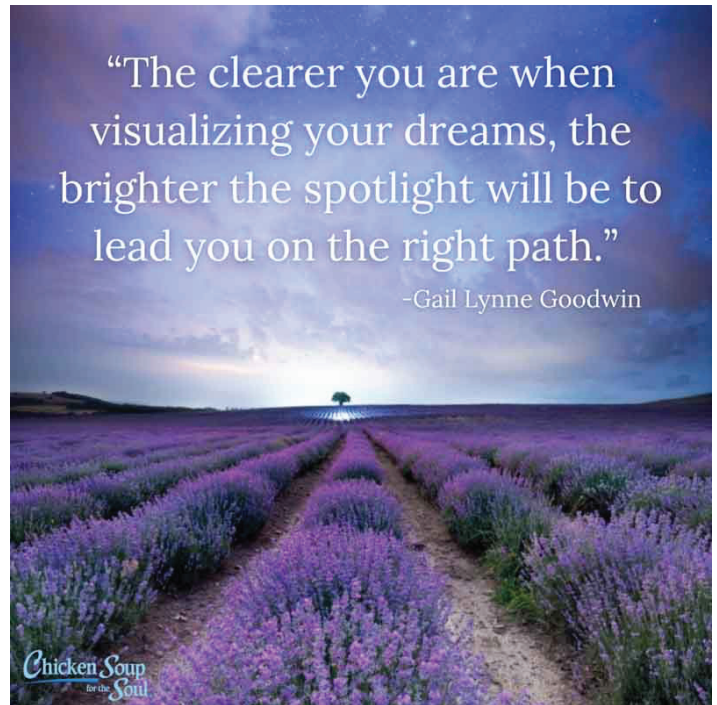


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“The clearer you are when visualizing your dreams, the brighter the spotlight will be to lead you on the right path.”

-Gail Lynne Goodwin

Groton Community Transit will be taking the bus to out of Town Legion Baseball games on 5/26 to Lake Norden



**6/1 to Sisseton
6/5 Milbank
6/6 Milbank
6/9 to Clark
7/6 to Northville
7/14 to Redfield.**



If anyone is interested on riding or for more information, please call Groton Transit at 397-8661



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

Groton Transit

FUNDRAISER

**Thursday, June 17, 2021
4 p.m. to 7 p.m.**

**Groton Community Transit
Downtown Groton**

*Tables will be set up outside
as in previous years!*

**We will be offering DRIVE-THRU
Service again on the
south side of the transit.**

*Please join us and help
support Groton Transit!*

FREE WILL OFFERING!

*** Food * Fun * Door Prizes ***

Groton Legion Post #39 Loses Lead Early in Defeat

Groton Legion Post #39 watched the game slip away early and couldn't recover in a 14-4 loss to Lake Norden (SD) on Wednesday. Lake Norden (SD) scored on a home run by Jackson Noem, an error, and a single by Dawson Noem in the first inning.

The Groton Legion Post #39 struggled to put runs on the board and had a tough time defensively containing Lake Norden (SD), giving up 14 runs.

Groton Legion Post #39 opened up scoring in the first inning. Alex Morris hit a solo homer.

Lake Norden (SD) scored four runs in the sixth inning. Lake Norden (SD)'s big inning was driven by a walk by C Heiser, by Mathew S, and a double by Noem.

Noem pitched Lake Norden (SD) to victory. The righthander lasted six innings, allowing six hits and four runs while striking out 14.

Morris took the loss for Groton Legion Post #39. The righty went two innings, allowing six runs on eight hits, striking out two and walking zero.

Groton Legion Post #39 tallied one home run on the day. Morris went deep in the first inning.

Morris led Groton Legion Post #39 with three hits in three at bats.

Lake Norden (SD) tallied 11 hits in the game. Noem, Heiser, and S each racked up multiple hits for Lake Norden (SD). Noem went 4-for-4 at the plate to lead Lake Norden (SD) in hits.

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Groton Legion Post #39 4 - 14 Lake Norden (SD)

📍 Away 📅 Wednesday May 26, 2021

	1	2	3	4	5	6	R	H	E
GRTN	1	0	1	0	2	0	4	6	4
LKNR	4	2	3	0	1	4	14	11	1

BATTING

Groton Post #39	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
J Doeden (CF)	3	1	0	0	0	2
P Kettering (C)	2	1	0	0	1	1
A Morris (P, 3B, SS)	3	1	3	2	0	0
P Johnson (1B)	3	0	1	0	0	2
J Cogley (2B, P, 2...)	3	0	0	0	0	3
D Heminger (RF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
J Kroll (RF)	2	0	0	0	0	2
B DeHoet (3B, 2B...)	2	0	1	0	1	1
J Zak (SS, P)	2	1	1	0	0	0
E Nehls (LF, P, LF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
L Iverson	1	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	23	4	6	2	2	14

HR: A Morris, **TB:** B DeHoet, J Zak, P Johnson, A Morris 6, **CS:** A Morris, **SB:** P Kettering, **LOB:** 3

PITCHING

Groton Post #	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
A Morris	2.0	8	6	4	0	2	1
J Cogley	2.0	1	3	2	2	5	0
E Nehls	1.0	1	3	2	3	1	0
J Zak	0.2	1	2	1	3	0	0
Totals	5.2	11	14	9	8	8	1

L: A Morris, **P-S:** J Zak 26-11, E Nehls 34-14, A Morris 61-35, J Cogley 46-25, **HBP:** E Nehls, J Cogley, **BF:** J Zak 6, E Nehls 8, A Morris 16, J Cogley 11

Lake Norden (SD)	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
Mathew S (C)	4	3	2	1	1	1
J Noem (P)	4	4	4	5	1	0
C Heiser (1B)	2	2	2	0	1	0
Thue (SS)	4	1	1	2	1	0
Luke S (CF)	5	0	1	0	0	0
D Noem (3B)	4	0	1	1	0	2
Tyson S (2B)	3	1	0	0	1	1
M Hausman (LF)	3	1	0	0	1	3
Camsin S (RF)	2	2	0	0	2	1
Totals	31	14	11	9	8	8

2B: C Heiser, J Noem, **3B:** J Noem, **HR:** J Noem, **TB:** Thue, Mathew S 2, D Noem, C Heiser 3, Luke S, J Noem 10, **HBP:** C Heiser 2, **LOB:** 8

Lake Norden	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
J Noem	6.0	6	4	2	2	14	1
Totals	6.0	6	4	2	2	14	1

W: J Noem, **P-S:** J Noem 94-69, **BF:** J Noem 25

Groton Service Organizations A continuing series by Dorene Nelson

The Groton American Legion Auxiliary #39

The Groton Unit #39 of the American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) was organized in 1921. The mission of ALA is to support the American Legion and to honor the sacrifice of those who serve by enhancing the lives of our veterans, military and their families, both at home and abroad. For God and Country, we advocate for veterans, educate our citizens, mentor youth, and promote patriotism, good citizenship, peace and security.

The purpose of ALA is to .

- ➔ support and advocate for veterans, active military and their families .
- ➔ support the initiative and programs of The American Legion .
- ➔ foster patriotism and responsible citizenship .
- ➔ provide educational and leadership opportunities that uphold the ideals of freedom and democracy and encourage good citizenship and patriotism in government .
- ➔ increase our capacity of deliver our mission by providing meaningful volunteer opportunities within our community .
- ➔ empower our membership to achieve personal fulfillment through Service Not Self.

Current club officers are as follows: President, Samantha Oswald; 1st Vice-Pres, Lori Giedt; Secretary, Marge Overacker; Treasurer, Meri Erickson; Chaplain, Historian/Membership, Gertie Erickson; and Sergeant-in-Arms, Michelle Everson The values that we support are our Commitment to the four founding principles of Justice, Freedom, Democracy and Loyalty; Service to God, our country, its veterans and their families; Tradition of patriotism and citizenship; Personal integrity and family values; Respect for the uniqueness of individual members; Truthful, open communication in dealing with the public and our members; and Adherence to the adopted policies and rules. The ALA currently has 94 members and usually meets on the 1st Monday of the month at the American Legion building at 6 p.m. These meetings are in September, October, November, March, and April.

The American Legion Auxiliary usually helps with the Pumpkin Fest, Turkey Shoot, and a Salad Buffet.

Dues are \$25 for an adult membership and \$5.50 for a junior member. There are good reasons to be a junior member since scholarships are available, junior members can attend Girls State, and they have the privilege of offering their opinion at local meetings. Junior members also can be a community volunteer and help with events that are happening within our district. Most important of all, junior members also can help veterans in need.



Samantha Oswald with Karen Wolter, District 4 Member of the Year. (Courtesy Photo)

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Members of the senior and junior Auxiliary who put flags on the veterans' graves for Memorial Day. (Courtesy Photo)



Rose Locke presenting a quilt to Korean War Vet Lester Nehls. (Courtesy Photo)



Samantha Oswald presenting a double blue star service banner to Tammy Dohman. (Courtesy Photo)



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and night
shift
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with monthly tier increases!
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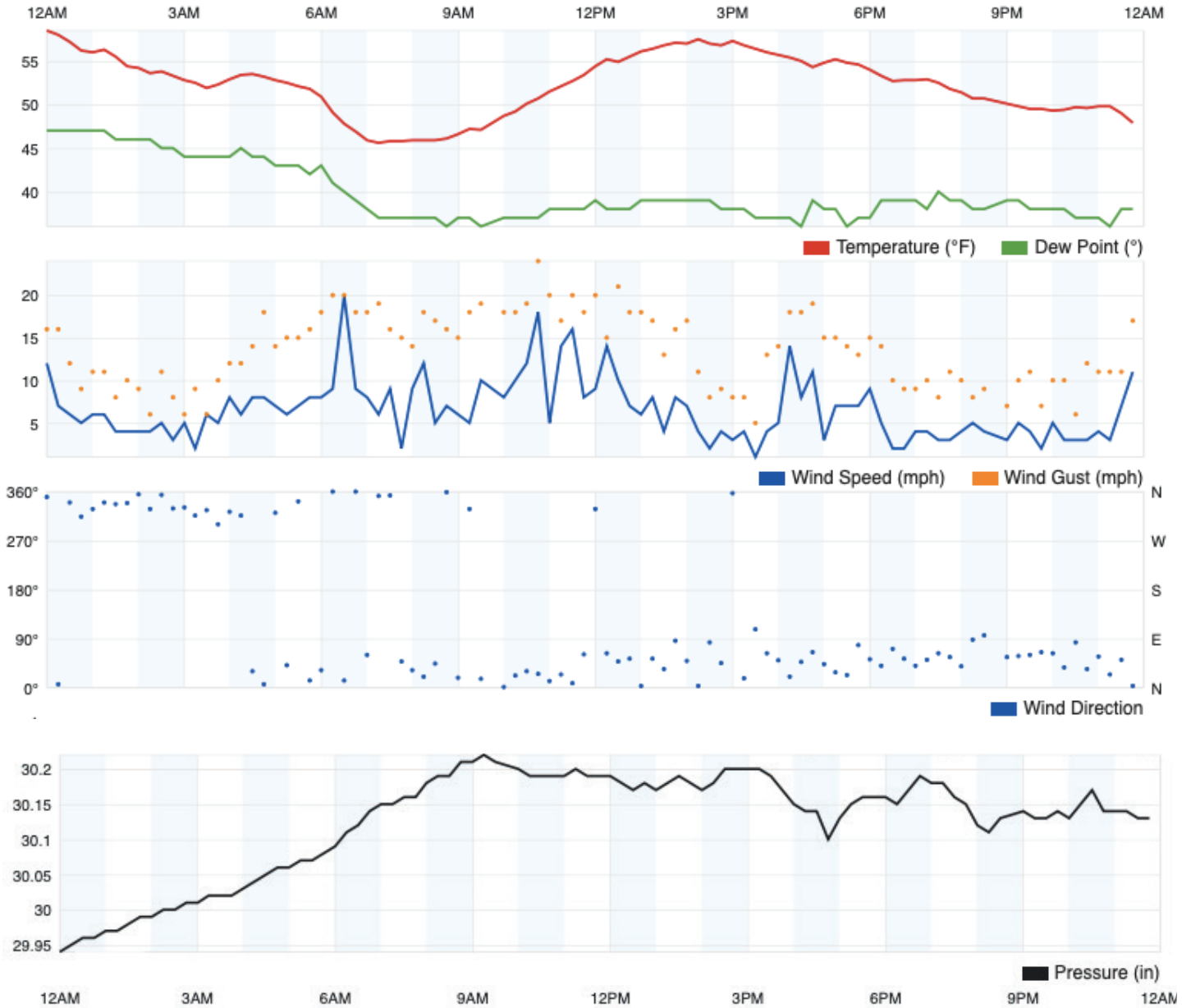
Britton



