democracy," a reference to the U.S. effort to arm allies in World War II. At the same time, the White House has pledged not to attach policy conditions to countries receiving the doses as global vaccine diplomacy heats up.

Moon came to Washington seeking renewed diplomatic urgency by the U.S. on curbing North Korea's nuclear program, even as the White House signaled that it is taking a longer view on the issue. The two also discussed coordination on vaccine distribution, climate change and regional security concerns spurred by China.

Their meeting was only Biden's second in-person session with a foreign leader because of the coronavirus pandemic. His first was with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.

Moon said afterward he and Biden spoke "like old friends" and emphasized the need for cooperation on security issues in the region.

"The most urgent common task that our two countries must undertake is achieving complete denuclearization and permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula," he said.

Biden did not rule out meeting North Korean leader Kim Jong Un Kim. But in a veiled reference to former President Donald Trump's charm offensive with Kim, Biden said he would not replicate the efforts of the "recent past."

Trump met face-to-face with the dictator on three occasions and exchanged what he called "love letters" with the leader.

"I would not give him all that he's looking for," Biden said of Kim, namely "international recognition."

Biden paid tribute to the "long history of shared sacrifice" by the two allies. His formal talks with Moon in the afternoon ran long, Biden said in earlier remarks, because "I enjoyed the meeting so much that it caused us to move everything back." He said his staff interrupted repeatedly to warn they were over time.

At the press conference, Biden also took a moment to note South Korea's growing influence on mainstream American culture. He said that now "K-pop fans are universal" and noted Korean actress Yuh-Jung Youn winning the Oscar award last month for her performance in "Minari" as well as the South Korean film "Parasite" winning the best picture award at the 2020 Oscars.

Moon said, "The world is welcoming America's return," an oblique reference to Trump's attempts to

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disengage on some aspects of American diplomacy.

The White House announced last month that it had completed a review of North Korea policy and Biden would veer from the strategies of his two most recent predecessors, rejecting both Trump's deeply personal effort to win over Kim and Barack Obama's more hands-off approach.

But the administration has yet to detail what its third-way effort to try to prod the North to abandon its nuclear program will look like.

Moon started his day at the White House complex by meeting with Vice President Kamala Harris and top Biden advisers. Moon also participated in a Medal of Honor ceremony for Ralph Puckett, a 94-year-old Army veteran who was celebrated for his gallantry during the Korean War more than 70 years ago.

"Without the sacrifice of veterans including Colonel Puckett ... freedom and democracy we enjoy today couldn't have blossomed in Korea," said Moon.

Moon, who will leave office next May, is eager to resume stalled talks between Washington and Pyongyang and between Seoul and Pyongyang. But the Biden administration, which confirmed in March that it had made outreach efforts to the North without success, has been less enthusiastic about the idea of direct negotiations in the near term.

Still, Moon made clear before the meeting that he would nudge Biden to renew diplomatic efforts with the North.

Biden also used the meeting to press South Korea to adopt a more ambitious 2030 target for curbing carbon emissions and to urge Seoul to do more to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Biden also wants Moon to take a strong stance on China's activity toward Taiwan and other provocative moves Beijing has made in the region. Biden has sought to rally Pacific allies to coordinate on China, which Biden sees as the United States' fiercest economic competitor.

South Korea could be reluctant to speak out about China, an important trading partner that it also sees as key in dealing with the North Korean government. Moon told the press conference "there was no pressure" on the issue from Biden in their meeting.

## **Palestinians see victory in Gaza truce as Israel warns Hamas**

By FARES AKRAM and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Palestinians rallied by the thousands Friday after a cease-fire took effect in the latest Gaza war, with many viewing it as a costly but clear victory for the Islamic militant group Hamas. Israel vowed to respond with a "new level of force" to further hostilities.

The 11-day war left more than 250 dead — the vast majority Palestinians — and brought widespread devastation to the already impoverished Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip. But the rocket barrages that brought life to a standstill in much of Israel were seen by many Palestinians as a bold response to perceived Israeli abuses in Jerusalem, the emotional heart of the conflict.

Like the three previous wars, the latest round of fighting ended inconclusively.

Israel claimed it inflicted heavy damage on Hamas but once again was unable to halt the rockets. Even as it claims victory, Hamas faces the daunting challenge of rebuilding in a territory already suffering from high unemployment and a coronavirus outbreak, and from years of blockade by Egypt and Israel.

The conflict brought to the surface deep frustration among Palestinians, whether in the occupied West Bank, Gaza or within Israel, over the status quo, with the Israeli-Palestinian peace process all but abandoned for years.

The continued volatility was on display when clashes broke out between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police following Friday prayers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a flashpoint holy site in Jerusalem sacred to Jews and Muslims. Clashes there earlier this month were one of the main triggers for the war.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fended off criticism from his hawkish base who said he ended the offensive prematurely without a more decisive blow to Hamas.

Israel had done "daring and new things, and this without being dragged into unnecessary adventures,"

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he said. Its forces caused "maximum damage to Hamas with a minimum of casualties in Israel," he added.

Netanyahu warned against further attacks, saying, "If Hamas thinks we will tolerate a drizzle of rockets, it is wrong." He vowed to respond with "a new level of force" against aggression anywhere in Israel.

He said Israeli strikes killed more than 200 militants, including 25 senior commanders, and hit more than 100 kilometers (60 miles) of militant tunnels. Hamas and the Islamic Jihad militant group have only acknowledged 20 fighters killed.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said in a televised speech from the Qatari capital of Doha that the war "opened the door to new phases that will witness many victories." He called it a "quantum leap" that will build support among Palestinians for "resistance" rather than failed negotiations.

The Gaza Health Ministry says at least 243 Palestinians were killed, including 66 children, with 1,910 people wounded. It does not differentiate between fighters and civilians. Twelve people were killed in Israel, all but one of them civilians, including a 5-year-old boy and 16-year-old girl.

Celebrations erupted in Gaza, the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem at 2 a.m. when the cease-fire took hold.

In Gaza City, thousands took to the streets, and young men waved Palestinian and Hamas flags, passed out sweets, honked horns and set off fireworks.

At noon prayers at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, hundreds held similar celebrations, waving flags and cheering Hamas. It was unclear what sparked the ensuing violence, in which police fired stun grenades and tear gas, and Palestinians threw rocks. Israeli police said they arrested 16 people. Similar clashes broke out in parts of the West Bank.

Gazans had a day of recovery after 11 days of Israeli bombardment.

Shoppers stocked up on fresh fruit and vegetables at a Gaza City open-air market that reopened after being closed during the fighting. Workers swept up rubble.

"Life will return, because this is not the first war, and it will not be the last war," said shop owner Ashraf Abu Mohammad. "The heart is in pain, there have been disasters, families wiped from the civil registry, and this saddens us. But this is our fate in this land, to remain patient."

Residents in the hard-hit town of Beit Hanoun surveyed wrecked homes.

"We see such huge destruction here, it's the first time in history we've seen this," said Azhar Nsair. "The cease-fire is for people who didn't suffer, who didn't lose their loved ones, whose homes were not bombed."

Rescue workers were still recovering bodies. Five were collected Friday in the town of Khan Younis, including that of a 3-year-old, the Red Crescent emergency service said.

Tens of thousands returned home after sheltering in U.N. schools. At the peak, 66,000 people were crammed inside, but on Friday the number fell under 1,000, U.N. spokesman Sephane Dujarric said.

After the cease-fire, the U.N. sent 13 trucks with food, COVID-19 vaccines, medical supplies and medicines into Gaza. The world body also allocated \$18.6 million in emergency humanitarian aid.

The bombardment struck a blow to the already decrepit infrastructure in the small coastal territory, home to more than 2 million Palestinians. It flattened high-rises and houses, tore up roads and wrecked water systems. At least 30 health facilities were damaged, forcing a halt to coronavirus testing in the territory.

The fighting began May 10, when Hamas militants in Gaza fired long-range rockets toward Jerusalem. The barrage came after days of clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police at Al-Aqsa. Heavy-handed police tactics at the compound and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers had inflamed tensions.

Competing claims to Jerusalem have repeatedly triggered bouts of violence. Israel captured east Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza in the 1967 war and the Palestinians want them for their future state.

Hamas and other militant groups fired over 4,000 rockets at Israeli cities. Dozens landed as far north as the bustling commercial capital of Tel Aviv.

Israel, meanwhile, conducted hundreds of airstrikes. A senior Israeli army official said it hit 1,600 "military targets."

The United States, Israel's closest and most important ally, initially backed what it called Israel's right to self-defense against indiscriminate rocket fire. But as fighting dragged on and deaths mounted, the

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Americans increasingly pressured Israel to stop the offensive, and Egypt brokered the cease-fire.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken plans to visit the region "to discuss recovery efforts and working together to build better futures for Israelis and Palestinians," the State Department said. He spoke Friday with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who asked that Washington follow up on stopping Israeli measures in Jerusalem, like raids on the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the planned evictions of Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, Abbas' office said.

President Joe Biden welcomed the cease-fire. He said the U.S. was committed to helping Israel replenish its supply of interceptor missiles and to working with the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority — not Hamas — to provide humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Later Friday, he said there has been no shift in his commitment to Israel's security, but insisted a two-state solution that includes a state for Palestinians remains "the only answer" to that conflict.

Speaking at the end of a visit by the president of South Korea, Biden also played down the idea that the newly ended fighting had opened a rift among Democrats, as scores of Democrats split with Biden's "quiet diplomacy" with ally Israel to publicly demand a cease-fire.

"My party still supports Israel," Biden said. "Let's get something straight here," he added. "Until the region says unequivocally they acknowledge the right of Israel to exist as an independent Jewish state, there will be no peace."

The Palestinian militants claimed Netanyahu had agreed to halt further Israeli actions at Al-Aqsa and the Sheikh Jarrah evictions. An Egyptian official said only that tensions in Jerusalem "will be addressed."

Netanyahu faced heavy criticism from members of his hawkish, nationalist base. Gideon Saar, a former ally who leads a small party, called the cease-fire "embarrassing."

Itamar Ben Gvir, head of the far-right Jewish Power party, told Israeli TV's Channel 13 that, with the cease-fire, the government "spat in the face of residents of southern Israel," and said it should topple Hamas and reoccupy Gaza.

## Actor Danny Masterson must stand trial on 3 rape charges

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — After three days of dramatic and often emotional testimony from three women who said "That '70s Show" actor Danny Masterson raped them nearly 20 years ago, a judge on Friday found that he must stand trial.

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Charlaine F. Olmedo ordered Masterson to trial on three counts of rape by force or fear, charges that could get him up to 45 years in prison.

She said she found the women's testimony credible for the purposes of the preliminary hearing, where the bar for sufficient evidence is significantly lower than it will be at the forthcoming trial.

That trial will represent the rare prosecution of a Hollywood figure in the #MeToo era despite dozens of investigations by police and the Los Angeles district attorney, most of which have ended without charges.

Masterson, 45, has pleaded not guilty. His lawyers said they would prove his innocence, and during the hearing repeatedly challenged the women on discrepancies in stories they alleged the accusers had coordinated in the years since their alleged rapes. The lawyers said the age of the incidents, which date from 2001 and 2003, made accurate memories impossible.

"Memories fade and memories change," Masterson attorney Sharon Appelbaum said.

The actor had no visible reaction to the judge's decision as he sat in court, with a small group of family and friends behind him. Masterson's lead attorney Thomas Mesereau, who also defended Michael Jackson and Bill Cosby in their sexual misconduct cases, declined to comment outside court.

During the hearing, Mesereau suggested that police, prosecutors and witnesses were tainted by anti-religious bias against the Church of Scientology. Masterson is a prominent Scientologist, all three women are former Scientologists.

Scientology and its teachings came up so frequently during the hearing that the judge felt compelled to say the church was not a defendant. The organization is likely to loom even larger at trial, where most of

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the witnesses will be either members or former members.

In her ruling, the judge said that a church document on members not going to police about other members and allowing the institution to mediate instead, "sufficiently explains to this course the hesitancy of these women" from reporting their accusations to police for years.

Appelbaum said the three women had colluded to form a "sisterhood" that "seems to want to take down Mr. Masterson and take down Scientology."

Appelbaum said they had spoken to each other, at times in violation of orders, changing accounts they had initially given police.

"Over time their stories are becoming more similar to one another," she said. "They're taking the language of one another."

Deputy District Attorney Reinhold Mueller said the testimony was "anything but" coordinated.

"These were not rehearsed statements," Mueller said. "They were heartfelt, and they each had their versions of what happened. If there is any consistency in these statements, it was because the defendant was consistent in these acts."

One woman, identified in court only as Jen B., testified that in 2003, Masterson, a friend from the church where she had been born a member, had taken her upstairs from the hot tub at his Los Angeles home and raped her in his bedroom. Masterson's attorney said the two had consensual sex. They pointed out that her testimony that Masterson threatened her with a gun hadn't appeared in an initial police report in 2004.

Another woman, identified in court only as Christina B., was five years into a relationship with Masterson in 2001 when she said she woke to him raping her during the night, and fought back and got him to stop by pulling his hair. Masterson's lawyers argued that that she had reframed the incident in recent years only after another alleged rape she reported could not lead to charges.

The third woman, identified in court only as N. Trout, said Masterson raped her on a night in 2003 after he texted telling her to come to his house, saying she had set boundaries and was clear there was to be no sex. Defense attorneys said she knew she was going to his house for sexual purposes, that she voluntarily stayed most of the night and that she sought a dating relationship with him that she did not get.

The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they were victims of sexual abuse.

Defense attorneys also said a lawsuit filed by the women showed they were seeking financial gain. The prosecutor countered that the lawsuit was filed to stop the harassment they had been receiving from the church since coming forward. The church has denied all the allegations in the lawsuit.

The allegations happened at the height of Masterson's fame, when he starred as Steven Hyde on Fox TV's retro sitcom "That '70s Show" from 1998 to 2006 alongside Ashton Kutcher, Mila Kunis and Topher Grace.

He had reunited with Kutcher on the Netflix Western sitcom "The Ranch" but was written off the show when the LAPD investigation of him was revealed in March 2017.

Masterson, who has been free on bail since his June arrest, was told to return to court for a new arraignment on June 7.

## Apple CEO faces tough questions about app store competition

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN RAMON, Calif. (AP) — Apple CEO Tim Cook described the company's ironclad control over its mobile app store as the best way to serve and protect iPhone users, but he faced tough questions about competition issues from a judge Friday about allegations he oversees an illegal monopoly.

The rare courtroom appearance by one of the world's best-known executives came during the closing phase of a three-week trial revolving around an antitrust case brought by Epic Games, maker of the popular video game Fortnite.

Epic is trying to topple the so-called "walled garden" for iPhone and iPad apps that welcomes users and developers while locking out competition. Created by Apple co-founder Steve Jobs a year after the iPhone's 2007 debut, the App Store has become a key revenue source for Apple, helping power the company to a \$57 billion profit in its last fiscal year.