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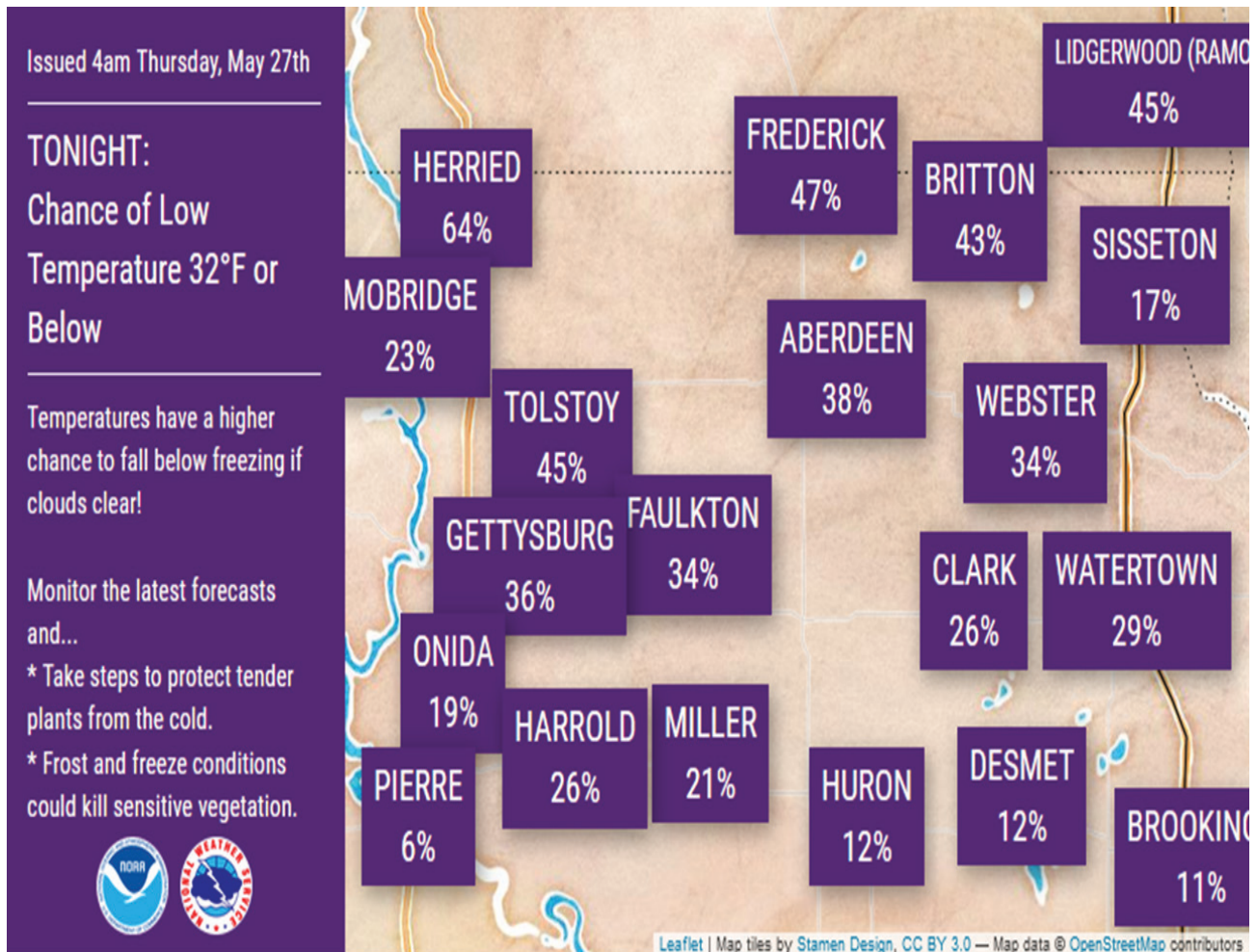
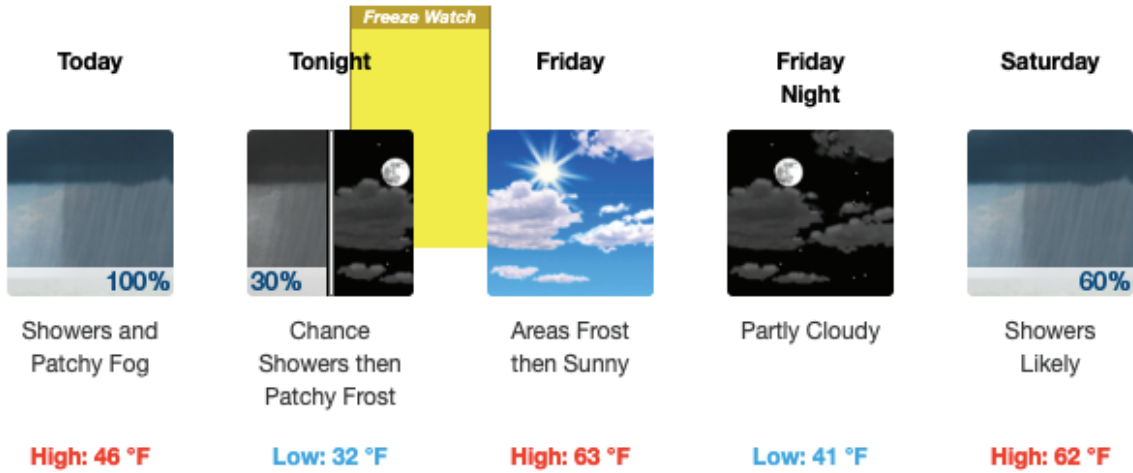
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Light rain will linger through the day today, and slowly end west to east tonight. Temperatures today will top out in the mid to upper 40s, and are expected to fall into the 30s tonight into early Friday morning. Here's the chance that the low temperature tonight will fall to 32 degrees or below.

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Today in Weather History

May 27, 1942: A short estimated F2 touchdown uprooted 27 trees on the western edge of Bryant in Hamlin County. One barn was destroyed.

May 27, 1996: On May 26th, anywhere from 4 to 6 inches of rain fell in a 24 hour period over the lower Bad River Basin. Also, 3 to 5 inches of rain fell over much of Western South Dakota. This runoff caused the Bad River at Fort Pierre to crest at 26.25 feet or about 5 feet above flood stage late on the 27th before falling back below flood stage on the 30th. The entire length of the Bad River Road from U.S. Highway 83 near Fort Pierre to U.S. Highway 14 near Midland was closed to all except local traffic on the 27th. Twenty-five to 35 volunteers were filling sandbags all day on the 27th around two homes along the river. Most of the damage was associated with flooding of agricultural land and some county roads. One resident along the river said the river was the highest it has been in 32 years.

1771: In Virginia, a wall of water came roaring down the James River Valley following ten to twelve days of intense rain. As water swept through Richmond, buildings, boats, animals, and vegetation were lost. About one hundred fifty people were killed as the River reached a flood stage of forty-five feet above normal. A monument to the flood was inscribed by Ryland Randolph, of Curles, in 1771-72: " ... all the great rivers of this country were swept by inundations never before experienced which changed the face of nature and left traces of violence that will remain for ages."

1896: A massive tornado struck Saint Louis, Missouri killing 306 persons and causing thirteen million dollars damage. The tornado path was short but cut across a densely populated area. It touched down six miles west of Eads Bridge in Saint Louis and widened to a mile as it crossed into East Saint Louis. The tornado was the most destructive of record in the U.S. at that time. It pierced a five-eighths inch thick iron sheet with a two by four-inch pine plank. A brilliant display of lightning accompanied the storm.

1997: An F5 tornado killed 27 people in Jarrell, Texas. Although tornado warnings were issued 30 minutes in advance and local sirens were sounded, there were few places to go for safety. Most homes were on slabs, with no basements. Houses were swept clean off their foundations, with little debris left behind. Total damage was \$20 million. The same thunderstorm complex produced a wind gust to 122 mph at Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio.

1926 - A hurricane came inland near Daytona Beach, FL. The hurricane caused 2.5 million dollars damage in eastern Florida, including the Jacksonville area. (David Ludlum)

1939 - The temperature at Lewiston, ID, hit 117 degrees to establish an all-time record high for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1943 - On a whim, and flying a single engine AT-6, Lieutenant Ralph O'Hair and Colonel Duckworth were the first to fly into a hurricane. It started regular Air Force flights into hurricanes. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in Minnesota spawned a tornado which moved in a southwesterly direction for a distance of thirty miles across Rice County and Goodhue County. Trees were uprooted and tossed about like toys, and a horse lifted by the tornado was observed sailing horizontally through the air. Thunderstorms drenched La Crosse, WI, with 5.26 inches of rain, their second highest 24 hour total of record. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Hot weather prevailed in the north central U.S. Williston, ND, reported a record high of 108 degrees. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the eastern U.S., and in southeastern Texas. Richland County, SC, was soaked with up to 5.5 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in the southwestern U.S. Yuma, AZ, experienced their most severe thunderstorm of record. Strong thunderstorm winds, with unofficial gusts as high as 95 mph, reduced visibilities to near zero in blowing dust and sand. Yuma got nearly as much rain in one hour as is normally received in an entire year. The storm total of 2.55 inches of rain was a record 24 hour total for July. Property damage due to flash flooding and high winds was in the millions. (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from Wisconsin and northern Illinois to New England, with 103 reports of large hail and damaging winds through the day. Thunderstorms in Wisconsin produced hail three inches in diameter near Oshkosh, and wind gusts to 65 mph at Germantown. (The National Weather Summary)

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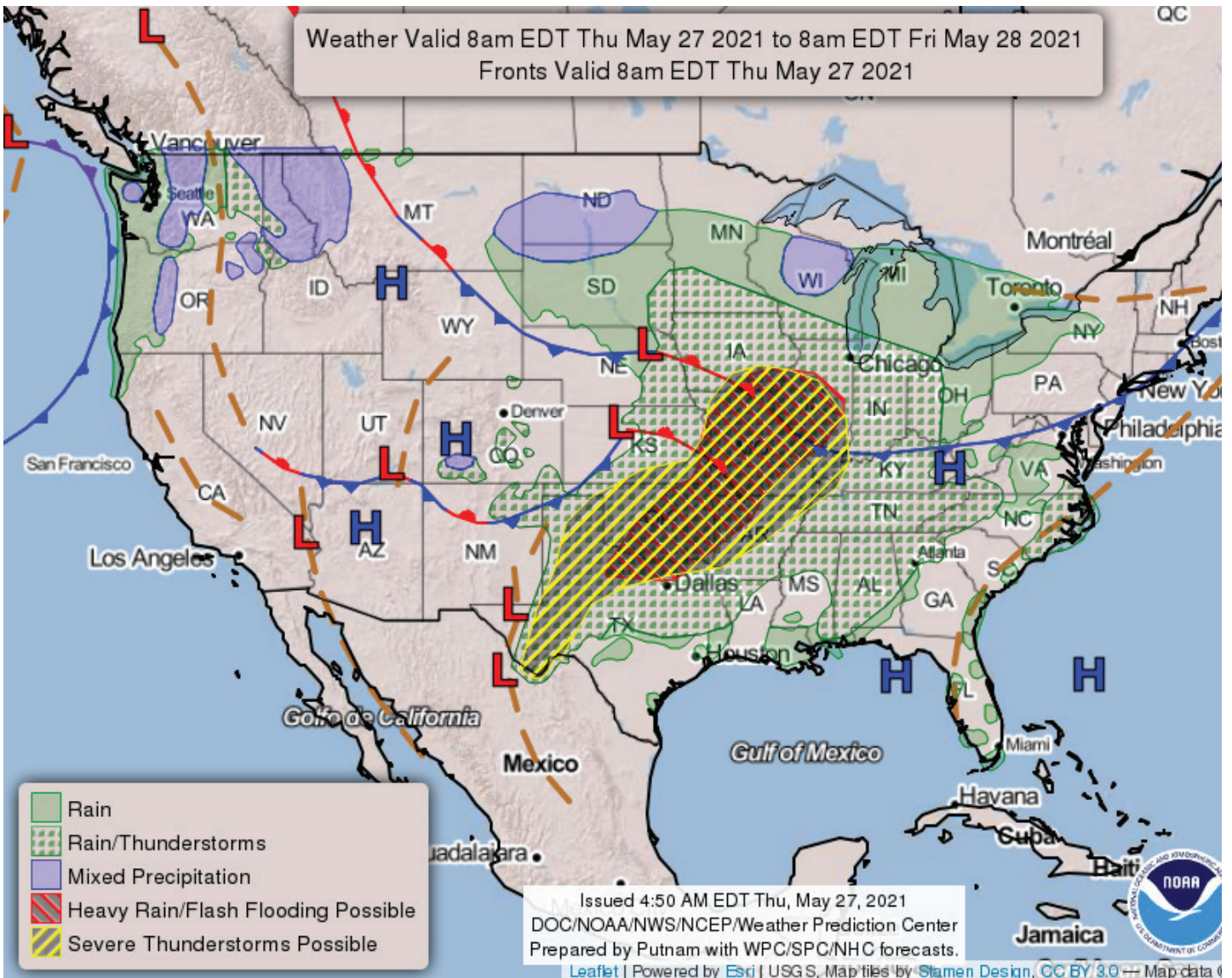
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 58.5 °F
Low Temp: 45.6 °F
Wind: 24 mph
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 101° in 2018
Record Low: 28° in 1907
Average High: 75°F
Average Low: 49°F
Average Precip in May.: 2.79
Precip to date in May.: 0.31
Average Precip to date: 6.76
Precip Year to Date: 3.08
Sunset Tonight: 9:11 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:51 a.m.



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ETERNAL TEARS

One day, John promised us, "God will wipe away all tears." Sickness and sadness, sorrow and suffering – whatever causes people pain or problems – would be gone, banished forever. We all look forward to that special day!

So it is strange when David said that "God will record my sorrows and list my tears on His scroll and in His record." Whatever could be God's reason for doing this to David? And might He do the same to us? Does it make sense that God would make a permanent record of grief – David's grief and our grief as well?

God knew of David's suffering and He knows when we suffer. Our God is a God who cares deeply for us and has compassion for us when we are gripped with grief. Why keep such a record?

Because God wants us to know that He knows and will respond to and one day relieve all our suffering!

Too often when we are overcome with illness or are struggling with sickness, we turn to the products we have stored in our medicine cabinet or to the countless remedies on the shelves of our pharmacies. And if and when they do not work, we turn to a physician and seek his counsel and cure. It is the normal, natural thing to do.

Unfortunately, all too often we only pray when all else fails. It is as if God was not aware of our sickness or has no time to be concerned with our health and wellbeing.

Not so, says David. God has a permanent record of every tear that falls from our eyes because they matter to Him. This is His way of saying, "I do care! Here is My record that I kept about you."

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for Your constant concern and never-ending care. We thank You and praise You for our health and well-being, recognizing Your presence and power at work. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Record my misery; list my tears on your scroll - are they not in your record? Psalm 56:8

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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
06/17/2021 Groton Transit Fundraiser, 4-7 p.m.
06/18/2021 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
06/19/2021 U8 Baseball Tournament
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

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News from the  Associated Press

For Native Americans, Harvard and other colleges fall short

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) — When Samantha Maltais steps onto Harvard's campus this fall, she'll become the first member of the Aquinnah Wampanoag tribe to attend its prestigious law school. It's a "full-circle moment" for the university and the Martha's Vineyard tribe, she says.

More than 350 years ago, Caleb Cheeshahteumuck, an Aquinnah Wampanoag man, became the first Native American to graduate from the Cambridge, Massachusetts, university — the product of its 1650 charter calling for the education of "English and Indian youth of this country."

"Coming from a tribal community in its backyard, I'm hyper aware of Harvard's impact," said Maltais, the 24-year-old daughter of her tribe's chairwoman. "It's a symbol of New England's colonial past, this tool of assimilation that pushed Native Americans into the background in their own homelands."

Maltais will arrive on campus at a time when Native American tribes, students and faculty are pushing the Ivy League institution and other colleges to do more for Indigenous communities to atone for past wrongs, much in the way states, municipalities and universities are weighing and, in some cases, already providing reparations for slavery and discrimination against Black people.

In Minnesota, 11 tribes have called on the state university system to return some of the lands taken from tribes, provide tuition waivers to Native American students and increase the number of Native American faculty, among other demands.

Tadd Johnson, the University of Minnesota's director of tribal relations and a Chippewa tribe member, said the university will establish a "truth and reconciliation" process to document the historical wrongs and determine ways to make amends.

"We're listening," he said. "We're acting on virtually everything that has been thrown at us."

Meanwhile in Colorado, state lawmakers are weighing legislation to grant in-state tuition to students from certain federally recognized tribes.

And in California, Native American students want tuition waivers and other tangible restitution, after most state schools have issued statements acknowledging their fraught history with tribal land, according to Tori McConnell, a 21-year-old member of the Yurok Tribe who graduates from the University of California, Davis in June.

"It's only right that they do these things," she said. "Actions speak louder than words."

Ryan King, a university spokesperson, said officials are "working diligently" to continue supporting Native students and tribal communities. He cited the creation of an advisory council to the university president that includes tribal leaders and scholars, among other recent efforts.

Many American universities are a product of the Morrill Act, a law signed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862 that funded the creation of public colleges through federal land sales. But an investigation by High Country News last year suggested nearly 11 million acres designated for so-called land grant colleges were actually taken from roughly 250 tribes.

At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology near Harvard, Native American students this past semester dug into the renowned school's Native American legacy, including how it continues to benefit from its status as one of the nation's original land grant colleges.

Luke Bastian, a 22-year-old Navajo student from Phoenix, says he and other students presented their class projects to MIT's president earlier this month as they urge the institution to create a Native American studies program.

University officials say conversations with Native students are ongoing and Bastian is optimistic they'll make progress. Students have already successfully lobbied for a designated campus space for Native students and convinced MIT to drop Columbus Day in favor of celebrating Indigenous People's Day, he said.

Some universities have taken laudable steps in recent years to prioritize the needs of Native students,

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say Indigenous community advocates.

Colorado State University offers the in-state tuition rate to students from any federally or state recognized tribe. And South Dakota State University uses private donations to provide scholarships to local tribal members and revenue from the college's land grant trust to enhance Native American programming, research and other efforts.

"We can't change the past, but we can change the future for these young people," says Barry Dunn, the university's president and a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe who launched the Wokini Initiative in 2017.

The call for colleges to do more comes at a critical time, as the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated higher education challenges for Native students, who already had the lowest college graduation rates in the country, said Cheryl Crazy Bull, president of the American Indian College Fund, which awarded Maltais a full scholarship to Harvard Law.

During the pandemic, Native students experienced the sharpest college enrollment decline of any racial or ethnic group, as economic hardships, health disparities and the challenges of remote learning in isolated tribal communities forced many students to quit school, said Crazy Bull.

At Harvard, there's concern that Native students are being asked to take temporary leave from campus due to poor grades at rates higher than those of the overall student population, according to Emily Van Dyke, president of Harvard's Native American alumni group.

That suggests Native students are struggling to adjust once they arrive on campus, said the 39-year-old Seattle resident and member of the Siksika Nation in Canada. The number of Native students enrolled in the school of more than 6,700 undergraduates has dropped in recent years, from 45 in the 2009-2010 school year to 16 in 2019-2020, according to university data.

Students and alumni are also pushing Harvard to formally acknowledge that it stands on land once inhabited by Indigenous peoples, Van Dyke said. It's a basic, initial step many colleges have taken, including MIT and the University of California, Davis.

"We're nowhere near where other colleges are at," Van Dyke said.

Harvard spokespeople declined to comment on the concerns, but Joseph Gone, an anthropology professor who heads the school's Native American program, said the university is in preliminary talks with local tribes to develop a land acknowledgement statement.

A member of the Gros Ventre Tribe in Montana, Gone also argues Harvard has made strides since his days as an undergraduate in the 1990s. He's one of three tenured Native American professors and roughly 10 Native American courses are now offered each semester.

The school's famous Peabody Museum, meanwhile, is also working to repatriate scores of artifacts to Native American tribes, Gone said, though some Native American groups have recently criticized the process.

For her part, Maltais says Harvard and other schools should ensure Native students coming from remote tribal communities acclimate to college life by investing more in student groups, mentorship programs, counseling and other support services.

The Dartmouth graduate, who recently served in the Peace Corps in Tonga, also supports the idea of free or discounted tuition for Native students, but stresses that shouldn't be the only solution.

"Not everyone needs a fancy degree," she said. "Sometimes the only reparation for land is land."

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

02-23-24-32-35

(two, twenty-three, twenty-four, thirty-two, thirty-five)

Estimated jackpot: \$29,000

Lotto America

04-14-21-31-40, Star Ball: 4, ASB: 3

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(four, fourteen, twenty-one, thirty-one, forty; Star Ball: four; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$6.49 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$22 million

Powerball

02-08-21-34-62, Powerball: 16, Power Play: 2

(two, eight, twenty-one, thirty-four, sixty-two; Powerball: sixteen; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$236 million

South Dakota passed medical pot, but physicians hesitant

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Medical marijuana advocates have convinced South Dakota voters that legalizing the drug for medical use is a good idea, but they are struggling to do the same with many of the state's physicians.

A split between the state's largest doctors' association and medical pot proponents was evident Tuesday at a meeting for a legislative committee tasked with studying the issue. The South Dakota State Medical Association was one of the most vocal opponents of the ballot measure last year. Though the law passed with 70% of the vote in November, the organization's president, Dr. Benjamin Aaker, told lawmakers that many of its concerns with medical pot have remained.

That's a potential problem for medical pot advocates because the new law, set to take full effect in November, will depend on involvement from physicians. It will require people who want a medical marijuana ID to get a physician's written certification stating that patients have a "debilitating medical condition" and could benefit from using cannabis.

Aaker raised a host of issues with medical cannabis. He was concerned with how it will be administered, as well as medical problems associated with pot use like cancer, heart disease and schizophrenia. He also pointed to indications in other states that traffic fatalities, emergency room visits for drug overdose and children's consumption of pot all increased after medical marijuana was legalized.

But Melissa Mentele, who launched the medical cannabis legalization campaign, said that reluctance from physicians and health care providers could result in a bumbling rollout of the program that will ultimately hurt patients. She said she envisioned an environment where patients could receive a recommendation from their family physician, but worried that if health care providers opted out, it would leave room for "doc-in-a-box" facilities that have little oversight or mission beyond recommending medical pot.

"This will create a state filled with patients who have no option," she warned.

While Mentele charged that potential pot patients have been turned away from the state's largest health care systems, an organization that represents health care providers said they are currently working on policies to comply with the law. But as lawmakers consider possible changes to the law, health care providers are in no hurry to start issuing medical pot certifications.

"It's impossible to complete until this has played itself out," said Tim Rave, the president of the South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations.

The law will technically go into effect July 1, but state agencies have well into the fall to set up the program. The Department of Health has a Nov. 18 deadline to start issuing the medical marijuana ID cards that permit people to buy and grow pot in their homes, as well as protect them from arrest and prosecution. The state's Supreme Court is currently weighing a case that will decide whether a separate constitutional amendment legalizing both recreational and medical pot will take effect.

Aaker encouraged lawmakers to keep a tight list of medical conditions eligible for marijuana treatment, but he acknowledged that the research around medical cannabis has been limited and there are situations where patients benefit from it.

"If the intent is to help people who are hurting, we need to find the people that this can help," he said.

Trial date set for attorney general in fatal crash

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A trial date has been set for the South Dakota attorney general who struck and killed a man along a Hyde County highway.

Jason Ravensborg will go on trial Aug. 26 on three misdemeanor charges, including careless driving, operating a vehicle while on an electronic device and driving outside of his lane. Two days have been set aside for the trial in Hughes County.

The state Department of Public Safety says Ravensborg was distracted the night of Sept. 12, swerved out of his lane near Highmore and struck 55-year-old Joe Boever who was walking on the shoulder with a flashlight.

Investigators say Boever crashed headfirst through the windshield of Ravensborg's car with his glasses landing inside the vehicle. Ravensborg told officials he never saw Boever and thought he struck a deer.

Hughes County Sheriff Mike Volek responded to the scene and let Ravensborg drive his car home to Pierre. Ravensborg said they didn't realize he hit and killed a person until he returned to the scene the next morning.

Gov. Kristi Noem, three law enforcement organizations and some legislators have called on Ravensborg to resign.

Each charge against the attorney general carries a maximum penalty of 30 days in jail and a \$500 fine.

Biden orders more intel investigation of COVID-19 origin

By ZEKE MILLER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden ordered U.S. intelligence officials to "redouble" their efforts to investigate the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, including any possibility the trail might lead to a Chinese laboratory.

After months of minimizing that possibility as a fringe theory, the Biden administration is joining worldwide pressure for China to be more open about the outbreak, aiming to head off GOP complaints the president has not been tough enough as well as to use the opportunity to press China on alleged obstruction.

Biden on Wednesday asked U.S. intelligence agencies to report back within 90 days. The Democrat directed U.S. national laboratories to assist with the investigation and the intelligence community to prepare a list of specific queries for the Chinese government. He called on China to cooperate with international probes into the origins of the pandemic.