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The trial focuses on Epic's contention that Apple has turned its store into a price-gouging vehicle that not only reaps a 15% to 30% commission from in-app transactions, but blocks apps from offering other payment alternatives. That ban extends to showing a link that would open a web page offering commission-free ways to pay for subscriptions, in-game items and the like.

Under friendly questioning from a company lawyer, Cook delivered polished remarks that sometimes sounded like a commercial for the iPhone and other Apple products.

But the normally unflappable CEO occasionally seemed flustered while being grilled by Epic lawyer Gary Bornstein. His unease was particularly evident when pressed about the level of profits in a store that Jobs initially thought would be lucky to break even. He seemed to stumble slightly again when when Bornstein confronted him about a deal in China that could compromise user privacy, even as the company maintains that protecting its customers' personal information is a top priority.

Cook, though, never wavered during nearly four hours of testimony from his position that Apple's grip on the app store helps it keep things simple for a loyal customer base that buys iPhones knowing they getting "something that just works."

"They buy into an entire ecosystem when they buy an iPhone," said Cook, who wore a face shield, but no mask in an Oakland, California, courtroom that has limited access because of the pandemic.

It wasn't at all clear that the federal judge who will decide the case was buying everything Cook said on the stand.

After the lawyers were done with their questioning, U.S. District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers asked why Apple can't allow rival stores to offer an in-app transaction option on iPhones, iPads and iPods that might charge lower commissions. That is something Epic is fighting to make it happen, partly because it has a still unprofitable store that imposes a 12% commission.

Gonzalez Rogers seemed particularly troubled by a survey indicating 39% of iPhone app developers aren't happy with the current distribution system. She also wondered about the fairness of a commission system requiring the makers of video games pay the bulk of the commissions, while digital services offered in other industries such as banking don't pay anything, even though they are using the technology that powers iPhones.

"The gaming industry seems to be generating a disproportionate amount of money relative to the (intellectual property) that you are giving them and everybody else? In a sense it's almost as if they are subsidizing everybody else," Gonzalez Rogers said.

Cook agreed about the subsidy, but insisted there is still a fair balance because video game makers are able to reach a wider audience of consumers who become players while visiting the store looking at other apps. He took issue with the notion that most app makers are unhappy with the store's current setup.

"We turn the place upside down for developers," Cook said.

Gonzalez Rogers also didn't seem to buy Apple's explanation for a move it made last year when it lowered its commission on in-app commissions to 15% on the first \$1 million in revenue. Although the price cut came after Epic filed its antitrust case in August, Apple said the discount was driven by desire to provide a helping hand during a pandemic-driven recession.

"At least what I've seen so far, that really wasn't the result of competition, (but) the pressure you were feeling," Gonzalez Rogers told Cook. Apple's app store practices are being examined by regulators and lawmakers in the U.S. and Europe while Epic pursues its case.

Gonzalez Rogers is expected to elaborate issues still weighing on her mind Monday when she plans to pose questions to lawyers on both sides while they make their final points before she takes the matter under submission. The judge said she hopes to release her decision before Aug. 13 in a written ruling that could reshape the technology landscape.

## Duke's King embraces being role model as Black woman AD

By AARON BEARD AP Sports Writer

DURHAM, N.C. (AP) — Nina King knows she faces a big responsibility in taking over as Duke's athletics director later this year. It's not just about managing a 27-sport program in a marquee league.

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King will become only the third Black woman AD in a power conference. Two have come in a year, a sign of progress when it comes to diversity hiring in leadership roles in major college athletics.

King hopes it's a start.

"I do feel a great responsibility, and I embrace that," King said Friday during her introductory campus news conference. "I am excited and ... I want to show little girls who look like me that this is possible."

The school announced King's promotion Wednesday, saying the administrator would take over officially Sept. 1 with the retirement of Kevin White. King, 42, is currently a senior deputy athletic director for administration and legal affairs as well as chief of staff, working on White's staff at Duke since 2008.

She joins Carla Williams at fellow Atlantic Coast Conference school Virginia and Candice Lee at Vanderbilt in the Southeastern Conference as the only Black women serving as ADs among the 65 power-conference schools. Williams was the first in October 2017, while Lee followed almost exactly one year ago after working as interim AD.

The other women ADs in the Power Five are: Heather Lyke with Pittsburgh in the ACC, Sandy Barbour with Penn State in the Big Ten and Jennifer Cohen with Washington in the Pac-12.

"Listen, we need to get better," King said. "Six female ADs in the Power Five? I mean, three Black females? We need to do better. And I'm happy to kind of be the next step toward progress and I'm committed to helping ensure that more females, more people of color, have opportunities like I do."

Diversity hiring, or the slow progress of it, isn't a new concern in college athletics. The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) at Central Florida has long compiled annual report cards evaluating college and professional leagues on racial- and gender-hiring practices. The results have largely been unchanged in the Bowl Subdivision ranks: white men dominating leadership positions while women and people of color remain underrepresented.

TIDES director Richard Lapchick hopes King's hiring inspires schools to "think about other possible breakthroughs."

"The fact that it's not only a Black AD, but a Black woman AD, makes it doubly important," Lapchick said in an interview with The Associated Press. "It's a time that one would hope in the wake for the racial reckoning this year that we're paying much more attention to diversity, equity and inclusion — both in college athletics as well as society in general.

"This is, for me, a good sign that we're doing that."

King said she had spoken with Williams numerous times during the process and has been close with Lee for several years.

As Lee put it Friday: "It's a small club, but it's a special club."

"There's no doubt that you feel pressure," Lee told the AP. "You certainly feel like a spotlight is on you and you want to make sure that you don't give any reason why other people, deserving people, would not get opportunities.

"I would say the good part is, and I think I can speak for all three of us, we are highly motivated, very driven. And so I think that regardless we would put the pressure on ourselves to do a good job."

King has handled daily operation and oversight of Duke's athletic department, and served last season as the chairwoman of the NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Committee that selects and seeds the tournament field.

She takes over at a time when schools nationally are grappling with financial hits from the COVID-19 pandemic and the impending arrival of college athletes being able to profit from use of their name, image and likenesses.

She also faces the potential of hiring the successor to Hall of Fame men's basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski (74 years old) as well as football coach David Cutcliffe (66).

Despite challenges ahead, King knows she has people she can rely on for advice. It includes Williams and Lee in what King hopes is a still-growing group of peers.

"Both of them, great advice: stay true to who are you are," King said, "and be yourself."

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## Stocks end a wobbly day mixed; S&P 500 posts a weekly loss

By DAMIAN J. TROISE and ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writers

Wall Street racked up more losses Friday on a choppy day of trading that left the major indexes mixed and the S&P 500 with its second straight weekly decline.

The S&P 500 ended 0.1% lower after having been up 0.7% in the early going. The benchmark index, which hit an all-time high two weeks ago, lost 0.4% this week. That follows a 1.4% loss last week.

Gains for banks and health care companies were kept in check by drops in technology stocks and in companies like Tesla, McDonald's and Amazon.com that rely directly on consumer spending. Energy stocks eked out a small gain as the price of U.S. crude oil rose. Treasury yields were mixed.

The market's latest bout of selling come as investors remain focused on the possibility of inflation as the economy stirs to life following more than a year of shutdowns related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The market is trying to digest signs of incipient inflation that may be more than transitory, with what the Fed's reaction might be," said Alicia Levine, chief strategist at BNY Mellon Investment Management.

The S&P 500 slipped 3.26 points to 4,155.86, while the Nasdaq slid 64.75 points, or 0.5%, to 13,470.99. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fared better, gaining 123.69 points, or 0.4%, to 34,207.84.

Small company stocks also notched gains. The Russell 2000 index picked up 7.51 points, or 0.3%, to 2,215.27.

The market's pullback this month reflects heightened unease among traders that rising inflation may prompt central banks to pull back on their efforts to support job growth before the economic recovery is fully realized. The Federal Reserve has said it expects any bump in inflation to be temporary, though investors are uncertain about how hot inflation could become.

Analysts have also said investors are looking further ahead, beyond the recovery, and wary about potential tax changes and the impact they may have on growth.

The U.S. Treasury Department supports a global minimum corporate tax rate of at least 15% as part of an effort to end what it calls "a race to the bottom" as countries compete with each other to cut corporate tax rates and lure multinational companies.

Solid earnings helped lift several companies Friday. Foot Locker rose 2% after reporting solid first-quarter earnings and revenue. Agricultural equipment maker Deere gained 1.3% after beating Wall Street's fiscal second-quarter profit forecasts.

Oatmilk maker Oatly rose another 11.2%, following the 19% climb it made a day earlier on its first day of trading.

Nvidia, the graphics card and chip manufacturer, rose 2.6% after the company announced a four-for-one stock split. Nvidia was one of the biggest gainers of 2020.

Treasury yields were mostly stable. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note fell to 1.62% from 1.63% late Thursday.

The price of Bitcoin also turned choppy following headlines out of China, where a government official said in a statement that the country is focused on cracking down on Bitcoin "mining and trading behavior."

Earlier this week, the price of Bitcoin and other digital currencies fell sharply after China's banking association issued a warning over the risks associated with digital currencies. The price of Bitcoin gave up 12% to about \$35,412, according to crypto news and information site Coindesk.

## Wyoming lawmaker reveals he impregnated 14-year-old at 18

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — Wyoming state Sen. Anthony Bouchard, a Republican trying to unseat U.S. Rep. Liz Cheney next year, revealed that he impregnated a 14-year-old girl when he was 18, describing the relationship as "like the Romeo and Juliet" story in a description that drew a rebuke from a sexual assault prevention group.

Bouchard vowed not to drop out of the race and blamed "dirty politics" for bringing the story to light.

Bouchard, 55, initially disclosed what he described as a typical teenage relationship in a Facebook Live video to supporters on Thursday. He later confirmed the girl's age to the Casper Star-Tribune.

"It's a story when I was young, two teenagers, girl gets pregnant," he said in the video. "You've heard



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those stories before. She was a little younger than me, so it's like the Romeo and Juliet story."

Bouchard married the girl when she was 15 and he was 19, when both were living in Florida. They divorced three years later, he told the newspaper. She killed herself when she was 20, Bouchard said.

Online records list a woman with her name as being buried at a Jacksonville cemetery in 1990. The newspaper chose not to identify the woman.

Bouchard, a gun rights activist who co-owns a septic system servicing business with his wife, did not immediately return a phone call from The Associated Press seeking comment.

Framing it as "Romeo and Juliet" is wrong and dangerous, said Kristen Schwartz, executive director for the Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

"Laws exist to protect young people involved in these situations," Schwartz said. "There's a reason we have laws against sexual abuse of a minor and it's because the brain of a 14-year-old is not developed enough to make mature decisions about sex and sexuality."

Schwartz added: "Any language that would minimize things that are a crime is harmful. It's harmful to survivors and it's harmful to our greater community."

Bouchard and the girl were able to legally marry because Florida at the time allowed marriage at any age with a judge's approval if a pregnancy was involved and a parent consented.

Bouchard is among at least eight Republicans running against Cheney in 2022 after her vote to impeach former President Donald Trump over the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Bouchard said he decided to post the video to get ahead of a story about his previous marriage. In the video, He claims an unnamed reporter and a "political opposition research company" were driving the effort together.

Bouchard said he didn't think Cheney was involved in the disclosure and Cheney spokesman Jeremy Adler denied any involvement.

He said he and the girl were under pressure to have an abortion, which they refused. The son, now an adult, has become "almost" estranged from him after making "some wrong choices in his life," Bouchard said.

"A lot of pressure. Pressure to abort a baby. I got to tell you. I wasn't going to do it, and neither was she," Bouchard said. "And there was pressure to have her banished from their family. Just pressure. Pressure to go hide somewhere. And the only thing I could see as the right thing to do was to get married and take care of him."

Bouchard said the disclosure wouldn't stop him from seeking higher office.

"Bring it on. I'm going to stay in this race," he said. "We're going to continue to raise money because my record stands on its own."

## New York AG has 2 lawyers working with DA on Trump probe

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York's attorney general said Friday that she's assigned two lawyers to work with the Manhattan district's attorney's office on a criminal investigation into former President Donald Trump's business dealings.

Attorney General Letitia James said her office is working alongside and cooperating with Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. on the criminal probe. Vance's office has been investigating Trump for about two years.

James, a Democrat, said her office is also continuing its ongoing civil investigation into the the Republican ex-president and his company, the Trump Organization.

"Two of our assistant attorney generals have been cross designated as district attorneys," James said at a news conference on an unrelated topic.

It was James' first appearance before the news media since her office announced Tuesday night that its Trump investigation had evolved into a criminal matter. She did not say what prompted her office to expand its investigation into a criminal probe.

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Trump issued a statement Wednesday complaining that he's being "unfairly attacked and abused by a corrupt political system." He contends the probes are part of a Democratic plot to silence his voters and block him from running for president again.

Duncan Levin, a lawyer for a witness who's cooperating with both investigations, said they've been talking to prosecutors from the attorney general's criminal division since March.

Levin represents Jen Weisselberg, the former daughter-in-law of Trump's longtime finance chief, Allen Weisselberg.

Jen Weisselberg has given New York investigators reams of tax records and other documents as they look into whether some Trump employees were given off-the-books compensation, such as apartments or school tuition.

Allen Weisselberg was subpoenaed in James' civil investigation and testified twice last year.

Vance's office has been investigating whether Trump, his company or people connected to them committed crimes relating to matters including hush-money payments for women who say they slept with Trump, property valuations and employee compensation.

James' civil investigation has centered on some of the same issues.

## New England Pats give flight to China's vaccine diplomacy

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press Writer

MIAMI (AP) — The New England Patriots' team plane has delivered 500,000 Chinese-made COVID vaccines to El Salvador — and in the process inadvertently inserted itself into a testy, geopolitical fight for influence in Latin America.

The "Pats Plane" was greeted upon arrival in San Salvador early Wednesday, just after midnight, by China's top diplomat to the tiny Central American country.

The team says it had been aware of the flight but didn't arrange it — that was done by a company that leases out the plane when the Patriots aren't using it.

While the Boeing 767 — emblazoned with the six-time Super Bowl champions' red, white and blue logo — drew much of the local and international media attention, when the cargo bay opened to offload a huge crate bearing Chinese script. Ambassador Ou Jianhong said China "would always be a friend and partner" of El Salvador.

Her comments were a not-so-subtle dig at the Biden administration, which in recent weeks has slammed President Nayib Bukele over the removal of several Supreme Court magistrates and a top prosecutor, which it warned undermines El Salvador's democracy.

Bukele, who hasn't been shy about leveraging budding ties with China to seek concessions from the U.S., touted the vaccine delivery — El Salvador's fourth from Beijing since the pandemic began — in several social media posts. To date, the country has received 2.1 million doses from China but not a single shot from the U.S., its traditional ally and biggest trading partner as well as home to more than 2 million Salvadoran immigrants.

"Go Pats," Bukele tweeted out Thursday with a smiling face with sunglasses emoji — even though the team itself had almost nothing to do with the flight.

Across Latin America, China has found fertile ground for so-called vaccine diplomacy that seeks to turn back decades of U.S. dominance. The region is the hardest hit in the world from the virus, with eight countries among the top 10 deadliest on a per capita basis, according to Our World in Data, an online research site. Meanwhile, a deep recession has wiped out more than a decade's worth of economic growth and governments in several nations are facing mounting pressure and even violent protests from voters outraged by the failure to control surging infection rates.

This week, the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, which advises Congress on the national security implications of China's rise, warned that the U.S. needed to begin sending its own vaccines to the region or risk losing support from longtime allies.

"The Chinese have made every delivery to an airport tarmac into a photo op," R. Evan Ellis, a China-Latin

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American expert at the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, told the panel on Thursday. "The president comes out and the boxes roll off with Chinese flags on them. So the Chinese, unfortunately, have done a much better job marketing."

Stacey James, a Patriots spokesman, said the team played no direct role in the vaccine's delivery and dismissed suggestions it was picking sides in a geopolitical fight. Last year, at the start of the pandemic, Patriots owner Robert Kraft brokered a deal with China using one of the team's two planes to transport 1 million N95 masks from Shenzhen to Boston. The plane, when not in use by the team, is leased for chartered flights by Philadelphia-based Eastern Airlines, James said.

"It's great to be associated with positive missions to deliver vaccines where they're needed," said James. "But this wasn't a political mission."

As part of its vaccine diplomacy, China has pledged roughly half a billion doses of its vaccines to more than 45 countries, according to an Associated Press tally. And just four of China's many vaccine makers claim they are able to produce at least 2.6 billion doses this year.

U.S. health officials haven't certified the Chinese vaccines as effective and Secretary of State Antony Blinken has complained about China's politicization of its vaccine sales and donations. Meanwhile Democrats and Republicans alike have harshly criticized China's human rights record, predatory trade practices and digital surveillance as a deterrent to closer ties.

But many in the developing world struggling to inoculate their populations have little tolerance for the badmouthing of China and accuse the U.S. of hoarding western-made shots. President Joe Biden on Monday pledged to share an additional 20 million vaccine doses of its own stocks in the coming six weeks, bringing the total U.S. commitment abroad to 80 million.

Countries in Latin America are also grateful for Chinese investment in major infrastructure projects and purchasing of the region's commodities amid the pandemic-induced recession.

Also this week, El Salvador's congress, which is dominated by Bukele's allies, ratified a cooperation agreement with China that calls for 400 million yuan — about \$60 million — in investment in a water purification plant, a stadium and a library among other projects. The agreement was the outgrowth of the previous Salvadoran government's severing of diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 2018 and establishment of ties with communist Beijing.

"The Biden administration should stop giving Latin American policymakers public advice vis-à-vis China," said Oliver Stuenkel, an international affairs professor at the Getulio Vargas Foundation in Sao Paulo, Brazil, speaking to the congressional advisory panel. "It sounds arrogant and dishonest given the many positive economic consequences trade with China has had in Latin America."

## Handwritten example of famous Einstein equation gets \$1.2M

BOSTON (AP) — A letter written by Albert Einstein in which he writes out his famous  $E = mc^2$  equation has sold at auction for more than \$1.2 million, about three times more than it was expected to get, Boston-based RR Auction said Friday.

Archivists at the Einstein Papers Project at the California Institute of Technology and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem say there are only three other known examples of Einstein writing the world-changing equation in his own hand.

This fourth example, the only one in a private collection, only became public recently, according to RR Auction, which had expected it to sell for about \$400,000.

"It's an important letter from both a holographic and a physics point of view," Bobby Livingston, executive vice president at RR Auction said, calling the equation the most famous in the world.

The equation — energy equals mass times the speed of light squared — changed physics by demonstrating that time was not absolute and that mass and energy were equivalent.

The one-page handwritten letter in German to Polish American physicist Ludwik Silberstein is dated Oct. 26, 1946.

Silberstein was a well-known critic and challenger to some of Einstein's theories.

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"Your question can be answered from the  $E = mc^2$  formula, without any erudition," Einstein wrote in the letter written on Princeton University letterhead, according to a translation provided by RR Auction.

The letter was part of Silberstein's personal archives, which were sold by his descendants.

The buyer was identified by RR only as an anonymous document collector.

The rarity of the letter set off a bidding war, Livingston said.

Five parties were bidding aggressively at first, but once the price reached about \$700,000, it became a two-party contest, he said.

The auction began May 13 and concluded Thursday.

## Myanmar election chief considers dissolving Suu Kyi's party

NAYPYITAW, Myanmar (AP) — The head of Myanmar's military-appointed state election commission said Friday that his agency will consider dissolving Aung San Suu Kyi's former ruling party for alleged involvement in electoral fraud and having its leaders charged with treason.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy came to power after a landslide 2015 election victory, and won an even greater majority in last November's general election. It was set to start a second term in February when the military seized power in a coup, arresting her and dozens of top government officials and party members.

Junta leader Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing cited electoral fraud as the reason for the army's takeover, saying "there was terrible fraud in the voter lists." The army-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party, which suffered unexpectedly heavy losses in the election, made similar allegations.

Independent observers dispute the assertions of widespread irregularities.

Political parties were called to discuss planned changes in the electoral system at a meeting Friday. There, Union Election Commission chairman Thein Soe said an investigation of last year's election that would soon be completed showed that Suu Kyi's party had illegally worked with the government to give itself an advantage at the polls.

"We will investigate and consider whether the party should be dissolved, and whether the perpetrators should be punished as traitors," he said.

Asked for U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' reaction, his spokesman Stephane Dujarric said: "Should that happen, that would be a clear step in the wrong direction."

"What we have all been working for, what the Security Council, the international community has been working for, is a restoration of democracy and a restoration of the voice of the people of Myanmar," Dujarric said.

Suu Kyi's party, which has thrown its weight behind the mass popular movement against the military takeover, has faced constant harassment since the coup, with its members arrested and offices raided and closed.

The junta initially announced that it would hold new elections a year after taking power, but it later hedged and said the delay could be up to two years. Before the start of democratic reforms a decade ago, Myanmar was ruled by the military for 50 years.

Suu Kyi's party also won a 1990 election, but the military stepped in to prevent it from taking power.

Suu Kyi and other members of her government already face various criminal charges that could keep them from running in the next election. Their supporters assert all the charges are politically motivated.

The announced purpose of Friday's commission meeting was to discuss the junta's plan to change the country's election system from "first past the post" to proportional representation.

In first-past-the-post systems, the candidate with the most votes in a given constituency is the winner, while in proportional representation, the share of winning parliamentary seats in an area with several seats is allocated according to the proportion of the vote won by each party or candidate.

Almost all the major parties — including Suu Kyi's NLD — refused to go to Friday's commission meeting, as they regard the body as illegitimate.

Local media reported that almost a third of the parties boycotted the gathering in the capital, Naypyitaw.

Many of the 62 attending were pro-military organizations that polled badly in last November's election, failing to win a single seat.

After taking power, the military dismissed the members of the election commission and appointed new ones. It also detained members of the old commission, and, according to reports in independent Myanmar media, pressured them to confirm there had been election fraud. The new commission declared the last election's results invalid.

A non-partisan election monitoring organization said this week that the results of last November's voting were representative of the will of the people, rejecting the military's allegations of massive fraud.

The Asian Network for Free Elections said in a report that it "lacked sufficient information to independently verify the allegations of voter list fraud" because the election law did not allow it access to voting lists, but that it had not seen any credible evidence of any massive irregularities.

However, the group also called Myanmar's electoral process "fundamentally undemocratic" because its 2008 constitution, implemented under army rule, grants the military an automatic 25% share of all parliamentary seats, enough to block constitutional changes.

It also noted that large sectors of the population, most notably the Muslim Rohingya minority, are deprived of citizenship rights, including the right to vote.

The military ruled Myanmar from 1962 up to 2011, when a quasi-civilian administration backed by the army took over.

## Ford CEO: Electric vehicle demand will transform industry

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) — A new electric version of Ford's immensely popular F-150 pickup truck might just be the catalyst that hastens America's transition from gasoline to battery-powered vehicles.

Jim Farley, the company's new CEO, calls the introduction of an electric version of the nation's top-selling vehicle a watershed moment for Ford as well as for the auto industry. The new truck, called the F-150 Lightning and due in showrooms by next spring, will be able to travel up to 300 miles (480 kilometers) per battery charge and tow up to 10,000 pounds (4,500 kilograms).

Yet Ford's commitment to the EV F-150 is hardly without risk. The company spent millions to develop the truck at a time when sales of electric vehicles remain minuscule — just 2% of the U.S. auto market. Many truck owners will be reluctant to switch from gasoline engines. And there's the distinct possibility that at least in the early months and perhaps years of production, automakers could run short of EV batteries and the scarce precious metals needed to make them.

The Associated Press spoke recently with Farley about electric vehicle sales and a global chip shortage that has hindered auto production. The interview was edited for clarity and length.

Q: Why is the Lightning so important to Ford, and why are you offering an electric version before other models?

A: We're starting with our icons because we know the customers the best and we can surprise them with the best execution. But the real key is the scale. We sell 1.1 million (F-Series) units a year. So these customers really trust us. If there's a company who's going to take them into an electric future, it's Ford.

Q: You're at a base price of roughly \$40,000. With a \$7,500 federal tax credit, will you be even cheaper than a gas-powered F-150?

A: It's going to be pretty close. It depends on the specifications. The vehicle is faster than a Raptor (F-150 high performance gas version.) It'll power your house for three days or a heck of tailgate. We have the latest interior technology, over-the-air updates. You could argue it's going to give the internal combustion product a heck of a run.

Q: How long do you think it will be until the majority of vehicles you sell are battery electric?

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A: A lot of it will depend on government support, the infrastructure (charging stations) build-out, as well as a support for the purchase. We have a \$7,500 benefit still at Ford. So it depends on what happens with government policy, and whether that tips the scale for a lot of customers. It has in Europe. China is moving fast. We're totally sold out with the Mach E (Electric SUV). On the West Coast, it's already changed quickly. It'll be a matter of time before that sweeps across the country.

Q: You have said the global semiconductor shortage will halve your normal production in the second quarter. Do you see that shortage ending this year?

A: These components are a high percentage of our build-of-material these days, and we can't really continue to run just-in-time inventory on components like this. It's a real game changer in how we look at our supply chain. We are seeing some positive indications from chip producers. The big change is the Renesas facility (a chip factory in Japan that was damaged by fire) coming back online. As that facility ramps up to 100%, we'll feel a lot more confident. So we're not through this. I'm not going to give any predictions about what the second half looks like.

Q: Does that 50% production loss figure for the second quarter change?

A: Certainly in the second half we see much less impact. We had about 200,000 units of lost production in the first quarter. The second quarter is going to be the most difficult. We see, conservatively, a couple of hundred thousand units of risk in the second half.

Q: You've mentioned that you may buy chips directly from the factories and stockpile them. Is this going to change the way Ford buys critical parts?

A: I really do think so. This is a really significant event. It's not really black swan events, Renesas is, but it's really more kind of dealing with the realities of a different supply chain focused on electronic components. Silicon is a big part of every vehicle. I do think that everything's on the table. We've also learned that you have to engineer flexibly for these components. You may have to have a design on the shelf in case something runs lean.

Q: You have said you may move from having huge inventories on dealer lots to an order-from-the-factory business model?

A: Most of our customers do their shopping online now. We just are expanding our e-commerce platform. There are a couple of pieces that are now starting to come together. The first is a reservation system, so that people are more likely to order what they want versus going into the dealership and ordering off the inventory. We have to make it easier. We've done that. The next thing is, our order-to-delivery has to improve. The next thing is very large-scale remote pick-up and delivery.

Q: Dealers say that people would embrace four weeks from order to delivery. Is that realistic?

A: That's about what we see in Europe. About 50% of our retail customers in Europe order their car. It's somewhere between four and six weeks. It all depends on how popular the model is. There's a big benefit for us on the cost side and marketing. But on the F-150, with millions and millions of combinations, we have to do a lot of complexity reduction to pull that off.

Q: Would I have to pay more for my F-150 because of this?

A: The whole system will be a lot leaner, and the company doesn't have to do the public advertising. There's a lot of efficiency gains that customers really don't benefit from today. There will be lower costs, which we'll pass on to the customers. It generally will not be a big change for customers. I just think they'll save a lot of time.

Q: Ford has plans to build its own electric vehicle batteries. Do you see these as being union plants, and

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will they pay as much as jobs now do at Ford powertrain plants?

A: Michigan is a good example, where we make the F-150. That's a UAW plant. VanDyke (in Sterling Heights, Michigan) is another one. They're making motors for the F-150 electric. The jobs are changing. We think that by working with the government and our UAW partners, we can secure American jobs as we move to e-mobility. It's critical for our country. It's critical for Ford. One of the real game-changers in this area is (battery) cell production. By in-sourcing cells, not just motors, power electronics, things like that, we have the opportunity to create more jobs. And although the vehicles are 30%-plus more efficient to make, by in-sourcing batteries, we can offset that risk.

## **NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week**

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Arizona election database is not missing

**CLAIM:** The election database in Maricopa County in Arizona has been deleted, seals were improperly broken on boxes that hold the votes, and ballots are missing.

**THE FACTS:** An unprecedented, partisan audit of the 2020 election in Arizona's largest county is being used to spread false information about the vote. Though a partial hand recount and two extra audits found no issues in the election that gave Biden a margin of victory of less than 10,500 votes in the battleground state, Republicans in the Arizona state Senate used their subpoena power to take possession of all 2.1 million county ballots, the machines that counted them and hard drives full of data, and hired a Florida-based cybersecurity firm to comb through it. The firm, Cyber Ninjas, is run by a supporter of former President Donald Trump who has promoted election conspiracy theories. On May 12, Senate President Karen Fann sent a letter to the chairman of the Republican-controlled Maricopa County Board of Supervisors accusing county officials of deleting election databases. The letter also questioned why there were discrepancies between certain batches of ballots and log sheets, and why broken seals were found in ballot boxes. Trump released a statement echoing Fann's letter, which also spread on social media. It read, in part: "The entire Database of Maricopa County in Arizona has been DELETED! This is illegal and the Arizona State Senate, who is leading the Forensic Audit, is up in arms. Additionally, seals were broken on the boxes that hold the votes, ballots are missing, and worse." At a meeting Monday, county officials refuted the allegations and issued a 14-page response to Fann, calling her accusations "false, defamatory, and beneath the dignity of the Senate." The letter, along with a separate technical memo, detailed the procedures around the vote and explained how they had been misunderstood by those behind the Senate's audit. In refuting the claim about deleted databases, the county listed a number of technical mistakes that may have been made by the firms running the audit when they configured a copy of the data and searched for the files in question. Furthermore, Megan Gilbertson, communications director for Maricopa County Elections Department, told The Associated Press that "the county backs up and archives all of its election data." On Tuesday, Ben Cotton, the founder of a computer forensics firm working on the audit, told key senators the data in question had been deleted from the server he copied but he also acknowledged he had recovered the data and had access to it -- thereby undermining the claim that the database had been permanently destroyed. Seals were not improperly broken on ballots, as was alleged. They were opened before the tabulated ballots were put in long-term storage, which is standard procedure, according to county officials. As for the allegation that ballots were missing: If a ballot cannot be read by the tabulation machine, it must go through a distinct process to be duplicated and is tracked in a separate set of logs. Liz Howard, senior counsel for the Democracy Program at the Brennan Center for Justice, said those running the audit are "basically looking at the wrong tracking sheets, the wrong documents." Election integrity experts who reviewed the county's documents said the evidence indicates the county followed established

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protocols, but those conducting the audit lacked professional election experience to understand what they were examining. "Experts have raised concerns over how those conducting this review would not know what they were looking at and that they would draw incorrect and malicious conclusions to support their own agendas," said Tammy Patrick a former Maricopa County official and senior adviser to the elections program at Democracy Fund. Fann did not respond to a request for comment.