Republicans, including former President Donald Trump, have promoted the theory that the virus emerged from a laboratory accident rather than naturally through human contact with an infected animal in Wuhan, China.

Biden in a statement said the majority of the intelligence community had "coalesced" around those two scenarios but "do not believe there is sufficient information to assess one to be more likely than the other." He revealed that two agencies lean toward the animal link and "one leans more toward" the lab theory, "each with low or moderate confidence."

"The United States will also keep working with like-minded partners around the world to press China to participate in a full, transparent, evidence-based international investigation and to provide access to all relevant data and evidence," said Biden.

His statement came after weeks of the administration endeavoring to avoid public discussion of the lab leak theory and privately suggesting it was farfetched.

China on Thursday accused Biden's administration of now playing politics and shirking its responsibility in calling for a renewed investigation into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic, which was first detected in China in late 2019. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Biden's order showed the U.S. "does not care about facts and truth, nor is it interested in serious scientific origin tracing."

In another sign of shifting attitudes on the origins of the virus, the Senate approved two Wuhan lab-related amendments without opposition, attaching them to a largely unrelated bill to increase U.S. investments in innovation.

One of the amendments, from Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., would block U.S. funding of Chinese "gain of func-

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tion" research on enhancing the severity or transmissibility of a virus. Paul has been critical of Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious-disease expert, and aggressively questioned him at a recent Senate hearing over the work in China. The other amendment was from GOP Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa and it would prevent any funding to the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Both were approved without roll call votes as part of the broader bill that is still under debate in the Senate. As for the origin of pandemic, Fauci, a White House coronavirus adviser, said Wednesday that he and most others in the scientific community "believe that the most likely scenario is that this was a natural occurrence, but no one knows that 100% for sure."

"And since there's a lot of concern, a lot of speculation and since no one absolutely knows that, I believe we do need the kind of investigation where there's open transparency and all the information that's available, to be made available, to scrutinize," Fauci said at a Senate hearing.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday that the White House supports a new World Health Organization investigation in China, but she added that an effective probe "would require China finally stepping up and allowing access needed to determine the origins."

Biden still held out the possibility that a firm conclusion may never be reached, given the Chinese government's refusal to fully cooperate with international investigations.

"The failure to get our inspectors on the ground in those early months will always hamper any investigation into the origin of COVID-19," he said.

The Chinese Embassy in Washington, without mentioning the Biden order, accused unnamed political forces of being fixated on a blame game while ignoring the urgent need to combat the pandemic.

"Smear campaign and blame shifting are making a comeback, and the conspiracy theory of 'lab leak' is resurfacing," the embassy said in a statement posted Wednesday on its website.

Administration officials continue to harbor strong doubts about the lab leak theory. Rather, they view China's refusal to cooperate in the investigation — particularly on something of such magnitude — as emblematic of other irresponsible actions on the world stage.

Privately, administration officials say the end result, if ever known, won't change anything, but note China's stonewalling is now on display for the world to see.

The State Department, which ended one Trump-era probe into the Chinese lab theory this spring, said it was continuing to cooperate with other government agencies and pressed China to cooperate with the world.

"China's position that their part in this investigation is complete is disappointing and at odds with the rest of the international community that is working collaboratively across the board to bring an end to this pandemic and improve global health security," said spokesman Ned Price.

Research into the origins of the virus is critically important, said Arinjay Banerjee, a virologist at the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization in Saskatchewan, Canada, because, "If you don't know where it came from, how are you going to stop it from spreading it again?"

"The great probability is still that this virus came from a wildlife reservoir," he said, pointing to the fact that spillover events — when viruses jump from animals to humans — are common in nature, and that scientists already know of two similar beta coronaviruses that evolved in bats and caused epidemics when humans were infected, SARS1 and MERS. "The evidence we so far have suggests that this virus came from wildlife," he said

However, the case is not completely closed. "There are probabilities, and there are possibilities," said Banerjee. "Because nobody has identified a virus that's 100% identical to SARS-CoV-2 in any animal, there is still room for researchers to ask about other possibilities."

Andy Slavitt, Biden's senior adviser for the coronavirus, said Tuesday that the world needs to "get to the bottom ... whatever the answer may be."

"We need a completely transparent process from China; we need the WHO to assist in that matter," Slavitt said. "We don't feel like we have that now."

Signs point to shift in combating sexual assault in military

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Momentum in Congress for taking sexual assault prosecution powers away from military commanders, combined with a more flexible view by some military leaders, is pointing to a historic shift in the battle against what Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin calls “the scourge of sexual assault.”

The leading lawmaker voice on this issue, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, a New York Democrat, has bipartisan, filibuster-proof support for a bill that would take prosecution decisions out of the chain of command for major crimes, including sexual assault, rape and murder. The legislation is caught in a procedural struggle in the Senate that supporters see as an effort to stall the bill and water down its language.

The Pentagon appears resigned to a new approach. Austin, who has emphasized the importance of the issue since his nomination was confirmed in January, is weighing military service leaders’ views, which some or all provided to him in recent days.

For years, military leaders have acknowledged sexual assault is a big problem but resisted taking prosecutions out of the chain of command; they have argued that it would undermine commanders’ ability to lead and would not reduce the frequency of assaults. That concern — and others — remains, but some leaders have begun publicly emphasizing their openness to change.

The Biden administration’s nominee as Air Force secretary, Frank Kendall, indicated he’s prepared for a new approach.

“Change is necessary, and hopefully we can move forward,” Kendall told Gillibrand at his confirmation hearing Tuesday, praising her efforts. He added that he believes the problem of sexual assault is rooted in military culture and leadership flaws, and he’s uncertain how broadly her proposed changes in prosecution authority should be applied.

“This is a generational change whose time has come,” Gillibrand said Tuesday on the Senate floor in seeking the required unanimous consent to put her bill to a vote.

Reflecting tensions on this issue among Democrats, Sen. Jack Reed, a Rhode Island Democrat and chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, blocked Gillibrand’s procedural move, arguing that her bill must be folded into the broader 2022 defense authorization bill that his committee will take up this summer and fall.

Reed has said he expects the broader defense bill to include “a robust change in the role of the commander in sexual assault cases.”

The shift in attitudes among some military leaders has emerged since President Joe Biden took office. During his campaign, Biden emphatically endorsed removing sexual assault prosecution decisions from the chain of command. He said he would set up a commission to recommend a way forward early in his term.

“We have to change the culture of abuse in this country, especially in the armed services,” Biden said on April 29, 2020.

At Biden’s direction, Austin, the Pentagon chief who is a former Army commander, established an Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault to study ways to attack the problem. In April, the commission recommended taking prosecution powers out of the chain of command. It said that for certain special victims crimes, designated independent judge advocates reporting to a civilian-led Office of the Chief Special Victim Prosecutor should decide two key legal questions: whether to charge someone and, ultimately, whether that charge should go to a court martial. The crimes would include sexual assault, sexual harassment and, potentially, certain hate crimes.

Austin is weighing the military service leaders’ views on this before deciding whether he will support it.

Doubts persist about whether establishing an independent prosecuting authority for sexual assault cases would help reverse a yearslong upward trend in the number of reported sexual assaults in the military.

The acting Army secretary, John E. Whitley, said in an Associated Press interview that the Army is focused more on improving the selection of commanders as a way to change attitudes and improve trust. He said data on the military’s prosecution of sexual assault cases indicates that taking it out of the chain of command would not address the crux of the problem.

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"Part of my concern is we're perhaps, we're in a very fever pitch debate right now," Whitley said. "And I worry that the data are not perhaps coming through to the extent they should."

But some military leaders in recent weeks have signaled a willingness to consider new approaches to prosecution, given the failures of the current system and in light of growing pressure from Congress.

"I'm open to the conversation," the Air Force chief of staff, Gen. Charles Q. Brown, said Tuesday.

Brown did not say whether he believes that taking prosecution decisions out of the chain of command would be a step in the right direction, but his comments suggest a break from the past. His predecessor and other service chiefs had been united in arguing strongly against the move, saying it would send a confusing message to service members about trust in their commander's judgment.

That solid wall of opposition began to crack in early May when the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark Milley, previously a prominent opponent, told the AP and CNN that he had changed his mind. Although he no longer opposes the idea, he has not publicly endorsed it, either. He said the time had come to try something different because "we've been at it for years, and we haven't effectively moved the needle."

Sexual assault has long plagued the military, triggering congressional condemnation and frustrating military leaders who have struggled to find effective prevention, treatment and prosecution methods. The most recent of the Defense Department's biennial anonymous surveys, done in 2018, found that more than 20,000 service members said they experienced some type of sexual assault, but only a third of those filed a formal report.

Milley said he shifted his thinking in part because he is concerned that junior enlisted service members lack confidence in the fairness of sexual assault case outcomes. He said this amounts to an erosion of confidence in the military chain of command.

"That's really bad for our military if that's true, and survey and the evidence indicate it is true," he said.

US pipelines ordered to increase cyber defenses after hack

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. pipeline operators will be required for the first time to conduct a cybersecurity assessment under a Biden administration directive in response to the ransomware hack that disrupted gas supplies in several states this month.

The Transportation Security Administration directive being issued Thursday will also mandate that the owners and operators of the nation's pipelines report any cyber incidents to the federal government and have a cybersecurity coordinator available at all times to work with authorities in the event of an attack like the one that shut down Colonial Pipeline.

Pipeline companies, which until now operated under voluntary guidelines, could face financial penalties that start at \$7,000 per day if they fail to comply with a security directive that reflects an administration focus on cybersecurity that predates the May attack on Colonial, senior Department of Homeland Security officials said.

"The evolution of ransomware attacks in the last 12-18 months has gotten to a point that it poses a national security risk and that we are concerned about the impact on national critical functions," one of the officials said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss details of the regulation ahead of the formal release.

Criminal syndicates, often based in Russia or elsewhere in Eastern Europe, have unleashed a wave of ransomware attacks in which they scramble a target's data with encryption and demand a ransom. Victims have included state and local governments, hospitals and medical researchers and businesses large and small, leaving some victims unable to perform even routine operations.

The hack that targeted Colonial Pipeline prompted the company to shut down a system that delivers about 45% of the gasoline consumed on the East Coast for about a week. It led to panic-buying and shortages at gas stations from Washington, D.C., to Florida.

It came up in Congress on Wednesday as DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas outlined the agency's

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budget next year to the House Appropriations Committee's subcommittee for homeland security.

"The Colonial Pipeline breach, in particular, was a wake-up call to many Americans about how malicious cyber actors, often backed by foreign states, can disrupt the U.S. economy and all of our lives," said Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard, D-Calif., the panel's chair.

Colonial Pipeline, based in Alpharetta, Georgia, later disclosed it paid a ransom of \$4.4 million to retrieve access to its data from the gang of hackers, linked by the FBI to a Russian-speaking criminal syndicate known as DarkSide.

The episode exposed the threat to the more than 2.7 million miles (4.4 million kilometers) of pipeline used to transport oil, other liquids and natural gas around the U.S.

The TSA is responsible for the physical security and cybersecurity of this network and has worked with the owners and operators, about 100 companies in all, to develop the voluntary guidelines and conducts on-site assessments. Lawmakers and experts have been critical of industry security standards.

DHS, under Mayorkas, launched a "60-day sprint" to focus the agency on the ransomware threat weeks before the Colonial Pipeline hack became publicly known on May 7. The directive is intended to address issues that emerged in the response and may have enabled the hack to occur in the first place.

Pipeline owners will be required to do the assessment within 30 days. They will have to show how their processes line up with the voluntary guidelines, identify any gaps and provide a plan for addressing them, the officials said.

Operators will be required for the first time to report any cybersecurity incidents to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, another DHS component. Companies have been reluctant to report breaches in the past for a variety of reasons, including embarrassment and concern that they could expose themselves to legal liability.

Pipeline companies will also have to designate a cybersecurity coordinator who would be on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week to work with TSA and CISA in case of a breach like the one at Colonial Pipeline.

Physician warns Tokyo Olympics could spread variants

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — A physician representing a Japanese medical body warned Thursday that holding the postponed Tokyo Olympics in two months could lead to the spread of variants of the coronavirus.

Dr. Naoto Ueyama, chairman of the Japan Doctors Union, said the International Olympic Committee and the Japanese government had underestimated the risks of bringing 15,000 Olympic and Paralympic athletes into the country, joined by tens of thousands of officials, judges, media and broadcasters from more than 200 countries and territories.

"Since the emergence of COVID-19 there has not been such a dangerous gathering of people coming together in one place from so many different places around the world," he said, speaking in Tokyo at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan. "It's very difficult to predict what this could lead to."