— Associated Press writers Jude Joffe-Block in Phoenix and Terrence Fraser in New York contributed this report.

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Moderna vaccine ingredient falsely targeted as unsafe

CLAIM: SM-102 is an ingredient in the Moderna vaccine that is not safe for humans or for veterinary use.

THE FACTS: As millions of Americans receive COVID-19 vaccines, posts online are falsely claiming that an ingredient listed in the Moderna vaccine is unsafe for humans and animals. One Instagram user posted a video that compares the ingredient list for the Moderna vaccine with the ingredients in a chemical solution made by the Michigan biotech company Cayman Chemical. Both products list SM-102, a lipid, as an ingredient. The Cayman product comes with a warning that it is to be used for research purposes only and contains chloroform. "It's unbelievable how many people are just following this blindly, and not doing active research to find out what they are putting into their, and now their children's body," the caption on the video reads. In fact, SM-102 — the ingredient both products have in common — is harmless to people and isn't what makes the Cayman Chemical solution dangerous. Only the Cayman product contains chloroform, a hazardous solvent. The posts ignore information on the Cayman Chemical safety sheet that lists chloroform as a "dangerous component" and lists SM-102 separately under "other ingredients." In response to the misleading social media posts, Cayman Chemical released a statement reaffirming that the product being mentioned online is made up of 90% chloroform and 10% SM-102. It is intended for research purposes only. The company has a separate division for products for human and veterinary use. "While it is a common solvent, chloroform has several known serious hazards," the company said in a news release. "Neither the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Registry of Toxic Effects of Chemical Substances (RTECS), or the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) Classification and Labelling Inventory list any hazards associated with SM-102." The Moderna vaccine uses SM-102 to deliver the genetic code, or mRNA, of the spike protein that coats the coronavirus into our cells. Experts say there is no need to be concerned about SM-102 in the vaccine. The amount of lipid used in the vaccine is very small, said Lisa Morici, an associate professor in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at Tulane University School of Medicine, in an email. "Our own cell membranes are composed of lipids," she said. Representatives for Moderna could not immediately be reached for comment.

— Associated Press writer Beatrice Dupuy in New York contributed this report.

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Video shows child having epileptic seizure, not COVID-19 vaccine reaction

CLAIM: A video shows a child shaking uncontrollably in response to the COVID-19 vaccine.

THE FACTS: A video of a child with epilepsy experiencing a seizure is being shared online to falsely imply the child is reacting to a COVID-19 vaccination. The video shows a young boy in an orange and blue shirt trembling as an adult woman soothes him, saying, "Come on, baby" and telling him to breathe. Overlaid text on the clip reads, "But they're safe right?!" and copies language about the safety of COVID-19 vaccines from the World Health Organization. In a version that amassed more than 2 million views on Facebook, a second video alongside the first shows a woman crying and shaking her head in fear. Taken together, the post falsely implies the child's physical symptoms are somehow related to the COVID-19 vaccine. But in a May 6 Instagram post, the boy's father explains that the child has epilepsy and has experienced seizures since 2009. "No, nothing to do with Covid," the post reads. In the post, the father does claim that his son's epilepsy is related to vaccines he received as a young child. But that is not supported by scientific evidence, Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine expert at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, told The Associated Press. "Vaccines do not cause epilepsy," Offit said. One side effect of many vaccines is a fever, which can



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cause seizures in a small percentage of young children, Offit explained. But those seizures, known as febrile seizures, are “short-lived and do not cause permanent harm,” he said. Data on the millions of COVID-19 vaccinations administered so far does not show any link between the vaccines and seizure disorders, Offit said. U.S. health advisers endorsed the use of Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine in kids as young as 12 last week. The two-dose vaccine made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech was studied in more than 2,000 kids ages 12 to 15 and was found to be safe and effective. Children who haven’t been vaccinated should still wear masks and keep 6 feet apart, according to the CDC, which recommends masks for children age 2 and older in public settings and when with people outside their household.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in Seattle contributed this report.

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Image of pyramids lit with Palestinian flag is manipulated

CLAIM: A photo shows Egypt projected the Palestinian flag on its Giza Pyramids during the latest war between Palestinian militants in Gaza and the Israeli military.

THE FACTS: An internet search reveals this image was fabricated using a 2014 photo of the pyramids that did not feature the flag projection. Since fighting broke out between Israel and the Hamas militant group in Gaza on May 10, neighboring Egypt has treated wounded Palestinians and sent trucks carrying humanitarian aid and medical supplies to Gaza. However, Egypt has not shown solidarity with the Palestinians in the form of a light show on its three famed pyramids of Giza, despite a fake image suggesting as much on social media. The image circulated widely on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter on Tuesday, with captions in both Arabic and English. “Egypt showing the flag of Palestine on the pyramids,” wrote a Facebook user. “Thank you Egypt!” In reality, the widely circulating picture is an edit of a 2014 image of the pyramids that can be found on Wikimedia Commons. On Thursday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office announced Israel would halt its offensive against Hamas militants.

— Ali Swenson

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Biden did not fake driving electric truck

CLAIM: President Joe Biden was caught fake driving a Ford F-150 Lightning truck during a visit to a Ford safety testing center Tuesday. A man in the passenger seat was operating the vehicle using a second steering wheel.

THE FACTS: An article shared thousands of times on Facebook this week falsely claimed that the president faked his Tuesday test drive of an electric Ford truck at Ford’s Rouge Electric Vehicle Center in Dearborn, Michigan. “WOW! Biden Caught Fake Driving -- Someone Else Is Steering Vehicle -- It Was All a Stunt!” a headline on the conservative website The Gateway Pundit read. The story misrepresented videos and pictures to claim they showed a passenger in the truck was steering instead of the president. There’s no truth to these claims, according to Melissa Miller, manager of government and public policy communications at Ford. “There was only one steering wheel in the vehicle the president drove yesterday,” Miller said in an email Wednesday. Photos and videos of the event show that the passenger in the vehicle, who was identified to reporters as a member of Biden’s Secret Service detail, was adjusting a camera that was resting on the dashboard, not operating the car. Associated Press photos of the inside of the vehicle show the right side of the dashboard was obstructed by a black cloth covering, which car experts say is typical in prototype vehicles before they are released. “Cloth coverings are very common on the interior of prototype vehicles because they’re designed to hide the dashboard from prying eyes before the product is officially released to the market,” said Billy Rehbock, social media editor at the automotive website MotorTrend. The Gateway Pundit did not respond to a request for comment.

— Ali Swenson

## 7 nooses halt construction at Connecticut Amazon warehouse

WINDSOR, Conn. (AP) — Amazon has temporarily shut down a new warehouse construction site in Connecticut after a seventh noose was found hanging over a beam, a series of incidents local police called

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“potential” hate crimes.

Another rope tied like a noose was discovered Wednesday at the site in Windsor, about 10 miles (16 kilometers) north of Hartford, prompting an intensified law enforcement investigation and calls by the state NAACP on Thursday for the suspect or suspects to be brought to justice.

Amazon said in a statement that it is closing the site until Monday so that additional security measures can be put in place.

“We continue to be deeply disturbed by the incidents happening at the construction site in Windsor,” Amazon said. “Hate, racism or discrimination have no place in our society and are certainly not tolerated in an Amazon workplace.”

Windsor police said they are working with the FBI and state police. A reward has been doubled to \$100,000 for information leading to the identification of the culprits. The first noose was found at the site last month.

Connecticut NAACP leaders joined with state and local officials at a news conference outside the site Thursday to condemn what they called racist acts.

“We’re here to make sure that people are safe,” said Scot X. Esdaile, president of the state NAACP. “We’re making sure that the voices are heard and that this situation is dealt with in a professional and adequate way.”

Carlos Best, an iron worker and foreman at the site, said he has heard racist remarks there, including some made by a worker that he fired.

“Personally, on this job here, I have seen a lot of racism,” he said at the news conference. “This is not the only construction site that these things occur on, and it has to stop.”

## **A new reason to swipe right? Dating apps adding vax badges**

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House is pushing a new reason to swipe right: vaccination badges and “super swipes” for people who’ve gotten their coronavirus shots.

The Biden administration said Friday it’s teaming up with dating apps to showcase the benefits of getting a shot.

Apps like Hinge, Tinder, Match and Bumble are offering special incentives to people who roll up their sleeves, including badges showing vaccination status and free access to premium content. BLK and Chispa will boost profiles of those who are vaccinated, to make them more visible to potential matches. And OKCupid will even let users filter out potential partners based on whether they’ve gotten a vaccine.

The White House says the apps will also direct users to learn how to get vaccinated, including connecting them with educational materials and information on how to find the nearest vaccination site. The administration pointed to research from OKCupid that found those who were already or were planning to get vaccinated received 14% more matches on the app.

“We have finally found the one thing that makes us more attractive — a vaccination,” said White House COVID-19 adviser Andy Slavitt.

Beware: Like a would-be date’s professed height or age, there is no way to verify the vaccination status of the dating app users.

The administration is stepping up its efforts to sustain demand for COVID-19 shots as President Joe Biden looks to meet his goal of delivering at least one dose to 70% of adult Americans by July 4. The nation is now at 60.5%.

Other promotional efforts include free rides to and from vaccination sites from ride-sharing companies Uber and Lyft, corporate giveaways and state lotteries that offer potential cash prizes to lucky vaccinated individuals.

Incentives have helped the rate of first vaccinations tick up from a low of about 551,000 per day to more than 630,000, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## In Virginia, Trump's election lies look like a GOP liability

By WILL WEISSERT and BILL BARROW Associated Press

LANEXA, Va. (AP) — Washington Republicans may be rushing to embrace former President Donald Trump's falsehoods about fraud costing him a second term, but next door in Virginia the GOP candidate in the year's only major election is doing the opposite.

Former private equity executive and political newcomer Glenn Youngkin, the Republican nominee for this November's gubernatorial election, once dodged questions about whether President Joe Biden was fairly elected. But now he acknowledges Biden's win. He campaigned for days with Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, a key leader of a congressional effort to overturn the election results. Cruz is unlikely to headline events this fall, an advisor said.

Youngkin's new tack may preview what's to come from other Republicans tasked with winning swing voters in midterm elections next year, when the party is hoping to retake control of Congress. After months of GOP leaders and activists demanding allegiance to Trump and rewriting history on the 2020 election, Youngkin's race could test whether Republicans can still distance themselves from the former president's lies about the election.

"Sometimes, when you spoon with an issue like that, it's hard to get out of bed with it," said Denver Riggelman, a former Virginia Republican congressman who is now a Trump critic.

In recent weeks, most top national Republicans have not appeared worried about getting too close to Trump. The party's House members took the extraordinary step of ousting Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney from a leadership post for repudiating Trump's false claims of election fraud. They also mostly opposed the creation of a 9/11-style commission to investigate the deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Prior to winning the GOP nomination last week, Youngkin appeared to be onboard with his national party. He refused to publicly answer a number of direct questions about the legitimacy of the election of Biden, who carried Virginia by a comfortable 10 points. He formed an "election integrity" task force, called safeguarding balloting a "top priority" and campaigned with Cruz.

After besting six primary rivals, many of whom were more pro-Trump, Youngkin is now openly acknowledging that Biden's election wasn't marred by fraud.

"Joe Biden was legitimately elected our president," he said on Fox Business last week.

That may put Youngkin out of step with many in his party, but it gets him closer to voters he needs to win over. A poll released in February by Virginia's Christopher Newport University found that 61% of Republicans, but just 19% of independents statewide, said Biden didn't win November's election legitimately.

A Youngkin adviser, who discussed campaign strategy on condition of anonymity, acknowledged the necessity of retaining Trump loyalists while still winning more centrist voters. Youngkin won't bring in conservative figures, like Cruz, to vouch for him, but his fundamental message as the pro-business outsider won't change, the adviser said.

"It's a test case of whether Republicans can find a way of uniting Trump's base with suburban voters that have defected from the party, and Youngkin is probably the best candidate they could have chosen to do that," said Bob Holsworth, a Virginia political consultant who has served on bipartisan boards and commissions. "But, to do that, they have to do something other than emphasize the issues that won him the nomination."

Holsworth said that, in addition to embracing false claims of election fraud, other signature Trump issues, like promises to "drain the swamp," never played well in Virginia — where the northern part of the state's Washington suburbs and other areas have economies dependent on the federal bureaucracy.

"What he did was, he drained Northern Virginia of Republicans," Holsworth said.

The Democratic gains that began there have crept to all of Virginia's largest metropolitan areas, part of a deeper rejection of the Republican Party under Trump in suburbs nationwide.

They have even begun to include places like forest- and reservoir-dotted Lanexa, where camping and hiking overshadows politics. With a population of barely 5,000, the community straddles the counties of New Kent — which Trump won by 35 percentage points — and James City County, where an increasingly

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suburban population helped Biden become the first Democratic presidential candidate to win in 50-plus years.

Jen Tierney, chairwoman of the James City County Democratic Party, said that, before November, a group of Republican veterans switched sides and helped mobilize voters for Biden — and she's worried they are the kinds of Virginians who could now flip back to the GOP.

She thinks the Republicans' internal fights over the 2020 election might prevent that, though. It's good "for people to see that the Republican Party, it's not mainstream anymore," Tierney said. "They are allowing the tail to wag the dog because they need those most ardent Trump folks."

Tom Miller, corresponding secretary of the New Kent County Republican Committee, said he supports some of Youngkin's election integrity proposals — including voter ID requirements — though he observed presidential election ballot counting and saw nothing "even close to lack of integrity." But he also said Virginia voters aren't likely to let questions about the 2020 presidential race effect how they vote for governor.

"The Liz Cheney thing?," Miller asked. "Who gives a crap?"

Democrats will try to make them care, and there are signs of concern among Republicans facing tough races next year.

Thirty five GOP House members defied their party and voted to support the commission on the Capitol attack, including some from swing districts and others whose territory includes fast-growing suburban areas. Republican Rep. Rob Wittman, who represents James City and New Kent counties, did not join.