Ueyama continually likened the virus to a "conventional war" situation, and said he was speaking from his own experience as a hospital physician who works just outside Tokyo. He has not been involved in any of the Olympic planning.

"I think the key here is if a new mutant strain of the virus were to arise as a result of this, the Olympics," he said.

The IOC and local organizers say they have been relying on the World Health Organization for public-health guidance. They say the Olympics and Paralympics will be "safe and secure," focused on extensive testing, strict protocols, social distancing, and keeping athletes largely isolated in the Olympic Village alongside Tokyo Bay.

The IOC has said it expects more than 80% of the people living in the village to be vaccinated. This contrasts with a very slow rollout in Japan where less than 5% of the public has been vaccinated.

Ueyama, who is the chairman of a body that represents 130 physicians, joins other medical experts in Japan in voicing opposition to holding the Olympics. On Wednesday, Japan's mass-circulation Asahi Shim-

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bun newspaper called for the Olympics to be canceled.

Earlier this week, the New England Journal of Medicine said in a commentary: "We believe the IOC's determination to proceed with the Olympic Games is not informed by the best scientific evidence."

It questioned the IOC's so-called Playbooks, which spell out rules at the games for athletes, staff, media and others. The final edition will be published next month.

"The IOC's Playbooks are not built on scientifically rigorous risk assessment, and they fail to consider the ways in which exposure occurs, the factors that contribute to exposure, and which participants may be at highest risk," the publication wrote.

The British Medical Journal last month in an editorial also asked organizers to "reconsider" holding the Olympics in the middle of a pandemic.

Ueyama said strains of the virus found in Britain, Brazil, India and South Africa could find their way to Tokyo. He repeated that PCR testing and vaccines are not foolproof.

"Such a decision (to hold the Olympics) is not something to be made only by the IOC or only by the one host country," he said. "I am an Olympic fan. However, I don't think they should go ahead while pushing many people into danger or calling on many people to make sacrifices in regard to their lives in order for them to take place.

"It is dangerous to hold the Olympic Games here in Tokyo," Ueyama added.

He stressed what others have said — holding the Olympics will place Japan's medical system under more strain. Tokyo, Osaka and other parts of Japan are under emergency orders that are likely to be extended past the May 31 expiration.

"It will not be possible for hospitals to provide any special treatment for those involved in the Olympics," he said. "They will be having the same treatment under the same rules that are available to the Japanese people."

More than 12,000 deaths in Japan have been attributed to COVID-19, good by global standards put poor compared to other parts of Asia. Many of those deaths have occurred in the last few months as new cases have spread quickly.

Japan has officially spent \$15.4 billion to organize the Olympics, although government audits say it may be much higher. All but \$6.7 billion is public money.

The IOC depends on selling broadcast rights for 75% of its income. It stands to generate an estimated \$2-3 billion from TV rights in Tokyo no matter if fans are allowed to attend or not.

So far, fans from abroad will be banned, and next month organizers will say if any local fans can attend.

Senior IOC member Richard Pound of Canada has been speaking out almost daily, focused on convincing Japanese — and a global audience — that the Olympics will not be canceled. He told the Japanese magazine Bunshun this week that games the games will be held.

His interview was translated from English to Japanese.

In an interview this week in London's Evening Standard, Pound said: "Organizers have now changed gears and they're in the operational part of it. Barring Armageddon that we can't see or anticipate, these things are a go."

Ueyama bristled at the comments.

"The Olympic Games are not something that should be held even to the extent of Armageddon," the doctor said. "The question is for whom are the Olympics being held and for what purpose? I don't think that someone who could make such statement has any understanding of these questions."

Belarusians who fled crackdown fearful after diverted flight

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

VILNIUS, Lithuania (AP) — Viachka Krasulin said he was arrested and brutally beaten all over his body by police in Belarus for attending a rally in August 2020 that challenged the results of an election keeping authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko in power.

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Krasulin said security forces threatened to sodomize him with a truncheon for joining the protest. After he complained to authorities about the police actions, they opened a criminal case against him — rather than the security forces — and he decided to flee to neighboring Lithuania.

Until this week, he and other Lukashenko opponents had thought they were safe from the sweeping government crackdown by moving to nearby European Union countries.

Now they are not so sure. On Sunday, Belarus diverted a jetliner carrying dissident journalist Raman Pratasevich to land in Minsk, where he was arrested. And Lukashenko has vowed to hunt down those who oppose him, even if they move abroad.

"I was a hostage of Lukashenko's regime, but now the entire European Union is in the same situation," said Krasulin, a 32-year-old ethnographer and musician. "Torture, brutal repressions and a hunt for journalists have spilled out of Belarusian borders and become a problem for all of Europe."

The Ryanair jet was traveling from Greece to Lithuania — both members of the European Union — when Belarusian flight controllers ordered it to land in Minsk because of a bomb threat, and Lukashenko scrambled a fighter jet to escort it. Once the plane was on the tarmac, security agents seized Pratasevich and his Russian girlfriend and took them into custody.

Pratasevich, 26, ran a popular messaging app channel that helped organize protests against Lukashenko, and he had fled abroad in 2019. He was on a Belarusian list of suspected "terrorists" and was charged in absentia with staging mass disturbances.

The rallies against Lukashenko, in power for more than a quarter-century, lasted for months after his Aug. 9 reelection to a sixth term in the vote that the opposition rejected as rigged. The 66-year-old leader responded by arresting more than 35,000 people, with thousands reported beaten.

Now living in Vilnius, Krasulin shuddered as he recalled his own arrest on Aug. 11.

He had tried to help a protester hit by a police rubber bullet when he was dragged into a police van, where he and others were beaten with clubs. Officers singled him out because of his looks, he said.

"They clearly didn't like my long hair -- they were beating me and threatened to rape me with a truncheon, but first they decided to cut my hair," he said. "They raised me by the hair and cut it with an army knife."

The beatings continued in jail, where Krasulin and hundreds of others were kept for 24 hours without food or water, packed in a cell that had six beds for 40 people. He was denied access to a lawyer and sentenced to 11 days.

After his release, he allowed doctors to document the marks on his body from the beatings. Nine months later, he still suffers from neck pain due to nerve damage.

Krasulin demanded that Belarusian authorities investigate the beatings and threats by security forces. Instead, they opened a case against him on charges of involvement in protests, and he fled to Lithuania to escape imminent arrest.

Thousands did the same.

Lithuania's Migration Department said more than 16,000 Belarusians received long-term visas in the past nine months, including nearly 3,500 on humanitarian grounds that imply political motivation.

Vilnius has become the main hub for the opposition, hosting activists, human rights campaigners, journalists and even an entire Belarusian university in exile.

Many of them were scared by the diversion of the Ryanair flight, shortly before it was to cross the Lithuanian border, and Lukashenko fed that fear on Wednesday by warning his foes living abroad that the authorities will pursue them.

"We know your faces, and it's just a matter of time for you to be brought to account before the Belarusian people," he said in a speech.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Lukashenko's main opponent in the election who moved to Lithuania days after the vote under official pressure, said she had taken the same flight as Pratasevich, from Athens to Vilnius, but a week before him.

"A regime has emerged in the center of Europe that openly spits on all norms and rules, transforming Belarus into a black spot," she said.

A day after his arrest, Pratasevich was shown on Belarusian state television confessing to organizing

disturbances. His mother said his nose appeared to have been broken and heavy makeup applied to his face to cover up bruises, and his father said the confession probably was coerced.

"Pratasevich's demonstrative arrest was intended to remind journalists and bloggers who have fled the country that the KGB has long hands, and it's too early for them to relax," said lawyer Siarhej Zikratski, referring to the Belarusian state security agency that still goes under its Soviet-era acronym.

Zikratski, who defended Belarusian journalists targeted by the authorities, fled to Vilnius this month with his wife and two daughters after being stripped of his law license.

"What is going on in Belarus can be called a legal default — laws no longer work there," he said. "Today a lawyer risks finding himself in the same cell with his clients simply for carrying out his professional duties."

Pratasevich's 23-year-old Russian girlfriend, Sofia Sapega, who was taken off the jet and arrested with him, was studying at the European Humanities University that relocated to Vilnius from Minsk in 2005, following a conflict with authorities.

"Lithuania has become a safe haven for thousands of Belarusians," said Maksimas Milta, a university representative. "Lithuania hadn't seen such a massive exodus from Belarus any time before."

Sapega also was shown on Belarusian TV confessing to investigators while in custody.

Milta said Belarusian TV showed a fake title page of Sapega's thesis indicating it was about using messaging apps to compile personal data on police officers. Her real topic, he said, was marriage laws.

"Such KGB methods give an impression what Belarusians have to face on daily basis," Milta added.

He noted that the EU decision to bar Belarus airlines from the bloc's airspace and airports would make it harder for Belarusians to leave the country.

After Belarus authorities restricted land travel amid protests last fall, air links were the last chance for Belarusians to leave, and the EU move will further limit their options.

"Millions of Belarusians can't leave and they have practically become Lukashenko's hostages," said Krasulin, who makes a living by repairing church organs and occasionally working in construction.

He hopes to return to Belarus someday.

"This absurdity in the center of Europe can't last forever," Krasulin said.

Can employers make COVID-19 vaccination mandatory?

By MAE ANDERSON Associated Press

Can employers make COVID-19 vaccination mandatory?

Yes, with some exceptions.

Experts say U.S. employers can require employees to take safety measures, including vaccination. That doesn't necessarily mean you would get fired if you refuse, but you might need to sign a waiver or agree to work under specific conditions to limit any risk you might pose to yourself or others.

"Employers generally have wide scope" to make rules for the workplace, said Dorit Reiss, a law professor who specializes in vaccine policies at the University of California Hastings College of the Law. "It's their business."

Rules will vary by country. But the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has allowed companies to mandate the flu and other vaccines, and has indicated they can require COVID-19 vaccines.

There are exceptions. For example, people can request exemptions for medical or religious reasons. Some states have proposed laws that restrict mandating the vaccines because of their "emergency use" status, but that may become less of an issue since Pfizer has applied for full approval and others are likely to follow.

How employers approach the issue will vary. Many might not want to require vaccination because of the administrative burden of tracking compliance and managing exemption requests, noted Michelle S. Strowhiro, an employment adviser and lawyer at McDermott Will & Emery. Legal claims could also arise.

As a result, many employers will likely strongly encourage vaccination without making it mandatory, Strowhiro said.

Walmart, for example, is offering a \$75 bonus for employees who provide proof they were vaccinated.

Deep-rooted racism, discrimination permeate US military

By KAT STAFFORD, JAMES LAPORTA, AARON MORRISON and HELEN WIEFFERING Associated Press

For Stephanie Davis, who grew up with little, the military was a path to the American dream, a realm where everyone would receive equal treatment. She joined the service in 1988 after finishing high school in Thomasville, Georgia, a small town said to be named for a soldier who fought in the War of 1812.

Over the course of decades, she steadily advanced, becoming a flight surgeon, commander of flight medicine at Fairchild Air Force Base and, eventually, a lieutenant colonel.

But many of her service colleagues, Davis says, saw her only as a Black woman. Or for the white resident colleagues who gave her the call sign of ABW – it was a joke, they insisted – an “angry black woman,” a classic racist trope.

White subordinates often refused to salute her or seemed uncomfortable taking orders from her, she says. Some patients refused to call her by her proper rank or even acknowledge her. She was attacked with racial slurs. And during her residency, she was the sole Black resident in a program with no Black faculty, staff or ancillary personnel.

“For Blacks and minorities, when we initially experience racism or discrimination in the military, we feel blindsided,” Davis said. “We’re taught to believe that it’s the one place where everybody has a level playing field and that we can make it to the top with work that’s based on merit.”

In interviews with The Associated Press, current and former enlistees and officers in nearly every branch of the armed services described a deep-rooted culture of racism and discrimination that stubbornly festers, despite repeated efforts to eradicate it.

The AP found that the military’s judicial system has no explicit category for hate crimes, making it difficult to quantify crimes motivated by prejudice.

The Defense Department also has no way to track the number of troops ousted for extremist views, despite its repeated pledges to root them out. More than 20 people linked to the Jan. 6 siege of the U.S. Capitol were found to have military ties.

The AP also found that the Uniform Code of Military Justice does not adequately address discriminatory incidents and that rank-and-file people of color commonly face courts-martial panels made up of all-white service members, which some experts argue can lead to harsher outcomes.

And racial discrimination doesn’t exist just within the military rank-and-file. Every year, civilians working in the financial, technical and support sectors of the Army, Air Force and Navy file hundreds of complaints alleging race and skin color discrimination, according to an AP analysis of U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission data.

In the fiscal year 2020 alone, the three services received 900 civilian complaints of racial discrimination and over 350 complaints of discrimination by skin color.

In February, Lloyd J. Austin III – a former Army general who now is secretary of defense, the first Black man to serve in the post – ordered commanders and supervisors to take an operational pause for one day to discuss extremism in the ranks with their service members.

Austin gave commanders the latitude to address the matter as they saw fit, but emphasized that discussions should include the meaning of their oath, acceptable behaviors both in and out of uniform, and how service members can report actual or suspected extremist behavior through their chains of command.

A recent poll from The Military Times showed the stand-down was received with mixed reviews. Some service members said their units went “above and beyond,” but others reported their trainers made disparaging comments that undercut the discussions and that the sessions were short and non-interactive.

The Southern Poverty Law Center sent Austin a letter shortly after his order, applauding him for his decisive action but underscoring that systemic change on all military levels is urgent.

“Those who are indoctrinated into white supremacist ideology present a significant threat to national security and the safety of our communities,” SPLC President Margaret Huang wrote.

The AP reached out to the Defense Department multiple times to learn what proactive measures it was

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taking to stamp out racism, discrimination and extremism, but did not receive a response by the publication deadline, even though the first outreach was May 5.

When Davis was medically retired by the Air Force in 2019 after more than two decades of service, she felt ground down by overt racism and retaliated against for accusing a superior of sexually assaulting her.

She noted how insidious racism can be to members of the ranks – service members entrust their lives to their fellow troops, and a lack of cohesion in a unit can be deadly.

“It creates a harmful and dangerous work environment,” Davis said. “And a lot of us suffer in silence because we feel like there’s nothing that can be done.”

In the midst of last year’s summer of unrest sparked by police killings of Black Americans across the nation, Army Gen. Mark A. Milley, who is also the Department of Defense’s Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told congressional leaders the military cannot afford racism or discrimination.

“We who wear the cloth of our nation understand that cohesion is a force multiplier,” Milley said. “Divisiveness leads to defeat. As one of our famous presidents said, ‘A house divided does not stand.’”

Austin pledged to rid the ranks of “racists and extremists” during his confirmation hearing before Congress, which came on the heels of the Capitol insurrection.

“The job of the Department of Defense is to keep America safe from our enemies,” he said. “But we can’t do that if some of those enemies lie within our own ranks.”

It’s standard custom for enlisted personnel to show their respect to higher-ranking colleagues by offering salutes that are held until the gesture is returned.

When Marine Maj. Tyrone Collier was a newly minted second lieutenant and judge advocate, he had a profound experience with that practice. Collier, a Black man, was at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall in Virginia when he was saluted by a Black enlisted Marine. But even after Collier acknowledged the gesture, the salute continued. Puzzled, Collier asked why the Marine held it for so long.

“He said, ‘Sir, I just have to come clean with something. ... We never see Black officers. We never see people like you and it makes me extraordinarily proud,’” Collier recalled.

“You can imagine what it’s like for a Black enlisted Marine who, for example, might want to consider becoming a warrant officer or a commissioned officer or who served under commander after commander and received so few opportunities to see people that look like them in higher ranks,” Collier said. “Representation really does matter.”

Though that prolonged salute took place in 2010, the racial picture has not improved much since.

At the end of 2020, the Defense Department’s Diversity and Inclusion Board released a report aimed at identifying ways to improve racial and ethnic diversity in the U.S. military.

Among the report’s findings: The enlisted ranks of the active and reserve military were “slightly more racially and ethnically diverse than its U.S. civilian counterparts.” But not the officer corps. Furthermore, it found that the civilian population eligible to become commissioned officers was “less racially and ethnically diverse than the civilian population eligible for enlisted service.”

The breakdown of all active commissioned officers: 73% white; 8% each Black and Hispanic; 6% Asian; 4% multiracial; and less than 1% Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native. And the diversity gap widened the higher individuals moved up in the ranks.

The report emphasized the increasing importance of the representation of minorities reflecting the nation’s morphing demographics, saying the Defense Department “must ensure that all service members have access to opportunities to succeed and advance into leadership positions.”

Several Black officers interviewed by the AP said the culture must give way if they are ever to flourish.

While serving in Afghanistan, one Marine officer recalled being questioned by a white colleague about why he was conversing with fellow Black officers. “My response to him was ‘I don’t ask you why you’re always hanging out with white officers,’” said the Marine, who asked not to be named because he remains on active duty. “Why can’t they just be officers? Why the qualifier?”

Thomas Hobbs, an infantry colonel who retired after 27 years of service in the Marine Corps in 2018,

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was among the officers interviewed who spoke of the pressures of trying to blend into an overwhelmingly "white male culture," while also feeling the need to outperform white officers to negate racial stereotypes.

Hobbs said the Marines have done better than other branches of the service in recruiting Black candidates into the officer corps, but noted that "many of them don't stay in the military past their 10th year."

"At the moment, we have more captains than we ever had before," he said, "but our field grade levels are actually going down. Why don't they stay in? Because they're exhausted from having to act a certain way all the time and they can never be themselves."

The Marine who remains on active duty also called it "exhausting," adding "not only do you have to deal with your own things but whenever a Black enlisted Marine gets in trouble, they will come to you and say, 'Oh man, what's wrong with these guys?' Coming to you like you're the expert on everything Black."

Collier said he felt pressure to act differently from the first moments he was recruited, recalling an encounter at a formal dinner with a Marine major trying to bring him into the service.

"I was one of two Black men who were applying ... and he and I were chatting, and the selection officer kind of mentioned to us, 'Hey, you guys might not want to isolate yourselves in this way because it might not look good,'" Collier said. "I mean, this is one of my first experiences involving the Marine Corps and I have a Marine major telling me I can't talk to another Black person without worrying about how people will look at us if we're purposely isolating ourselves from the group."

Other service members of color detailed incidents in which they said they were discouraged by superiors from openly embracing their cultures. Some said they were told to avoid speaking languages other than English to not offend their mostly white colleagues.

Former Air Force Master Sgt. Ricardo Lemos, who was medically discharged in 2019, said a superior once discouraged him from speaking to his mother in Spanish on the phone in the office "because people can't understand you."

And some Black women detailed the challenges they faced navigating a culture that often labels them as "aggressive or difficult" and their natural hair as unkempt or unprofessional.

DeMarcus Gilliard, a 34-year-old former Marine captain, told the AP that he felt an unspoken pressure to prove himself better than his peers when he entered the Basic School, where new officers learn the ropes, feeling like a symbol of Black Americans.

But he said he never experienced overt racism there and credits the Marine Corps for making strides toward diversifying its top ranks.

"It's a great idea, 'I don't see color,' but it actually is pretty dismissive. And I think not talking about issues of race actually exacerbates the problem and we need to be able to talk about these things," said Gilliard. "I think the Marine Corps would be a great place to do it."

The Basic School told the AP that sessions on diversity and inclusion are a core part of the training it offers, including "discussions about the negative impact bias has on leadership, decision-making and cohesiveness."

Last year, Gen. David Berger, who became the top general of the Marine Corps in 2019, used the occasion of the Marine Corps Association's annual Modern Day Marine expo to drive home the message that diversifying the service will save lives.

"I am absolutely convinced: Too much similarity, too much that we look all the same, think the same, got the same background – we're going to get killed because we're going to end up with solutions that we're all familiar with, but they're easy to counter," Berger said.

Racism in the ranks is not merely a modern stain. More than a half-century ago in 1971, Frank W. Render, a Black man who was assistant secretary of defense, resigned over what he viewed as unequal treatment of people of color.

That same year, the Defense Department created what is now known as the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute – the Pentagon's premier agency for education and training programs covering diversity and inclusion within the U.S. military.

One of its tools is an anonymous, voluntary "organizational climate" survey that offers a snapshot of a

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unit's institutional effectiveness and provides commanders with insight into diversity and inclusion issues within their ranks and how they are addressed.

"Racist, sexual and bigoted jokes are a daily occurrence in my work place," a Marine at California's Camp Pendleton wrote in one December 2017 survey. "Very little has really ever been done to prevent it." Another Marine said slurs were commonly uttered by officers and enlisted colleagues with no repercussions.

But not everyone is comfortable filling out the surveys or with being honest. Women assigned to Navy SEAL units, for example, fear they can be identified since the surveys break down demographics by gender, rank and race and not many women are assigned to special operation units.

Congress and the Defense Department have mandated that the surveys be conducted annually or whenever a unit changes commanders, but response rates vary widely across units, the surveys do not fall under the Federal Records Act and they are destroyed after three years.

Using multiple Freedom of Information Act requests, the AP managed to collect surveys for the past four years, concentrating on the eleven aircraft carriers in the U.S. Navy fleet due to their large population size, which can mimic a small floating city with more than 5,000 personnel.

In surveys collected from 2017, 265 sailors from the USS Abraham Lincoln, the USS George Washington, the USS John C. Stennis, the USS Nimitz and the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower said they personally experienced racial discrimination. But in the fall of that year, the discrimination question softened, moving from pointed inquiries to broadly asking whether discrimination "does not occur."

Since that change, in 2019, the latest complete year obtained by AP, more than 1,600 sailors – or 1 in 5 – disagreed, saying racial discrimination did take place on their ships, with nearly a third reporting racial jokes, comments or slurs. Nearly 1 in 4 sailors said they could not use their chain of command to report incidents without fear of retaliation or reprisal, and 4 out of every 10 said discipline is unfairly administered.

Out of the 11 aircraft carriers, the George Washington, John C. Stennis and Abraham Lincoln performed worst when sailors were asked about racial discrimination and whether they could safely report harassment. In 2019 on the George Washington, for instance, 30% of sailors said unequal treatment occurred based on race, color or national origin.

The AP's request to interview a representative of the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute was referred to the Pentagon, which did not provide anyone with knowledge of the workings of the command climate surveys.

In a statement, the Navy called diversity a "key component to maintaining our highest state of readiness," adding that "certainly our military is better served when it reflects the nation it serves and all of its members are treated with dignity and respect."

As a young airman, Nick Shands didn't initially think much of it when he received a request to report to the medical treatment facility on Mountain Home Air Force Base. But when he arrived, he thought it was strange that he saw only a handful of superiors and a large dumpster. His task: Climb in and sift through the garbage for documents containing personally identifiable information.

Shands, one of the few Black airmen on the Idaho base, was stunned by the order but clambered over the side for what turned out to be a nearly all-day task, as his superiors watched him search fruitlessly.

He said it was just one incident among several on the nearly all-white base where he felt singled out, including being told repeatedly that he wasn't "built" for the military.

"If it was for the purpose of to embarrass and to mentally break you, I guess that's what they tried to do," he said.

Shands said targeted racism and discrimination continued after he left Idaho and served on different bases, leading him to depart the military in 2018. He believes a tough road lies ahead for the Defense Department and Congress, which provides oversight, to address structural racism in the military and prevent other service members from suffering as he did.

But a round of sweeping changes to the National Defense Authorization Act – which primarily funds and lays out policies governing the Defense Department and military services – could present a unique

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opportunity to begin to turn the tide toward systemic change.

A bill that was passed earlier this year ordered the Secretary of Defense to devise a plan to remove all names, symbols, displays and monuments that honor the Confederacy, including the renaming of military bases such as Fort Benning and Fort Hood that honor Confederate leaders.

"Several years ago, they uncovered a cell of white supremacists down at Fort Bragg," U.S. House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn recalled in an interview with the AP. "Were they there because of the attitudes they brought with them or were they celebrating the fact that Fort Bragg is named after a segregationist?"

"That's one reason those of us here in Congress feel that we need to get rid of all of the institutionalization and the celebration of these racist attitudes," Clyburn said.

Buried deep within the more than 1,400-page bill are mechanisms aimed at transforming the way the military addresses racism and extremism from within. It lays out tracking and reporting requirements for supremacist, extremist and criminal gang activity, and creates an inspector general to oversee diversity and inclusion efforts.

And it says the military must add questions to its climate surveys that explicitly ask about racism, antisemitism and supremacism.

In addition, Shands believes the military – like the nation it is sworn to protect – also needs to do some deep soul-searching.

Though he has moved on with his life, he carries humiliation and pain that he cannot erase.

Still, he will always cherish aspects of his military career. As a public health instructor with the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine, he had a direct impact on students eager to make a change in the world. He also met his wife in the military.

After the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis sparked protests that swept the globe, Shands finally confronted one of his former superiors – a white woman involved with the dumpster task more than a decade ago.

After the woman posted in a private military Facebook group that "Black Lives Matter," Shands reached out to remind her of the incident, telling her he hoped it didn't take the "murders of Black humans" to awaken her to the discrimination and racism that exists in both America and the Air Force – including the discrimination she exerted upon him.