Virginia Democrats won't choose their gubernatorial nominee until next month, but the Democratic Governor's Association is already running digital ads linking Youngkin to Trump's claims about the election. Former Gov. Terry McAuliffe, the frontrunner for that nomination, has tweeted that Youngkin is a "Big Lie believing Trump loyalist."

"If you're not focused on jobs and improving the quality of schools" rather than "ideological agendas" then "you're going to lose," said former House majority leader Eric Cantor, who represented parts of New Kent County but lost his seat in a 2014 primary upset.

Youngkin's team points to his fundraising success — \$1 million since winning his party's nomination — as validation of his strategy.

After Youngkin won the nomination, Trump issued a relatively routine, written endorsement, rather than scheduling a high-profile Virginia visit. Still, the former president's shadow is likely to loom large over the race.

Republican pollster Whit Ayres said during Virginia's last governor's race, Republicans had a "reasonable, articulate, professional, smart" candidate in Ed Gillespie, who got "blown out of the water in northern Virginia by voters trying to send Donald Trump a message."

"Maybe some of those voters shift back," Ayres said. "But it would take a lot of them."

## **BBC faces questions of integrity after Princess Diana report**

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British broadcaster BBC, seen as a respected source of news and information around the world, is facing questions at home about its integrity following a scathing report on its explosive 1995 interview with Princess Diana.

Britain's justice secretary said Friday that the government would review the rules governing oversight of the BBC after an investigation found that one of its journalists used "deceitful behavior" to secure the interview and the corporation obscured this misconduct for 25 years.

Princes William and Harry, Diana's sons, excoriated the BBC late Thursday, saying there was a direct link between the interview and their mother's death in a traffic accident two years later as she and a companion were being pursued by paparazzi.

The interview on the Panorama program came under renewed scrutiny after Diana's brother, Charles Spencer, complained that journalist Martin Bashir used false documents and other dishonest tactics to persuade Diana to grant the interview. As a result, the BBC commissioned an investigation by retired Judge

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John Dyson, who released a 127-page report on his findings Thursday.

"It wasn't just the decision of a reporter or a production team, there were decisions made much further up the chain about the conduct of these individuals that have now proved, according to Lord Dyson, to be unfounded and wrong," Justice Secretary Robert Buckland told the BBC. "And therefore, government does have a responsibility to look very carefully to see whether the governance of the BBC does need reform in the light of these devastating findings."

The BBC, founded in 1922, is Britain's publicly funded but editorially independent national broadcaster. The rules governing its operations are set out in a royal charter that requires the corporation to be impartial, act in the public interest and be open, transparent and accountable. A mid-term review of the BBC's governance is scheduled to begin next year.

Even before the Dyson report, the BBC was under pressure from some members of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative Party who believe the broadcaster has a liberal bias. Johnson said he was concerned about the findings and hoped that the broadcaster would make sure "nothing like this ever happens again."

At the heart of the scandal were documents made to look like bank statements, falsely suggesting that members of Diana's inner circle were being paid to spy on her.

Spencer alleged that Bashir used the documents to gain his trust so Spencer would introduce the journalist to Diana. He also alleged that Bashir made up stories about the royal family to strengthen Diana's belief that there was a conspiracy against her.

When graphic designer Matt Wiessler, who had been commissioned by Bashir to create mocked-up documents, saw the program, he immediately made the connection between his commission and the interview. He brought his concerns to BBC management, but he has long contended that they made him a scapegoat.

He said there is a culture within the BBC that "the little people" don't need to be addressed. His business faltered after the BBC blacklisted him from assignments.

"Only under duress do we get some sort of apology and some sort of acknowledgement," he told the BBC.

Amid the outcry following the report, the BBC's director-general, Tim Davie, said the broadcaster "should have made greater effort to get to the bottom of what happened at the time and been more transparent about what it knew."

But the BBC also insisted that it had strengthened rules making it possible to outpoint failings.

"There has been radical change over the past 25 years. We now have a thorough and industry-leading whistleblowing scheme, which provides clear and independent routes to raise concerns and, if necessary, direct access for whistle-blowers to a non-executive director on the BBC board," the BBC said. "That is very different to the past."

In the interview, a major scoop for Bashir, Diana famously said that "there were three of us in this marriage" — referring to her husband Prince Charles' relationship with Camilla Parker-Bowles. Her candid account of her failing marriage was watched by millions and sent shockwaves through the British monarchy.

Bashir went on to forge a successful career on both sides of the Atlantic. He conducted another bombshell interview with Michael Jackson in 2003 for ITV and worked for both ABC and MSNBC.

He returned to the BBC in 2016 as religion editor. James Harding, the director of BBC News at the time Bashir was re-hired, apologized and said responsibility for the journalist's return "sits with me."

Bashir, who resigned this month citing ill health, apologized for faking the documents. But he said it had "no bearing whatsoever on the personal choice by Princess Diana to take part in the interview."

The impact of the interview lives on. Prince William, 38, said the interview had created a "false narrative" about Diana that should be corrected by the BBC and news organizations.

"It is my view that the deceitful way that the interview was obtained substantially influenced what my mother said," he said in a broadcast statement. "The interview was a major contribution to making my parents' relationship worse and has since hurt countless others."

William also criticized the BBC's "woeful incompetence" in investigating complaints about the program.

"What saddens me most is that if the BBC had properly investigated the complaints and concerns first raised in 1995, my mother would have known that she had been deceived," he said. "She was failed not

just by a rogue reporter but by leaders at the BBC, who looked the other way rather than asking the tough questions.”

## Hour-by-hour: Biden’s behind-the-scenes push for cease-fire

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

The diplomatic flurry was over and Israel’s Benjamin Netanyahu was on the phone telling President Joe Biden that it appeared the furious fighting between Israel and Hamas was about to end.

But Biden remained wary even after the afternoon phone call with the prime minister. Things still could go crosswise with hours to go before the cease-fire took effect, Biden’s team reasoned.

Nervous White House aides dialed contacts in Tel Aviv and Cairo to suss out whether the truce would hold. Officials in both the U.S. and Israel worried that another barrage of Hamas rockets could sink the Egyptian-brokered agreement, according to an official familiar with the conversations.

Then came another call from Netanyahu — his second to Biden that day — with reassurances for the American president that the 11-day war really was halting.

Biden’s first extended foreign policy crisis, one he handled largely by avoiding the cameras and maneuvering instead behind the scenes, had abated.

The president went before cameras in the Cross Hall of the White House to describe “intensive high-level discussions, hour by hour, literally” by the United States that involved Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and other Middle Eastern countries.

All of it, he said, came “with an aim of avoiding the sort of prolonged conflict we’ve seen in previous years when the hostilities have broken out.”

The calls between Biden and Netanyahu were a small sample of the furious diplomacy that the White House conducted. The president and senior aides had over 80 engagements, by phone or in person, in search of an endgame to the fighting, according to the White House.

Biden’s speech celebrating the cease-fire lasted just 3½ minutes and was delivered in time for evening news broadcasts. He reiterated his belief that Israel has a right to defend itself, expressed condolences for Palestinian civilians who died in the Israeli bombardment and promised that humanitarian aid to Gaza Strip was on its way.

It was an enigmatic, and perhaps fitting, bookend to the sort of messy Mideast crisis he had hoped to avoid, particularly early in a presidency already oversubscribed with managing the public health and economic tumult caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The conflict had also exposed a rift between Biden and members of his own party. The president who over nearly 50 years in national politics has burnished a reputation for unwavering support of Israel leads a Democratic Party that has trended toward a far more divided outlook on the proper path to peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Republicans were all too eager to try to make political use of the situation.

Biden had studiously avoided extensive public comment about the Israeli military strikes. But he faced increasing pressure from Democrats to speak out against the Israelis as the death toll climbed in Gaza and as tens of thousands of Palestinians were displaced by the aerial bombardment.

Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut expressed relief at the cease-fire and commended Biden and his team for their work. But he also laid out ongoing worries, saying, “I am deeply concerned that without meaningful progress towards a two-state future, the conditions of despair will deepen, further fuel extremism and lead to a tragic renewal of the cycle of violence.”

The cease-fire announcement came after Biden on Wednesday stepped up his pressure on Netanyahu, telling the prime minister that he expected “significant de-escalation” of the fighting by day’s end, according to the White House. But Netanyahu came right back with a public declaration that he was “determined to continue” the Gaza operation “until its objective is achieved.”

Biden’s advisers were not overly concerned that Netanyahu’s comments seemed to reject the president’s public call to ease off, said the official, who was not authorized to publicly discuss private discussions and spoke on condition of anonymity.

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In fact, soon after Wednesday's conversation between the leaders, the Israelis signaled to the White House that they were prepared to propose a time for a cease-fire, according to officials.

Netanyahu, who saw daily polling that showed the vast majority of Israelis opposed a cease-fire, was looking for assurances that if such an offer was extended it would, in fact, be accepted. And he wanted the Biden administration's help.

Biden on Thursday morning called Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and asked him if he could guarantee that Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza would abide by a cease-fire if Israel agreed to a deal.

El-Sissi told Biden that he was confident the answer was yes. And the White House quickly relayed that to the Israelis.

Hours later, Netanyahu sat down with his Cabinet. For the roughly 2-½ hour meeting, White House officials — who had been in nearly continuous contact for days from the Israelis — heard nothing from Tel Aviv.

When it ended, Netanyahu called Biden and told the president that the Cabinet had approved the cease-fire. The Israelis wanted it to take effect quickly in hopes of mitigating chances that Hamas would attempt to rain rockets on Tel Aviv in the final moments of the war.

Still, Netanyahu conveyed some trepidation that the deal could fall apart. About 40 minutes later, as Biden was preparing for his remarks, Netanyahu called again and told the president he was confident the cease-fire would stick.

While Biden and aides were deep in the backchannel efforts, domestic pressure was building on the president.

On Tuesday, while in Michigan to visit a Ford facility, Democratic Rep. Rashida Tlaib confronted Biden at the airport and called on him to speak out forcefully against the Israeli strikes. Also this week, Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York introduced resolutions to block the sale of \$735 million in military weaponry to Israel that had already been approved by the Biden administration.

"Let us hope that the ceasefire in Gaza holds," Sanders tweeted Thursday evening. "But that's not enough. Our job now is to support desperately needed humanitarian and reconstruction aid to Gaza's people, and find a way to finally bring peace to the region."

Biden advisers had concluded in the first days of the crisis, as Hamas fired hundreds of rockets on Israel, that a call from the president for Israeli restraint would have fallen flat. At the same time, early in the crisis, there was deep worry inside the White House that the fighting could escalate into something that would take months to tamp down.

As the outside calls for Biden to speak out more forcefully grew, the president and top aides privately made the case to Israeli officials that time wasn't on their side.

Biden and Netanyahu have known each other for more than 30 years and have frequently butted heads. Their conversations throughout the crisis probed one another as they tried to game out a path forward, according to officials.

Netanyahu insisted that his half-dozen conversations with Biden during the fighting were "warm and friendly." Biden in the calls referred to Netanyahu by his nickname, "Bibi," while the prime minister addressed the president as "Joe."

"I told him that any country coming under fire from thousands of rockets on its cities would not sit with folded hands, and I told him that we will halt the fighting once we achieve the objectives of the campaign," Netanyahu said. "The president understood this and this is exactly what we did."

Biden ended his own brief remarks about the cease-fire on a hopeful note: "I believe we have a genuine opportunity to make progress, and I'm committed to working for it."

## The Diana Interview: A look at the pivotal moment in time

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The respected British broadcaster BBC is facing questions about its integrity following a scathing report on its explosive 1995 interview with Princess Diana.

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Britain's justice secretary said Friday that the government would review the rules governing oversight of the BBC after an investigation found that one of its journalists used "deceitful behavior" to secure the interview and the corporation obscured this misconduct for 25 years.

Here's a look at the impact of the interview:

## WHAT HAPPENED?

Princess Diana, who was already separated from her husband, Prince Charles, gave a 1995 interview to the BBC in which she said the marriage had failed because Charles, then 47, was still in love with an old flame, Camilla Parker Bowles, then 48.

Diana, then 34, said she was devastated when she found out in 1986 — five years after her marriage — that Charles had renewed his relationship with Camilla. She said she was so depressed that she deliberately hurt herself in a desperate bid for help.

"There were three of us in this marriage, so it was a bit crowded," Diana said.

## HOW WAS THE INTERVIEW SEEN AT THE TIME?

The interview with now-disgraced BBC reporter Martin Bashir was widely seen as the princess' retort to her husband's nationally televised confession in 1994 that he had strayed from his marriage vows.

Diana said she was devastated when she found out about Charles' affair and that the discovery led to a feeling of failure and "rampant bulimia."

Though the couple had separated in December 1992, the princess' revelations shocked television audiences and evoked sympathy from millions of Britons. The Sun tabloid reported floods of calls running at 75% in favor of Diana after the 55-minute interview.

Diana disclosed that Charles had asked for the separation and said she wasn't seeking a divorce because of the impact it would have on her sons. But she added: "Obviously we need clarity in the situation. ... I await my husband's decision of which way we are all going to go."

After the interview, Queen Elizabeth II recommended that the couple divorce quickly. The marriage was legally dissolved the following year.

## WHY WAS IT SO IMPORTANT?

The interview marked the first time Diana had offered her side of the story in what was dubbed "the war of the Windsors," said Ed Owens, author of "The Family Firm: Monarchy, Mass Media and the British Public, 1932-53." The now-famous comment about three people in the marriage made clear that Charles had long been unfaithful, all but ensuring the collapse of their marriage.

"It was also a turning point in the way the media reported on the monarchy, in that journalists increasingly looked for 'inside scoops' which could shed light on the dysfunctional elements of royal family life that were usually concealed from public view," Owens said.

"Equally, other royals have since used the one-to-one 'tell all' interview as a way of getting their side of the story across," Owen added.

He cited Prince Andrew's self-destructive 2019 interview with the BBC about his links to convicted American sex offender Jeffrey Epstein and the interview that Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, gave to Oprah Winfrey this year.

## WHAT WAS THE AFTERMATH?

As a result of the divorce, Diana lost many of her royal perks. Two years after the interview, the princess died in a Paris traffic accident as she and a companion were being pursued by paparazzi.

Both of her sons, Princes William and Harry, have said they see a direct link between deceptive tactics that were used to secure the BBC interview and their mother's untimely death.

## **Analysis: In Mideast turmoil, Palestinians find rare unity**

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Over the past weeks, as stun grenades echoed off Jerusalem's walls, rockets streaked out of Gaza, West Bank protesters burned tires and Israeli cities erupted in violence, the frail boundaries separating Israel and the Palestinians seemed to vanish in smoke and flames.



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Israelis saw the chaos ripple out of Jerusalem, not only igniting another Gaza war, but days of ethnic violence in mixed cities they had long held up as models of coexistence, bringing the conflict home in ways unseen since the 2000 Palestinian uprising.

But Palestinians, whether in blockaded Gaza, the occupied West Bank, annexed east Jerusalem or Israel itself made a striking show of unity after decades of forced separation. And the porous frontiers between Israel and the lands it occupied in 1967 — so central to decades of failed peace efforts — seemed to disappear.