The woman acknowledged she did not treat Shands well and had been "incredibly ignorant to acknowledging and/or recognizing many things, including systemic racism and the presence of it in the Air Force," according to the screenshots reviewed by the AP.

For Shands, the conversation was cathartic, as others chimed in to offer support. But it also brought home the dualities facing Black Americans and other people of color, inside and out of the military, who are trying to navigate a nation riddled by racism.

"You're not going to escape racism anywhere in this country," he said. "The best interpretation I've ever heard of being in the military, especially a minority or a person of color in the military, is that the military is a microcosm of regular society."

For Native Americans, Harvard and other colleges fall short

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) — When Samantha Maltais steps onto Harvard's campus this fall, she'll become the first member of the Aquinnah Wampanoag tribe to attend its prestigious law school. It's a "full-circle moment" for the university and the Martha's Vineyard tribe, she says.

More than 350 years ago, Caleb Cheeshateaumuck, an Aquinnah Wampanoag man, became the first Native American to graduate from the Cambridge, Massachusetts, university — the product of its 1650 charter calling for the education of "English and Indian youth of this country."

"Coming from a tribal community in its backyard, I'm hyper aware of Harvard's impact," said Maltais, the 24-year-old daughter of her tribe's chairwoman. "It's a symbol of New England's colonial past, this tool of assimilation that pushed Native Americans into the background in their own homelands."

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Maltais will arrive on campus at a time when Native American tribes, students and faculty are pushing the Ivy League institution and other colleges to do more for Indigenous communities to atone for past wrongs, much in the way states, municipalities and universities are weighing and, in some cases, already providing reparations for slavery and discrimination against Black people.

In Minnesota, 11 tribes have called on the state university system to return some of the lands taken from tribes, provide tuition waivers to Native American students and increase the number of Native American faculty, among other demands.

Tadd Johnson, the University of Minnesota's director of tribal relations and a Chippewa tribe member, said the university will establish a "truth and reconciliation" process to document the historical wrongs and determine ways to make amends.

"We're listening," he said. "We're acting on virtually everything that has been thrown at us."

Meanwhile in Colorado, state lawmakers are weighing legislation to grant in-state tuition to students from certain federally recognized tribes.

And in California, Native American students want tuition waivers and other tangible restitution, after most state schools have issued statements acknowledging their fraught history with tribal land, according to Tori McConnell, a 21-year-old member of the Yurok Tribe who graduates from the University of California, Davis in June.

"It's only right that they do these things," she said. "Actions speak louder than words."

Ryan King, a university spokesperson, said officials are "working diligently" to continue supporting Native students and tribal communities. He cited the creation of an advisory council to the university president that includes tribal leaders and scholars, among other recent efforts.

Many American universities are a product of the Morrill Act, a law signed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862 that funded the creation of public colleges through federal land sales. But an investigation by High Country News last year suggested nearly 11 million acres designated for so-called land grant colleges were actually taken from roughly 250 tribes.

At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology near Harvard, Native American students this past semester dug into the renowned school's Native American legacy, including how it continues to benefit from its status as one of the nation's original land grant colleges.

Luke Bastian, a 22-year-old Navajo student from Phoenix, says he and other students presented their class projects to MIT's president earlier this month as they urge the institution to create a Native American studies program.

University officials say conversations with Native students are ongoing and Bastian is optimistic they'll make progress. Students have already successfully lobbied for a designated campus space for Native students and convinced MIT to drop Columbus Day in favor of celebrating Indigenous People's Day, he said.

Some universities have taken laudable steps in recent years to prioritize the needs of Native students, say Indigenous community advocates.

Colorado State University offers the in-state tuition rate to students from any federally or state recognized tribe. And South Dakota State University uses private donations to provide scholarships to local tribal members and revenue from the college's land grant trust to enhance Native American programming, research and other efforts.

"We can't change the past, but we can change the future for these young people," says Barry Dunn, the university's president and a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe who launched the Wokini Initiative in 2017.

The call for colleges to do more comes at a critical time, as the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated higher education challenges for Native students, who already had the lowest college graduation rates in the country, said Cheryl Crazy Bull, president of the American Indian College Fund, which awarded Maltais a full scholarship to Harvard Law.

During the pandemic, Native students experienced the sharpest college enrollment decline of any racial or ethnic group, as economic hardships, health disparities and the challenges of remote learning in isolated tribal communities forced many students to quit school, said Crazy Bull.

At Harvard, there's concern that Native students are being asked to take temporary leave from campus

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due to poor grades at rates higher than those of the overall student population, according to Emily Van Dyke, president of Harvard's Native American alumni group.

That suggests Native students are struggling to adjust once they arrive on campus, said the 39-year-old Seattle resident and member of the Siksika Nation in Canada. The number of Native students enrolled in the school of more than 6,700 undergraduates has dropped in recent years, from 45 in the 2009-2010 school year to 16 in 2019-2020, according to university data.

Students and alumni are also pushing Harvard to formally acknowledge that it stands on land once inhabited by Indigenous peoples, Van Dyke said. It's a basic, initial step many colleges have taken, including MIT and the University of California, Davis.

"We're nowhere near where other colleges are at," Van Dyke said.

Harvard spokespeople declined to comment on the concerns, but Joseph Gone, an anthropology professor who heads the school's Native American program, said the university is in preliminary talks with local tribes to develop a land acknowledgement statement.

A member of the Gros Ventre Tribe in Montana, Gone also argues Harvard has made strides since his days as an undergraduate in the 1990s. He's one of three tenured Native American professors and roughly 10 Native American courses are now offered each semester.

The school's famous Peabody Museum, meanwhile, is also working to repatriate scores of artifacts to Native American tribes, Gone said, though some Native American groups have recently criticized the process.

For her part, Maltais says Harvard and other schools should ensure Native students coming from remote tribal communities acclimate to college life by investing more in student groups, mentorship programs, counseling and other support services.

The Dartmouth graduate, who recently served in the Peace Corps in Tonga, also supports the idea of free or discounted tuition for Native students, but stresses that shouldn't be the only solution.

"Not everyone needs a fancy degree," she said. "Sometimes the only reparation for land is land."

Afghan forces struggle, demoralized, rife with corruption

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Abdullah Mohammadi lost his two legs and an arm below the elbow in a ferocious battle with the Taliban. As a young Afghan soldier, he had been eager to fight for his country, but now he's furious at a government he says ignores him and hasn't paid his veteran's pension for nearly a year.

Afghanistan's National Defense and Security Forces, meant to be the bulwark against advancing Taliban insurgents, are rife with corruption, demoralized and struggling to keep territory. The government says the army can hold its own, but military experts warn of a tough fight ahead for poorly trained, ill-equipped troops whose loyalties waver between their country and local warlords.

By Sept. 11 at the latest, the remaining 2,300-3,500 U.S. troops and roughly 7,000 allied NATO forces will have left Afghanistan, ending nearly 20 years of military engagement. Also leaving is the American air support that the Afghan military has relied on to stave off potentially game-changing Taliban assaults, ever since it took command of the war from the U.S. and NATO in 2014.

"Without U.S. military support, it is a matter of time before the Taliban consolidates its gains, particularly in the south, east and west," said Bill Roggio, senior fellow at the American Foundation for the Defense of Democracies and editor of its Long War Journal, which tracks militant movements.

At least half the country is believed to be contested ground, often with the government holding only the main towns and cities in local districts and the Taliban dominating the countryside.

In the last two weeks, the Taliban seized control of four district centers, including a strategic town southwest of Kabul, on the main highway linking Afghanistan's north and south.

This week, the Taliban briefly entered Mehtar Lam, the capital of Laghman province, after police and army abandoned several outposts protecting the city, government officials said. The Taliban were driven out but later showed off weapons and equipment allegedly left behind at the outposts. More than 100

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military personnel were brought to Kabul to be reprimanded for abandoning their positions.

"Once U.S. military support is gone, the Taliban should be able to take and hold several provincial capitals and hold them indefinitely," said Roggio.

Within the Afghan army, soldiers complain of substandard equipment, even shoddy basic items like army boots that fall apart within weeks because corrupt contractors used inferior material. The Associated Press witnessed boots with gaping holes being worn, insufficient helmets available and weapons that often jammed.

At a police outpost seen by the AP earlier this month, eight men lived in a partially built bunker that looked big enough for only half that number. They had only a few rifles as they watched sentry from two turret-style posts on the outpost's high brick walls. They overlook a busy road where the Taliban frequently attack security convoys.

The commander, who wore sandals, said the outpost is occasionally hit by rocket or gunfire and would have a hard time fending off a full-fledged attack.

"There's no other option but peace," he said, asking not to be identified because he did not have permission to allow media into his compound.

The Afghan government long ago stopped releasing casualty figures among its security forces. But a former senior security official deeply familiar with the cost of war over the past two years told the AP that about 100-110 security personnel are killed or wounded every day. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk about casualties.

Mohammadi, the wounded veteran, said he was injured six years ago in Zhari district in southern Kandahar province, once the spiritual heartland of the Taliban until their ouster in 2001 by U.S.-led coalition forces.

He led a company of 18 men airlifted into battle in a grape field, about 5 kilometers (3 miles) from their nearest base. The fight went on all day and night until eventually the Taliban surrounded them.

"I was the commander. I had to do something. I stood up and aimed my RPG (rocket propelled grenade launcher)." That was the last Mohammadi remembered. He stepped on a land mine. The Taliban had littered the fields with mines, and higher-ups had not warned him or his men.

For a year he recovered in hospital. He received two wooden legs and an artificial plastic hand. The legs are painful to wear and he can manage them only for 15 minutes at a time. It takes two people to help him get them on, and he sometimes pays a neighbor to help.

"I am proud of what I have sacrificed for this country. What I gave for my country I gave with pride," he said.

But Mohammadi is fuming at the government. For years, his veteran's pension, around 16,000 Afghanis (\$200) a month, has been erratic, and for the past 11 months he hasn't received it at all. "They tell me to wait," he said.

Mohammadi says he has had to borrow from family and friends. It wounds his pride, but it's better than begging, he said.

"I am angry. I feel like my dignity has been insulted. My life is a struggle," he said, wrapping his lower body in a wool blanket. The cold and damp cause him pain in his missing limbs.

The Defense Ministry's deputy spokesman, Fawad Aman, promised to look into the complaint. He said that corruption, while it exists, is not widespread and efforts are being made to tackle it and that the spirit of the fighting force was high.

"With the withdrawal of United States forces there will be no security vacuum or gap in Afghanistan because our forces can defend Afghanistan independently," he said.

Washington's chief watchdog overseeing U.S. spending in Afghanistan, John Sopko, told a Congressional hearing in March that Afghanistan's security forces were demoralized. He said the figure of 300,000 troops in the security forces was a guesstimate because of the many so-called ghost soldiers, where commanders list non-existent personnel to collect their paychecks.

"I think corruption is the threat," he said. Not only does it mean money is lost, he said, "it also is fueling the insurgency" since the Taliban can build public support by pointing to the corruption and the impunity

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officials enjoy.

The U.S is committed to pay \$4 billion annually until 2024 to finance Afghanistan's security forces. As of Dec. 31, 2020, Sopko said the U.S. has spent \$88.3 billion to help the Afghan government provide security in Afghanistan — roughly 62% of all U.S. reconstruction funding.

Yet, according to Attiqullah Amarkhiel, the Afghan army of today is half as good as the army left by the former Soviet Union when it withdrew in 1989, ending its 10-year occupation of Afghanistan.

Amarkhiel was major general in the 1989 Moscow-allied Afghan army and served in the post-Taliban government of President Hamid Karzai. He helped build the security forces following the fall of the Taliban in 2001.

The army of 1989 were professional soldiers who had graduated from high school and later a military academy, he said. That army numbered around 150,000 troops, compared to the 300,000 today. "But then we had quality. Today we have quantity."

In contrast, recruits to the post-Taliban security forces were mostly uneducated, often allied with warlords, he said. Training lasted barely six to eight weeks, he said. The intention was to build up the numbers and get them onto the battlefield, Amarkhiel told the AP.

After the Soviet withdrawal, the Moscow-allied president, Najibullah, held on to power for three years. His eventual collapse, Amarkhiel said, came because of divisions within his own government, which led several of his generals to abandon him.

"The same is true now. The collapse, if it comes, will come from within," he said.

Killer of 8 in California had talked of workplace attacks

By JOCELYN GECKER and MARTHA MENDOZA Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — An employee who gunned down eight people at a California rail yard and then killed himself as law enforcement rushed in had talked about killing people at work more than a decade ago, his ex-wife said.

"I never believed him, and it never happened. Until now," a tearful Cecilia Nelms told The Associated Press on Wednesday following the 6:30 a.m. attack at a light rail facility for the Valley Transportation Authority.