On Tuesday, Palestinians from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River observed a general strike, not only against the Gaza war but other aspects of Israeli rule. Protesters from Lebanon and Jordan, both home to large numbers of Palestinian refugees, stormed border fences.

"It highlighted the common destiny," said Nijmeh Ali, a Palestinian academic and activist who is a citizen of Israel. "Palestinians are leading their struggle against one regime. It's using different policies of control, but it's the same apartheid system."

There's always been a certain degree of solidarity among Palestinians, she said, but a new generation is coordinating activities online and sharing videos from across Israel and the occupied territories, further binding them together in a shared struggle.

Israel's leaders blame the unrest on Hamas, which does not recognize Israel's right to exist and is branded a terrorist group by Western countries. They say the Islamic militants seized on protests in Jerusalem to incite war and unrest across the region.

"It's a great success for Hamas, but I'm not sure that it has to do with the popularity of Hamas," said Ofer Shelah, a former parliament member from a centrist party. "Something like this, when it happens, it ignites fumes that have already been there."

Still, he said grievances within Israel's Arab community and the conflict with the Palestinians are "two different stories." He noted that before the fighting broke out a small Arab party was poised to play a key role in forming the next Israeli government.

Over the years, Palestinian citizens of Israel, while facing discrimination in many aspects of their lives, have also made inroads in others, building successful careers in law, academia, entertainment and medicine.

The peace process launched in the early 1990s was based on the idea that a century-old territorial dispute between Jews and Arabs could be resolved by dividing the land along the armistice lines from the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation. The state of Palestine would include most of east Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, lands Israel captured in a later war, in 1967.

But even with the cajoling of five U.S. presidents and much of the international community, the two sides were never able to reach an agreement or resolve the power imbalance favoring Israel. The last substantive talks broke down more than a decade ago.

And lines which were always arbitrary faded away.

Jewish settlers — who never wanted to divide the land to begin with — pushed into east Jerusalem and the West Bank, and their supporters came to dominate Israeli politics. Today, there are more than 700,000 settlers in both territories, the vast majority living in built-up residential areas connected to Israeli cities by rapidly expanding highways.

The Palestinian Authority, once seen as a state-in-waiting, has only limited autonomy in scattered enclaves making up less than 40% of the occupied West Bank. Its close security ties with Israel, and its decision last month to cancel the first elections in 15 years, have led many Palestinians to view it as an extension of the occupation.

If the West Bank is looking more like Israel, the opposite is also true.

Palestinian citizens of Israel, who make up 20% of the population, face widespread discrimination, especially when it comes to land and housing. Israel has spent decades establishing new communities on lands seized in 1948 that are intended for Jewish "settlement" — a descriptor used by Israelis and Palestinians alike.

In recent years, Jews with close ties to the settler movement have moved into predominantly Arab neighborhoods, not only in east Jerusalem, where they are trying to evict dozens of Palestinian families,

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but in mixed cities across Israel. Palestinians have cited that as one of the underlying causes of the recent ethnic violence. The Jews say they have the right to live anywhere in their country.

When the riots broke out, Israel redeployed hundreds of paramilitary Border Police — normally used to quell violent demonstrations in the West Bank — into its own cities.

Some of Israel's traditional allies are taking notice, with left-leaning Americans increasingly drawing parallels to racial injustice in the United States.

"For years, most of the world, including liberals and progressives, believed that there was a good democratic Israel that was separate from a bad, Israeli-run apartheid regime in the occupied territories," says Nathan Thrall, a writer living in Jerusalem who authored a book about the conflict. "That argument is collapsing before our eyes."

That leaves Gaza, from which Israel withdrew all its troops and settlers in 2005, and where Hamas seized power from the Palestinian Authority two years later. Israel and Hamas have fought four wars in a little over a decade, and Israelis routinely speak of the territory as though it is a hostile neighboring country.

But more than half of the 2 million Palestinians living in Gaza are the descendants of refugees who fled or were driven from their homes in what is now Israel in 1948. Israel controls Gaza's airspace, coastal waters, population registry and commercial crossings.

All of this together, according to the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem and the New York-based Human Rights Watch, amounts to a single apartheid regime in which the roughly 7 million Jews living between the river and the sea dominate the roughly 7 million Palestinians — just in different ways depending on where they live.

Israel adamantly rejects the apartheid label and bristles at talk of a single state, which it views as an assault on its very legitimacy, even though its political system is dominated by leaders opposed to Palestinian independence.

Tareq Baconi, an analyst with the Crisis Group, an international think tank, says the question of whether there should be one or two states has been rendered largely irrelevant.

"Partition was something Palestinians and Israelis tried to do, backed by the international community, and it failed," Baconi said.

"There might be some form of partition in the future. Who knows? Right now... the issue is that the single state that controls these territories is constitutionally committed only to Jews, not to Palestinians," he said.

## 'I was afraid': Prince Harry, Oprah discuss mental health

By ALICIA RANCILIO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — For Harry, returning to London to attend Prince Philip's funeral last month meant once more facing a place where he felt trapped and hunted by cameras. It would be a test of his ability to cope with the anxiety that was bubbling up again.

"I was worried about it, I was afraid," Harry told The Associated Press during a recent joint interview with Oprah Winfrey to promote a mental-health series they co-created and co-executive produced for Apple TV+.

He was able to work through any trepidation using coping skills learned in therapy.

"It definitely made it a lot easier, but the heart still pounds," said Harry, the Duke of Sussex and grandson of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and her late husband Philip.

In "The Me You Can't See," which debuted Thursday night on Apple's streaming service, Harry reveals that he first saw a therapist approximately four years ago at the encouragement of then-girlfriend Meghan. They'd had an argument and she recognized his anger seemed misplaced.

The series is another chapter in the unprecedented openness that Harry has brought to his life and his royal family relationships since stepping away from his duties and moving with his wife to California. In March, he and Meghan gave a headline-making interview to Winfrey that elicited a rare public response from the palace.

Harry's self-work may be relatively recent but he and older brother William, The Duke of Cambridge,

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have long championed the importance of mental health. In 2016, Harry, William and his wife Catherine, the Duchess of Cambridge, launched Heads Together, an initiative to speak up and not be ashamed to ask for help when mental well-being is at stake.

Their collective work led to interactions with people across the globe, from all walks of life, and they recognized a common thread. "Sharing your story in order to be able to save a life or help others is absolutely critical," said Harry.

Harry is practicing what he preaches and laying bare his own struggles with trauma and grief. He describes in "The Me You Can't See," the instances of feeling helpless as a young boy while riding in the car with his mother, Princess Diana, who cried as they were surrounded by paparazzi and she struggled to drive.

Years later, Diana was killed in Paris after the car she and friend Dodi Fayed were riding in, crashed during a high-speed chase to flee cameras. Harry was 12 and suppressed his own feelings to meet the mourning public gathered outside Kensington Palace.

Cameras rolled and snapped away as he walked behind her casket to Diana's funeral, alongside William, father Prince Charles, Philip and Diana's brother Charles Spencer.

Harry's revelations coincide with Queen Elizabeth's official confirmation a few months ago that he and Meghan will not return to their senior royal positions within the family, following a one-year trial period.

The couple now lives about 90 minutes north of Los Angeles in an exclusive area near Santa Barbara called Montecito. They count Winfrey, Katy Perry and Orlando Bloom as neighbors. The paparazzi still lurks but it's less intense than in Los Angeles.

This new, outspoken prince who shares his emotions is a contrast to the "never complain, never explain," "keep calm and carry on" mantras that are part of the prototypical British way.

The British tabloids have had a field day picking apart his statements. Some royal commentators have also cried foul over a contradiction between seeking a private life yet granting interviews and revealing family strife.

Harry appears to be cautious in choosing what he wants to speak about, and neither he nor Meghan seem interested in sharing their every move with the world. They do not operate a social media account.

He is undeterred by naysayers, he says, because there's a greater good in being honest about his struggles. "I see it as a responsibility. I don't find it hard to open up," he said. "Knowing the impacts and the positive reaction that it has for so many people that also suffer, I do believe it's a responsibility."

Winfrey was already working with Apple to develop a series on mental health when a conversation with Harry sparked the idea to join forces.

"We were having a conversation and I asked him, 'What are the two most important issues you think facing the world today?' And he said immediately, 'climate change and mental health.'"

She mentioned the project and Winfrey recalls him later saying, 'Oh, by the way, if you ever need any help with that ... give me a call.' And I went and turned around and said, 'What's your number?'"

Winfrey's existing partnership with Apple created a rare opportunity to reach the vast number of people who use the company's devices, Harry said.

"If that's in a billion pockets on a billion screens, then maybe we can really start a global conversation about this," he said.

Winfrey recalls some of her own childhood traumas in "The Me You Can't See." In addition to her and Harry's stories, the series also features accounts from both regular people and celebrities including Lady Gaga and Glenn Close, who speak candidly about their own experiences with mental illness.

Winfrey said Harry pushed to present a global perspective. "This has got to be a world thing and not just a U.S. thing," she recounted him saying, adding: "I think we've accomplished that really well."

Harry jokes he's "slowly catching up" to Winfrey's decades of inner-work and encouragement of others to do the same whether on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" or her "Super Soul Sunday" interviews on OWN. Even Winfrey said she's had a lot to learn.

"I have dealt personally with one of the girls from my school (Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa), who had schizophrenia," Winfrey said. "Only after hearing the doctor say that 'it's a diagnosis. It's not your life, it's not who you are,' that I had my great awakening about it. ... 'That is not

you. You are a person who has a diagnosis of schizophrenia.' That is powerful."

## Retired cop put in chokehold takes police case to high court

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Something went wrong at the security checkpoint at the VA hospital in El Paso, Texas, on a winter's day in 2016.

A 70-year-old man arriving for dental work was put in a chokehold and thrown to the ground by federal police officers in an altercation that was caught on camera.

The man, Jose Oliva, left needing surgery on his shoulder and also required treatment for his throat, eardrum and hand, on which he wore a gold watch he received when he retired after 25 years in federal law enforcement.

But when Oliva, who identifies himself as Mexican American, tried to sue the three officers who were involved, a federal appeals court ruled he was out of luck. He's asking the Supreme Court to revive his lawsuit and the justices could say what they're going to do as early as Monday.

The case puts before the justices the issue of suing law enforcement officers who used chokeholds and possibly excessive force at a time of national reckoning over police tactics and treatment of people of color.

"I just think when I'm alone, letting my mind wander, how could this have happened to me, who served a year in the combat zone and then the rest of my life in law enforcement? How could this happen to me?" Oliva said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press.

Now 76, Oliva said he still has trouble swallowing and his shoulder still hurts five years after the incident.

There is no sound to accompany the images from the day, but Oliva appears to be waiting in line to go through security and at no time physically resists the officers.

He said the trouble began when an officer asked him for his identification, which he indicated he already had put in a bin that was about to be scanned.

The officers and Oliva dispute precisely what was said. But at one point, Officer Mario Nivar approached Oliva with handcuffs at the ready. As soon as Oliva reached the metal detector, Nivar grabbed him, applied a chokehold and wrestled Oliva to the ground. Oliva said he heard a popping sound as his shoulder was wrenched behind his back.

Oliva was charged with disorderly conduct, but the government later dropped the charge.

Nivar was assisted by two other officers, Mario Garcia and Hector Barahona. James Jopling, Nivar's lawyer, declined to make his client available for an interview or to respond to questions himself.

But lawyers for the other men described Oliva as obstinate in refusing to comply with repeated requests for identification and said the officers acted appropriately.

"Because at that point, he's a potential threat. You don't know what he is or what he's carrying. His obstinate refusal is a concern to everyone. A 70-year-old man can handle a .45 pistol just as well as an 18 year old," said Louis Lopez, Barahona's lawyer.

Gabriel Perez, representing Garcia, said the video lacks context, in part because there is no sound.

"He's a veteran obviously, but he's entering a public place, a federal installation. Signs state you have to present ID before you are admitted. He's requested to provide identification. He refused," Perez said.

U.S. District Judge Frank Montalvo ruled that the lawsuit could go forward, noting that officers do not contend that Oliva resisted arrest.

"This is critical as an officer who grapples and chokes a suspect who is not actively resisting violated clearly established law," Montalvo wrote.

Fifty years ago, the Supreme Court ruled that, in limited circumstances, people could sue federal officers for violations of their constitutional rights. Seven federal courts of appeals have held that officers can be sued for rights violations in the course of standard law enforcement operations.

But the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which includes Texas, reversed Montalvo's ruling. A three-judge panel held that the right to sue basically is limited to the same situation the Supreme Court ruled on in 1971, when federal agents entered a home without a warrant, then manacled and strip-searched a suspect.

Appeals court judge Don Willett was not on the three-judge panel that decided Oliva's case, but in a concurring opinion in another 5th Circuit case that dismissed a lawsuit on similar grounds, Willett called the attack on Oliva "unprovoked" and worried that Oliva and others like him find themselves without any legal recourse.

"Are all courthouse doors—both state and federal—slammed shut?" he asked. Willett said he was compelled by previous 5th Circuit rulings to agree the other lawsuit should be dismissed.

In urging the Supreme Court to take the case, Oliva's lawyers with the libertarian Institute for Justice quoted Willett that under the law in the 5th Circuit, which also encompasses Louisiana and Mississippi, federal officials "operate in something resembling a Constitution-free zone."

Oliva, who retired from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection in 2010, said he has a high regard for police officers because he was one of them.

But he said his experience at the VA hospital five years ago "brings to mind more and more the recent attacks on people who have been killed, George Floyd, Eric Garner and the others. The job does not entail assaulting people."

## **IOC VP: Tokyo Olympics go ahead even if state of emergency**

By STEPHEN WADE and YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — The IOC vice president in charge of the postponed Tokyo Olympics said Friday the games would open in just over two months even if the city and other parts of Japan were under a state of emergency because of rising COVID-19 cases.

John Coates, speaking from Australia in a virtual news conference with Tokyo organizers at the end of three days of meetings, said this would be the case even if local medical experts advised against holding the Olympics.

"The advice we have from the WHO (World Health Organization) and all other scientific and medical advice that we have is that — all the measures we have outlined, all of those measures that we are undertaking are satisfactory and will ensure a safe and secure games in terms of health," Coates said. "And that's the case whether there is a state of emergency or not."

Public opinion in Japan has been running at 60-80% against opening the Olympics on July 23, depending on how the question is phrased. Coates suggested public opinion might improve as more Japanese get fully vaccinated. That figure is now about 2%.

"If it doesn't then our position is that we have to make sure that we get on with our job," Coates said. "And our job is to ensure these games are safe for all the participants and all the people of Japan."

IOC officials say they expect more than 80% of the residents of the Olympic Village, located on Tokyo Bay, to be vaccinated and be largely cut off from contact with the public. About 11,000 Olympic and 4,400 Paralympic athletes are expected to attend.

Coates said about 80% of spots in the Olympics would be awarded from qualifying events, with 20% coming from rankings.

Coates left no doubt that the Switzerland-based International Olympic Committee believes the Tokyo Games will happen. The IOC gets almost 75% of its income from selling broadcast rights, a key driver in pushing on. And Tokyo has officially spent \$15.4 billion to organize the Olympics, though a government audit suggests the real number is much higher.

Tokyo, Osaka and several other prefectures are currently under a state of emergency and health-care systems are being stretched. Emergency measures are scheduled to end on May 31, but they are likely to be extended.

"If the current situation continues, I hope the government will have the wisdom not to end the emergency at the end of May," Haruo Ozaki, head of the Tokyo Medical Association, told the weekly magazine Aera.

Ozaki has consistently said government measures to control the spread of COVID-19 have been insufficient. About 12,000 deaths in Japan have been attributed to the virus, and the situation is exacerbated

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since so few in Japan have been fully vaccinated.

Ozaki warned that if the emergency conditions are not extended, the virus and contagious variants will spread quickly.

"If that happens, there will be a major outbreak, and it is possible that holding the games will become hopeless," he added.

Ozaki is not alone with this warning.

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

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

Hashimoto addressed the worry of ordinary Japanese.

"At present there are not a few people who feel uneasy about the fact the games are going to be held where a lot of people are coming from abroad," she said. "There are other people who are concerned about the possible burden on the medical system of Japan."

She said the number of "stakeholders" coming to Japan from abroad had been reduced from 180,000 to about 80,000. She said Olympic "stakeholders" would amount to 59,000, of which 23,000 were Olympic family and international federations. She said an added 17,000 would involve television rights holders, with 6,000 more media.

She also said 230 physicians and 310 nurses would be needed daily, and said about 30 hospitals in Tokyo and outside were contacted about caring for Olympic patients. Organizers have said previously that 10,000 medical workers would be needed for the Olympics.

Hashimoto said retired nurses might also be called in. Separately, the IOC has said it will make available an unspecified number of medical personnel from unnamed national Olympic committees.

Fans from abroad were banned months ago. Hashimoto said the number of spectators — if any — at venues would "depend on the spread of the infection." She has promised a decision on venue capacity next month.

Kaori Yamaguchi, a bronze medalist in judo at the 1988 Seoul Olympics and a member of the Japanese Olympic Committee, hinted in an interview with the Kyodo news agency this week that organizers were cornered. She has been skeptical about going ahead.

"We're starting to reach a point where we can't even cancel anymore," she said.

The IOC's most senior member, Richard Pound, said in an interview with Japan's JiJi Press that the final deadline to call off the Olympics was still a month away.

"Before the end of June, you really need to know, yes or no," JiJi quoted Pound as saying.

Pound repeated — as the IOC has said — that if the games can't happen now they will be canceled, not postponed again.

IOC President Thomas Bach now plans to arrive in Tokyo only July 12. He was forced to cancel a trip to Japan this month because of rising COVID-19 cases.

## As pandemic spread pain and panic, congressman chased profit

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the early days of the pandemic, New Jersey Rep. Tom Malinowski scolded those looking to capitalize on the once-in-a-century health crisis.

"This is not the time for anybody to be profiting off of selling ventilators, vaccines, drugs, treatments, PPE (personal protective equipment), anywhere in the world," the two-term Democrat and former assistant secretary of state told MSNBC in April 2020.

He did not heed his own admonition.

Since early 2020, Malinowski has bought or sold as much as \$1 million of stock in medical and tech companies that had a stake in the virus response, according to an analysis of records by The Associated

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Press. The trades were just one slice of a stock buying and selling spree by the congressman during that time, worth as much as \$3.2 million, that he did not properly disclose.

The issue of congressional stock trading took on a new urgency last year when at least three senators were the subject of inquiries about whether they made financial decisions based on insider information. Though no one was charged, their dealings stirred outrage and highlighted the limitations of the Stock Act, a 2012 law intended to curtail stock market speculation by lawmakers.

Malinowski's trades received little attention at the time. Yet his subsequent failure to report his trading activity to Congress as required by law, which was first reported by Business Insider, have made him the latest to face scrutiny, with two complaints filed against him with the Office of Congressional Ethics.

When millions were out of work and markets were hemorrhaging, Malinowski snapped up securities at bargain prices — profiting when valuations recovered. In other cases, he sold shares before they fell substantially, according to the AP's analysis of a list of trades that his office said he made in 2020.

He also engaged in the controversial practice of short-selling stocks, placing bets that the values of specific businesses would decline at a time when many companies were pleading with the government for a financial lifeline.

"It boggles my mind why he's doing it," said Richard Painter, a University of Minnesota law professor who served as President George W. Bush's ethics attorney and later ran for Senate as a Democrat. "It's a huge conflict of interest and not an acceptable situation."

There is no indication Malinowski acted on inside information to make his investment decisions. Still, it's difficult to assess the full scope of his financial activity. Nearly six months after 2020 drew to a close, mandatory reports to Congress detailing his trades have not been made public.

In an interview Thursday, Malinowski said his failure to file was "a mistake that I own 100%." He said the reports, some of which were due over a year ago, have been submitted though not released by the congressional ethics office, which did not respond to a request for comment.

Malinowski said his broker handles all of his trading decisions and he does not speak to the firm about specific transactions. His office provided a statement from the firm, Gagnon Securities, stating that it made trades "without Congressman Malinowski's input or prior knowledge."

"At no point in the last 25 years have I directed, suggested, or even asked questions about a particular trade being made by my brokerage firm," Malinowski said. He said the one exception was a request to sell stock that he was obligated to get rid of after joining President Barack Obama's State Department in 2014.

He also said he was in the process of setting up a blind trust to hold his financial portfolio, which he will have no control over. He said other members of Congress should do the same.

Painter noted that Malinowski had ultimate control over his account when the trades were made, a fact the congressman acknowledged.

"Of course he is going to say his broker makes all the decisions," Painter said.

The Stock Act, which proponents initially said would end stock speculation among members of Congress, passed with bipartisan support in 2012 in the wake of a stock trading scandal.

The law bars members from using inside information to make investment decisions and requires that all stock trades be reported to Congress within 45 days. Yet in the nearly 10 years since it was enacted, no one has been prosecuted under it even as many members continue to conspicuously trade.

"I thought no congressman or senator would want to get caught in that sort of controversy, even if it just had the appearance of insider trading," said Craig Holman, a lobbyist for the Washington-based government watchdog group Public Citizen. "But clearly there's still a significant number of members of Congress who still want to abuse their access to insider knowledge."

Trades by Malinowski follow a familiar, albeit less overt pattern when compared with others who have drawn scrutiny.

In March 2020, he bought between \$190,000 and \$625,000 worth of stock as the virus drove a market collapse, records show.

Some of the companies he invested in were developing COVID-19 testing or therapeutics to combat ill-

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nesses caused by the disease. Last June, he bought between \$1,001 and \$15,000 worth of shares of TFF Pharmaceuticals, which is developing an antibody treatment. They have nearly doubled in value since.

In November, he sold between \$15,001 and \$50,000 worth of stock in drug maker Merck, which he had not previously disclosed owning. The company's value tumbled two months later after it announced it would end its efforts to develop a COVID-19 vaccine.

In at least one case Malinowski benefited from exceptional timing.

In February 2020, days after members of Congress were briefed on the virus, records show Malinowski sold between \$1,001 and \$15,000 shares in Kimco Realty, a company that owns shopping centers across the U.S. A month later, when the company's share price dropped nearly 50%, he bought back far more stock in the company, worth somewhere between \$15,001 and \$50,000. They've increased in value by 50% since.

"I don't think it would be possible for any investor in the market to instruct their broker not to take into account the most important thing happening in the economy," Malinowski said of the pandemic.

But it is Malinowski's short selling of stocks that government watchdogs find particularly troubling.

"A shorting congressman? It's just nuts," said Painter, the ethics lawyer.

A short sale is a stock transaction where an investor borrows shares in a company and sells them in hopes of buying them back later at a lower price and pocketing the difference. It's a practice that during the pandemic has come under criticism from some economists and academic experts because it has the potential to throttle existing market anxiety, drive rumors and lead to irrational buying decisions that could harm otherwise solid companies.

Xu Jiang, a Duke University business school professor, said members of Congress face a "moral responsibility" during such times.

"There is merit to banning short selling during a crisis period," said Xu Jiang. "It can drive rumors and take down viable firms."

Malinowski has been a prolific short seller throughout his time in Congress. It's unclear whether he short sold in 2020 because the list of stock transactions released by his office is incomplete. But a recent disclosure reveals he short sold between \$62,000 and \$230,000 worth of stock in at least six companies in 2021.

"It is part of how investment on the stock market works in our capitalist system," Malinowski said, later adding, "I don't think there's anything inherently wrong with Americans engaging in these kinds of normal investment activities."

Whether Malinowski's trading will pose a liability with voters will be tested as he campaigns for a third term and Democrats are on defense trying to hold their narrow House majority.

Republican Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler, of Georgia, both lost their runoff bids for the Senate in January after their own stock trades became a major campaign issue, handing control of the chamber to Democrats. Both were investigated by the Justice Department, but ultimately cleared.

Perdue had dumped between \$1 million and \$5 million worth of stock in a company where he was formerly a board member. After markets crashed, he bought it back and earned a windfall after its price skyrocketed.

Loeffler and her husband, the CEO and chairman of the parent company of the New York Stock Exchange, dumped millions of dollars in stock following a briefing on the virus.

Republican Sen. Richard Burr of North Carolina drew perhaps the most scrutiny for his trades. He stepped aside as chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee chairman after the FBI obtained a search warrant to seize a cellphone.

Burr and his wife sold between \$600,000 and \$1.7 million in more than 30 transactions in late January and mid-February, just before the market began to dive and government health officials began to sound alarms about the virus. Burr was captured in a recording privately warning a group of influential constituents in early 2020 to prepare for economic devastation.

The Justice Department investigated Burr's actions, but cleared him of wrongdoing.

Despite the spate of cases, congressional leaders have shown little appetite for strengthening stock trading rules. Yet the temptation to use insider information remains.



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"We are constantly apprised, before the public has the information, about what specific provisions might benefit particular entities," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., who sponsored a bill that would ban lawmakers from stock trading. "What you saw during COVID was one of the most horrific examples."

It's not the first time Malinowski has run afoul of government trading rules.

As an assistant secretary of state during the Obama administration, he agreed to sell shares held in CNinsure Inc. following his 2014 confirmation to the post. In a letter to a State Department ethics lawyer, he acknowledged that the investment in the Chinese insurance company, now known as Fanhua Inc., posed a "heightened prospect of a conflict of interest" given his work, which dealt heavily with human rights abuses, including those by China.

Yet the stock remained in his portfolio for over a year, well beyond a 90-day window to sell that he agreed to, records show. He sold it for more than he initially reported it to be worth, collecting somewhere between \$15,001 and \$50,000 in June 2015, following a period in which the stock's value was held down following allegations of fraud made against the company.

Malinowski said he instructed his broker to sell the shares earlier, but it failed to do so. They were sold after he sent a June 2015 email inquiring about them.

"As we discussed last year, I can't hold Chinese stocks (or any stocks from countries that might pose conflicts with my State Department job, which, to be safe, would include any country outside Europe/Canada). Could you make sure this is sold?" he said, according to an email provided by his office.

Some members of Congress, acknowledging the shortcomings of the Stock Act, are proposing a bipartisan bill that would require lawmakers to place assets like stock in a blind trust.

"I don't know that you should be buying and selling stock when the people we represent are facing what will invariably be the most horrific and challenging years of their lives," said Rep. Abigail Spanberger, a Democrat from Virginia who is co-sponsoring the bill with Republican Rep. Chip Roy of Texas. "If you are not willing to make certain sacrifices to be in public service, then perhaps there might be a different job that's best for you."

## Premature nonuplets born in Morocco are stable but fragile

By The Associated Press undefined

CASABLANCA, Morocco (AP) — Nine premature newborns that a 25-year-old Malian woman gave birth to are being closely monitored in a Moroccan clinic, with medical staff working around the clock to stabilize their health.

Halima Cissé gave birth to the nonuplets — five girls and four boys — earlier this month in Morocco after the Malian government flew her there for specialist care. The babies weighed between 500 grams to 1 kilogram (1.1 pound to 2.2 pounds) at birth.

Reports show that only two other sets of nonuplets have been recorded since the 1970s, but the babies all died within days.

"It is a pride for all of Morocco," said Youssef Alaoui, director of the Ain Borja Clinic in Casablanca, where the newborns are being treated. "Now the challenge is to get these babies out in good health."

One doctor said Cissé's nonuplets are stable but fragile.

"They are very immature babies. They have deficiencies in everything — at the level of the lungs, the head, the heart," said Khalil Msaif, the clinic's paediatric neonatologist.

But there's also a quiet sense of optimism from staff on the babies' future.

"Since the birth, we are in week three and the condition of the babies is stable... Most of the babies have had a good period without any problem. We hope that all will be well," Msaif said.

## EXPLAINER: What was the outcome of the latest Gaza war?

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The cease-fire that took effect Friday appears to have halted 11 days of fighting between Israel and Gaza's militant Hamas rulers, without resolving any of the underlying issues in the

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decades-old Middle East conflict.

Almost no one on either side expects this war — which was triggered by protests and clashes in Jerusalem — will be the last.

Israel carried out hundreds of airstrikes against what it said were militant targets across Gaza, destroying homes and damaging vital infrastructure in the impoverished territory, which has been under a crippling blockade since Hamas seized power there 14 years ago.

Palestinian militants, meanwhile, fired more than 4,000 rockets at Israel, with some reaching as far as Tel Aviv, bringing parts of the country to a standstill.

At least 243 Palestinians were killed, including 66 children and 39 women, with 1,910 people wounded, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. Twelve people in Israel, including a 5-year-old boy and 16-year-old girl, were killed.

Here's a look at what comes next:

## ANOTHER STALEMATE

Palestinians across Gaza, east Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank celebrated what many saw as a victory by Hamas against a much more powerful Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meanwhile faced criticism from his hawkish base, with many accusing him of ending the war prematurely without vanquishing Hamas.

Netanyahu said Israel inflicted major damage on Hamas' military capabilities, killing 200 militants, including 25 senior commanders. He says it struck more than 100 kilometers (60 miles) of militant tunnels as well as rocket launchers and other military infrastructure.

But Israel never managed to stop the rocket fire.

Palestinian militants launched massive rocket barrages that at times seemed to overpower Israel's formidable air defenses. The Israeli military says it had an interception rate of 90% and that hundreds of rockets fell short into Gaza, with one killing a Palestinian family of eight.

## ANOTHER FRAGILE TRUCE

As with the last three wars, the fighting was ended by an informal cease-fire brokered by Egypt and other mediators, the exact terms of which were not made public.

Hamas claimed that Israel agreed to halt police actions at the flashpoint Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem and the threatened eviction of Palestinian families from the nearby Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. Both had sparked Palestinian protests and clashes with police that eventually ignited the war. But there was no confirmation from Israel or mediators.

Previous cease-fires have stopped major fighting but proved shaky. Israel and Hamas have fought four wars and exchanged fire countless times since the Islamic militant group seized control of Gaza from forces loyal to the Palestinian Authority in 2007. Scattered clashes at Al-Aqsa after Friday prayers were an early test of the truce's durability.

No cease-fire has addressed the underlying issues, including Israel's occupation of lands the Palestinians want for a future state and Hamas' refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist. Israel and the Palestinians have not held substantive peace talks in more than a decade.

## ANOTHER ISRAELI ELECTION?

Netanyahu's political opponents were on the verge of forming a government and ousting him following four inconclusive elections in two years. But delicate coalition negotiations with Arab parties were put on hold when the fighting erupted.

The war initially seemed to bolster Netanyahu's political prospects, allowing him to present himself as tough leader who was punishing the country's enemies. But since the cease-fire took hold, he has faced renewed criticism.

It was never clear whether Netanyahu's opponents, who span the political spectrum from erstwhile

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right-wing allies to Arab parties — would be able to set aside their differences to push him out of office. Another election later this year is a distinct possibility.

Israelis have been deeply polarized over Netanyahu in recent years as he has faced allegations of corruption for which he is now on trial. In the months before the war, activists had organized weekly protests outside his residence. Those are now set to resume.

## ANOTHER US INTERVENTION

The Biden administration, which had hoped to extricate the U.S. from the region's intractable conflicts to focus on a rising China and climate change, was caught flat-footed and has now been dragged back into the dispiriting role of Mideast mediator.

From the start of the latest war, the U.S. repeatedly affirmed Israel's right to defend itself while quietly encouraging cease-fire efforts. On Wednesday, however, President Joe Biden told Netanyahu he wanted to see a "significant de-escalation."

Netanyahu initially seemed to brush him off, saying he was "determined to continue" the offensive until its objectives were met. But he agreed to the cease-fire the following day.

The exchange marked an early test of the relationship between the two leaders, who have had moments of tension over the years. Biden meanwhile faces domestic pressure from a Democratic base that increasingly sympathizes with the Palestinians.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken plans to visit the region in the coming days.

## Old records shed new light on smallpox outbreaks in 1700s

By WILLIAM J. KOLE Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — A highly contagious disease originating far from America's shores triggers deadly outbreaks that spread rapidly, infecting the masses. Shots are available, but a divided public agonizes over getting jabbed.

Sound familiar?

Newly digitized records — including a minister's diary scanned and posted online by Boston's Congregational Library and Archives — are shedding fresh light on devastating outbreaks of smallpox that hit the city in the 1700s.

And three centuries later, the parallels with the coronavirus pandemic are uncanny.

"How little we've changed," said CLA archivist Zachary Bodnar, who led the digitization effort, working closely with the New England Historic Genealogical Society.

"The fact that we're finding these similarities in the records of our past is a very interesting parallel," Bodnar said in an interview. "Sometimes the more we learn, the more we're still the same, I guess."

Smallpox was eradicated, but not before it sickened and killed millions worldwide. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say the last natural outbreak of smallpox in the United States occurred in 1949. In 1980, the World Health Organization's decision-making arm declared it eradicated, and no cases of naturally occurring smallpox have been reported since.

But in April 1721, after an English ship, the HMS Seahorse, brought it to Boston, it was a clear and present danger. By winter of 1722, it would infect more than half of the city's population of 11,000 and kill 850.

Much earlier outbreaks, also imported from Europe, killed Native Americans indiscriminately in the 1600s. Now, digitized church records are helping to round out the picture of how the colonists coped when it was their turn to endure pestilence.

The world's first proper vaccination didn't occur until the end of that century, when an English country doctor named Edward Jenner inoculated an 8-year-old boy against smallpox in 1796.

Before then, doctors used inoculation, or variolation as it was often called, introducing a trace amount of the smallpox virus into the skin. The procedure, or variations of it, had been practiced since ancient times in Asia. Jenner's pioneering of vaccination, using instead a less lethal strain of the virus that infected cows, was a huge scientific advance.

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Yet just as with COVID-19 vaccines in 2021, some took a skeptical view of smallpox inoculations in the 18th century, digitized documents show. To be sure, there was ample reason to worry: Early smallpox treatments, while effective in many who were inoculated, sickened or even killed others.

The Rev. Cotton Mather, one of the era's most influential ministers, had actively promoted inoculation. In a sign of how resistant some colonists were to the new technology, someone tossed an explosive device through his window in November 1721.

Fortunately, it didn't explode, but researchers at Harvard say this menacing message was attached: "Cotton Mather, you dog, damn you! I'll inoculate you with this; with a pox to you."

Among the recently digitized Congregational Church records are handwritten diary entries scrawled by the Rev. Ebenezer Storer, a pastor in Cambridge, Massachusetts. On March 11, 1764, as smallpox once again raged through Boston, Storer penned a prayer in his journal after arranging to have his own children inoculated.

The deeply devout Storer, his diary shows, had faith in science.

"Blessed be thy name for any discoveries that have been made to soften the severity of the distemper. Grant thy blessing on the means used," he wrote.

Three weeks later, Storer gave thanks to God "for his great mercy to me in recovering my dear children and the others in my family from the smallpox."

For Bodnar, the archivist, it's a testament to the insights church records can contain.

"They're fascinating," he said. "They're essentially town records — they not only tell the story of the daily accounting of the church, but also the story of what people were doing at that time and what was going on."

## AP-NORC poll: Police violence remains high concern in U.S.

By KAT STAFFORD and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

A year after George Floyd's murder at the hands of a white police officer sparked global protests and a racial reckoning, a majority of Americans say racism and police violence are serious problems facing the nation. Yet relatively few believe attention in the past year to the issues has led to positive change.

A poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows Americans are more likely than they were before Floyd's death to say that police violence is a serious problem and about half think police who cause harm on the job are treated too leniently by the justice system. The poll also found that about 6 in 10 Americans say racism in the United States is a very or extremely serious problem; it's similar to the percentage that said the same thing one year ago.

But about half of Americans, including about 6 in 10 Black Americans, say Derek Chauvin conviction of Floyd's murder has not changed their level of confidence in the criminal justice system. About one-third say their confidence increased. Chauvin, a former Minneapolis police officer, was convicted in April on state charges of murder and manslaughter in Floyd's death. A federal grand jury indicted Chauvin and three other former Minneapolis police officers involved in Floyd's arrest and death after the poll was conducted.

"Racism is a core feature of American life and it dominates certain relationships between African Americans and white Americans in ways that I don't see how they're going to change in the near or distant future," said Kyle T. Mays, assistant professor in African American Studies and American Indian Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

AP-NORC polling showed a shift in views of police violence and injustice toward Black Americans last June, just weeks after Floyd's killing. In 2019, just 36% of Americans called police violence an extremely or very serious problem. After Floyd was killed, that number increased to 48%, and 45% say so now. About 6 in 10 say police are more likely to use deadly force against a Black person than against a white person.

At 77%, the overwhelming majority of Black Americans say police violence is a very serious problem, compared with 36% of white Americans. Among white Americans, the percentage saying police violence is not a serious problem increased from 26% last June to 36% now; that's roughly the same percentage

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who said so in 2019, before Floyd's killing.

The partisan gap in views of police violence as a serious problem has also widened since last June. Among Democrats, about 7 in 10 say police violence is a very serious problem. Among Republicans, 58% say it is not a serious problem, compared with 44% last June.

Georgia resident Linda R. Curtis, who was a police officer for 24 years, believes police misconduct is a serious issue, partly because of problematic behavior she witnessed throughout her career. Despite her history within law enforcement, as a Black woman, she worries about her family's safety.

"When police see me, they don't say, 'Oh, this is a retired police officer,' or that my other half is a retired firefighter or that my two children are sons of a retired police officer and firefighter," Curtis said. "They just see two Black men and an opportunity. I've always taught my sons how to respond when they're stopped because of what I saw in my own ranks."

A majority of Americans continue to support sweeping changes to the criminal justice system, including 25% who think it needs a complete overhaul and 43% that it needs major changes. An additional 27% support minor changes, while just 4% think no changes are needed. Black Americans are most likely to call for the largest changes.

Louisiana resident Alan Hence said that as a Black man, he has faced discrimination by police who, he believed, were often aggressive toward him during routine traffic stops because of his race. His personal encounters and the "deep hurt" he felt after the killing of Floyd and other Black Americans at the hands of police reinforced his belief that the nation's criminal justice system needs to be overhauled.

"This country was founded on supremacy that cultivated racism and I believe that it created a culture in America that stands strong today and has proven extremely hard to change," said Hence, 40. "But investing in changing police culture, changing their relationships and procedures when dealing with the public, could have a drastic effect."

Relatively few Americans, 24%, say attention on police violence against Black Americans over the past year has led to change for the better, while 31% say it has led to change for the worse and 44% say it has made no difference. Fifty-four percent of Black Americans say it has not made a difference, with the remainder split evenly between seeing change for the better and for the worse.

"Nothing has really fundamentally changed, even if you put one individual in prison for police violence," said Mays, the UCLA professor and author of "An Afro-Indigenous History of the United States."

The House of Representatives passed the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act in March, but the bill is unlikely to win approval in the Senate before the May 25 anniversary of Floyd's death. The bill, which would end qualified immunity and implement other changes, has faced significant Republican opposition, as well as criticism from some activists who believe it doesn't go far enough.

Beyond policing, about 8 in 10 Black Americans and about two-thirds of both Hispanic and Asian Americans say racism in the U.S. is a very or extremely serious problem. Among white Americans, about half call it that serious, and about 3 in 10 more say it is moderately serious.

Black Americans say they personally have faced discrimination in a variety of ways. Six in 10 say they have been discriminated against often or sometimes when dealing with the police, compared with just about 1 in 10 white Americans. About 3 in 10 Asian Americans and about 4 in 10 Hispanic Americans say the same.

About 6 in 10 Black Americans also say they have been regularly discriminated against when applying for jobs or in stores or shopping malls, about half when applying for housing or for a loan and about 4 in 10 when receiving health care.

The intersection of dueling crises — the pandemic and the racial justice movement — that have disparately impacted people of color has forced some white Americans in particular to struggle with the nation's history of racism in ways that they never have before.

"George Floyd definitely had an impact on me," said Andy Campbell, 57 and an Oklahoma minister. "It was a matter of realizing that the whole country was built on this lie of racism. And that the history of the country was built on a lie of exceptionalism. White supremacy is a white problem. That's who has to

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deal with it."

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, May 22, the 142nd day of 2021. There are 223 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 22, 2017, a suicide bomber set off an improvised explosive device that killed 22 people at the end of an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England.

On this date:

In 1813, composer Richard Wagner (VAHG'-nur) was born in Leipzig, Germany.

In 1915, the Lassen Peak volcano in Northern California exploded, devastating nearby areas but causing no deaths.

In 1939, the foreign ministers of Germany and Italy, Joachim von Ribbentrop and Galeazzo Ciano, signed a "Pact of Steel" committing the two countries to a military alliance.

In 1960, an earthquake of magnitude 9.5, the strongest ever measured, struck southern Chile, claiming some 1,655 lives.

In 1962, Continental Airlines Flight 11, en route from Chicago to Kansas City, Missouri, crashed after a bomb apparently brought on board by a passenger exploded, killing all 45 occupants of the Boeing 707.

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson, speaking at the University of Michigan, outlined the goals of his "Great Society," saying that it "rests on abundance and liberty for all" and "demands an end to poverty and racial injustice."

In 1967, a fire at the L'Innovation department store in Brussels killed 322 people. Poet and playwright Langston Hughes died in New York at age 65.

In 1968, the nuclear-powered submarine USS Scorpion, with 99 men aboard, sank in the Atlantic Ocean. (The remains of the sub were later found on the ocean floor 400 miles southwest of the Azores.)

In 1969, the lunar module of Apollo 10, with Thomas P. Stafford and Eugene Cernan aboard, flew to within nine miles of the moon's surface in a dress rehearsal for the first lunar landing.

In 1992, after a reign lasting nearly 30 years, Johnny Carson hosted NBC's "Tonight Show" for the final time (Jay Leno took over as host three days later).

In 2011, a tornado devastated Joplin, Missouri, with winds up to 250 mph, claiming at least 159 lives and destroying about 8,000 homes and businesses.

In 2018, Stacey Abrams won Georgia's Democratic gubernatorial primary, making her the first woman nominee for Georgia governor from either major party. (Abrams, seeking to become the nation's first Black female governor, was defeated in November by Republican Brian Kemp.)

Ten years ago: A tornado devastated Joplin, Missouri, with winds up to 250 mph, claiming at least 159 lives and destroying about 8,000 homes and businesses.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama arrived in Vietnam, making him the third sitting president to visit the country since the end of the war.

One year ago: President Donald Trump labeled houses of worship as "essential" and called on governors to let them reopen; he threatened to "override" governors who defied him. As Americans headed into the Memorial Day weekend, health officials urged them to follow social distancing and other measures aimed at stopping the spread of the coronavirus. In a radio interview, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden suggested that African Americans who backed President Donald Trump "ain't black"; he later said he "should not have been so cavalier." A Pakistani airliner crashed near the airport in Karachi, killing 97 of the 99 people on board. "Full House" star Lori Loughlin and her fashion designer husband, Mossimo Giannulli, pleaded guilty to paying half a million dollars into the University of Southern California as part of a college admissions bribery scheme. (Loughlin would spend two months behind bars; Giannulli began a five-month sentence in November 2020 and was released to home confinement in April 2021.)

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Today's Birthdays: Actor Michael Constantine is 94. Conductor Peter Nero is 87. Actor-director Richard Benjamin is 83. Actor Frank Converse is 83. Former CNN anchor Bernard Shaw is 81. Actor Barbara Parkins is 79. Retired MLB All-Star pitcher Tommy John is 78. Songwriter Bernie Taupin is 71. Actor-producer Al Corley is 66. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, is 64. Singer Morrissey is 62. Actor Ann Cusack is 60. Country musician Dana Williams (Diamond Rio) is 60. Rock musician Jesse Valenzuela is 59. Actor Mark Christopher Lawrence is 57. R&B singer Johnny Gill (New Edition) is 55. Rock musician Dan Roberts (Crash Test Dummies) is 54. Actor Brooke Smith is 54. Actor Michael Kelly is 52. Model Naomi Campbell is 51. Actor Anna Belknap is 49. Actor Alison Eastwood is 49. Singer Donell Jones is 48. Actor Sean Gunn is 47. Actor A.J. Langer is 47. Actor Ginnifer Goodwin is 43. R&B singer Vivian Green is 42. Actor Maggie Q is 42. Olympic gold medal speed skater Apolo Anton Ohno is 39. Actor Molly Ephraim (TV: "Last Man Standing") is 35. Tennis player Novak Djokovic is 34. Actor Anna Baryshnikov (TV: "Superior Donuts") is 29. Actor Camren Bicondova is 22.