"When our deputies went through the door, initially he was still firing rounds. When our deputy saw him, he took his life," Santa Clara County Sheriff Laurie Smith told reporters.

The sheriff's office is next door to the rail yard, which serves the county of more than 1 million people in the heart of the Silicon Valley.

The attacker was identified as 57-year-old Samuel Cassidy, according to two law enforcement officials. Investigators offered no immediate word on a possible motive but his ex-wife said he used to come home from work resentful and angry over what he perceived as unfair assignments.

"He could dwell on things," she said. The two were married for about 10 years until a 2005 divorce filing and she hadn't been in touch with Cassidy for about 13 years, Nelms said.

It was the 15th mass killing in the nation this year, all of them shootings that have claimed at least four lives each for a total of 86 deaths, according to a database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University.

At the White House, President Joe Biden ordered flags to be flown at half-staff and urged Congress to act on legislation to curb gun violence.

"Every life that is taken by a bullet pierces the soul of our nation. We can, and we must, do more," Biden said in a statement.

Gov. Gavin Newsom visited the site and then spoke emotionally about the country's latest mass killing.

"There's a numbness some of us are feeling about this. There's a sameness to this," he said. "It begs the damn question of what the hell is going on in the United States of America?"

The shooting took place in two buildings and killed employees who had been bus and light rail operators, mechanics, linemen and an assistant superintendent over the course of their careers. One had worked for the agency since 1999.

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The Santa Clara County Office of the Medical Examiner-Coroner identified the victims as Paul Delacruz Megia, 42; Taptejdeep Singh, 36; Adrian Balleza, 29; Jose Dejesus Hernandez, 35; Timothy Michael Romo, 49; Michael Joseph Rudometkin, 40; Abdolvahab Alaghmandan, 63, and Lars Kepler Lane, 63.

Another man wounded in the attack was in critical condition at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, spokesperson Joy Alexiou said.

Singh had worked as a light rail train driver for eight or nine years and had a wife, two small children and many family members, said his cousin, Bagga Singh.

"We heard that he chose the people to shoot, but I don't know why they choose him because he has nothing to do with him," he said.

San Jose City Councilman Raul Peralez said Rudometkin was a close friend.

"There are no words to describe the heartache we are feeling right now, especially for his family," he wrote on Facebook. "Eight families are feeling this same sense of loss tonight and our entire community is mourning as well."

The shooter had more than one gun, county District Attorney Jeff Rosen said.

It wasn't immediately clear whether he had obtained the guns legally.

In court documents, an ex-girlfriend described Cassidy as volatile and violent, with major mood swings because of bipolar disorder that became worse when he drank heavily.

Several times while he was drunk, Cassidy forced himself on her sexually despite her refusals, pinning her arms with his body weight, the woman alleged in a 2009 sworn statement filed after Cassidy had sought a restraining order against her. The documents were obtained by The San Francisco Chronicle.

The Associated Press generally does not name people who say they have been sexually assaulted.

Cassidy had worked for Valley Transportation Authority since at least 2012, according to the public payroll and pension database Transparent California, first as a mechanic from 2012 to 2014, then as someone who maintained substations.

Officials also were investigating a house fire that broke out shortly before the shooting, Davis said. Public records show Cassidy owned the two-story home where firefighters responded after being notified by a passerby. Law enforcement officers cordoned off the area near the home and went in and out Wednesday.

Doug Suh, who lives across the street, told The Mercury News in San Jose that Cassidy seemed "strange" and that he never saw anyone visit.

"I'd say hello, and he'd just look at me without saying anything," Suh said. Once, Cassidy yelled at him to stay away as he was backing up his car. "After that, I never talked to him again."

Wednesday's attack was the deadliest shooting in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1993, when a gunman attacked law offices in San Francisco's Financial District, killing eight people before taking his own life.

It also was Santa Clara County's second mass shooting in less than two years. A gunman killed three people and then himself at a popular garlic festival in Gilroy in July 2019.

Study seeks origins of ghost nets that haunt Hawaii's shores

By CALEB JONES Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — "Ghost nets" from unknown origins drift among the Pacific's currents, threatening sea creatures and littering shorelines with the entangled remains of what they kill.

Lost or discarded at sea, sometimes decades ago, this fishing gear continues to wreak havoc on marine life and coral reefs in Hawaii.

Now, researchers are doing detective work to trace this harmful debris back to fisheries and manufacturers — and that takes extensive, in-depth analysis on tons of ghost nets.

The biggest concern is that derelict gear keeps killing fish and other wildlife such as endangered Hawaiian monk seals, seabirds and turtles long after it's gone adrift, said Drew McWhirter, a graduate student at Hawaii Pacific University and one of the study's lead researchers.

"These nets bulldoze over our reefs before they hit shore," McWhirter added. "They leave a path of destruction, pulling coral heads out, and can cause a lot of ecological damage."

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Ghost nets foul oceans throughout the world, but the Hawaiian Islands — with the Great Pacific Garbage Patch to the east and another gyre of floating trash to the west — are an epicenter for marine waste.

Past efforts to identify origins of nets have proven difficult because debris comes from so many countries and nets have few, if any, unique identifying marks or features.

Experts believe many nets are lost accidentally, but boats occasionally ditch nets to avoid prosecution when fishing illegally. Other fishermen cut away portions of damaged nets instead of returning them to shore.

The ghost net study is being supervised by Hawaii Pacific University's Center for Marine Debris Research co-director, Jennifer Lynch, a research biologist with the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

"We're going to have a very challenging time ... trying to identify it back to its source," said Lynch. "And if we fail, ... that's going to be increased evidence for policymakers to see the importance of gear marking and potentially bring those kinds of regulations to the front."

For Lynch, it's not about pointing fingers. Rather, she hopes the study, which will be presented to the fishing industry first, will help develop new ways to prevent damage to the marine environment.

"We're doing this study in a very forensic way where we're gathering as much evidence as we possibly can so that we can present the best, most accurate story," Lynch said.

The crew gets ghost nets from three sources: The main Hawaiian Islands, the fishing grounds of the Hawaii longline tuna fleet that often snags nets — and the shores of the uninhabited Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, which are part of Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Monument.

An April cleanup expedition to Papahānaumokuākea — the largest protected environment in the United States and a UNESCO World Heritage Site — brought back nearly 50 tons (45 metric tons) of nets and other lost gear.

In a shed on the university's campus, researchers pull apart bundles of fishing gear, noting the relationships between items. Then samples are taken to a lab for analysis.

"We only really need a small sample here to really understand how it's constructed," said Raquel Corniuk, a research technician at the university.

Researchers look at about 70 different aspects of each piece of net, including its polymer types. "We look at how it's twisted. Is it twisted versus braided? We are trying to look at how many strands does it have, its twine diameter, mesh stretch size," Corniuk said.

The information is entered into a database, which will help scientists find patterns that could lead to manufacturers and eventually individual fisheries or nations.

The researchers have spent about a year collecting data and hope to have findings peer reviewed and published this year.

Among the ghost gear are fish aggregation devices — or FADs — floating bundles of material fishing vessels leave in the ocean to attract fish. The devices have receivers linked to satellites, but when they drift outside designated fishing areas, they're usually abandoned.

Mike Conroy, president of West Coast Fisheries Consultants, works with purse seine and gillnet operators off California. He said FADs are prohibited in U.S. waters and that fishers do everything they can to prevent loss of nets.

"An average one of those nets is going to run the operator somewhere between 150 and 250 grand," he said.

Conroy acknowledged ghost gear is a problem. "These types of research activities will point the finger in the right direction," he said. "I think what you'll see is that West Coast fisheries probably aren't contributing much."

The researchers have already found debris from all corners of the Pacific, including Asian countries and the U.S. West Coast.

Much of the ghost net problem lies with less developed nations that have few fishing regulations and sometimes buy or manufacture low-quality nets, according to a career fisherman who now works for a net manufacturer in Washington state.

"Their products tend to be weaker," said Brian Fujimoto, a sales executive for NET Systems Inc., in

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Bainbridge Island. "And if you look at the poly netting and ropes that you're finding, they're all very inexpensive stuff."

Fujimoto said his company uses technology, colors and other construction techniques unique to their products, so they're easily identifiable.

Making that an industry standard, he said, is "only going to happen with the more industrialized nations, say for example, the U.S., Canada, Japan."

Daniel Pauly, a marine biologist and professor at the University of British Columbia's Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries, said, "We kill fish for fishing and for consumption, but these fish that are killed by lost gear are killed for no reason, not to mention the marine mammal and turtles and other animals that we like."

"Clamping down on this loss, which is too easily accepted, ... is a good thing," added Pauly.

Jonathan Moore, principal assistant secretary of the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs at the U.S. State Department, said last year, "Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, which is sometimes associated with ghost gear, is among the greatest threats to the sustainable use of our shared ocean resource."

"Certainly, gear-marking guidelines and regulations should be a central pillar of all responsible fisheries management operations," he said.

Although U.S. and some international laws require identifying markers on some fishing gear, such as crab pots and buoys, nets are not required to be marked.

Officials with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's fisheries division declined to be interviewed for this story, but said in an email: "NOAA Fisheries is unaware of any regulations that have been, or are being considered, with regard to ghost nets. We continue to work agency-wide on this international marine debris problem."

Authorities ID 8 victims of California railyard shooting

By JOCELYN GECKER and MARTHA MENDOZA Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — An employee opened fire Wednesday at a California rail yard, killing eight people before taking his own life as law enforcement rushed in, authorities said, marking the latest attack in a year that has seen a sharp increase in mass killings as the nation emerges from coronavirus restrictions.

The shooting took place around 6:30 a.m. in two buildings at a light rail facility for the Valley Transportation Authority, which provides bus, light rail and other transit services throughout Santa Clara County, the most populated county in the San Francisco Bay Area.

"When our deputies went through the door, initially he was still firing rounds. When our deputy saw him, he took his life," Santa Clara County Sheriff Laurie Smith told reporters. Deputies "were going through hallways saying, 'Sheriff's office!' He knew at that time that his time for firing shots was over."

The victims, many of them longtime employees of the transit agency, were identified by the Santa Clara County coroner's office Wednesday night as Paul Delacruz Megia, 42; Taptejdeep Singh, 36; Adrian Balleza, 29; Jose Dejesus Hernandez, 35; Timothy Michael Romo, 49; Michael Joseph Rudometkin, 40; Abdolvahab Alaghmandan, 63, and Lars Kepler Lane, 63.

Their jobs included bus and light rail operators, mechanics, linemen and assistant superintendent. One had worked for the transit authority since 1999.

Singh had worked as a light rail train driver for eight or nine years and had a wife, two small children and many family members, said his cousin, Bagga Singh.

"We heard that he chose the people to shoot, but I don't know why they choose him because he has nothing to do with him," he said. He said he was told that the gunman targeted certain people and let others go.

San Jose City Councilman Raul Peralez said Rudometkin was a close friend. "There are no words to describe the heartache we are feeling right now, especially for his family," he wrote on Facebook. "Eight families are feeling this same sense of loss tonight and our entire community is mourning as well."

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The attacker was identified as 57-year-old Sam Cassidy, according to two law enforcement officials. Investigators offered no immediate word on a possible motive.

His ex-wife, Cecilia Nelms, told The Associated Press that Cassidy had a bad temper and would tell her that he wanted to kill people at work, "but I never believed him, and it never happened. Until now."

Nelms, teary-eyed and shaken by the news, said her ex-husband would come home wound up and angry about things that happened at work. As he talked about it, "he would get more mad," she said. "He could dwell on things."

When Cassidy lost his temper, Nelms said there were times she was scared. He was someone who could physically hurt others, she said.

Nelms said they were married for 10 years — Cassidy filed for divorce in 2005 — and had not been in contact for 13 years. She said he had been treated for depression.

Members of a union representing Valley Transportation Authority workers were meeting when the shooting began, San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo said, but it's not clear the meeting was related to the attack.

When she heard shots, transit authority mechanic Rochelle Hawkins said she dropped her phone.

"I was running so fast. I just ran for my life," she said. "I would hope everyone would just pray for the VTA family. Just pray for us."

Other friends and family members awaited news after being unable to reach their loved ones through calls or text messages. Some had tracked the missing person's cellphone to the rail yard but had no information from authorities.

Sheriff's spokesman Deputy Russell Davis said he did not know the type of weapon used in the attack.

As bomb squads searched the rail complex, officials were also investigating a house fire that broke out shortly before the shooting, Davis said. Public records show Cassidy owned the two-story home where firefighters responded after being notified by a passer-by. Law enforcement officers cordoned off the area near the home and went in and out Wednesday.

Doug Suh, who lives across the street, told The Mercury News in San Jose that Cassidy seemed "strange" and that he never saw anyone visit.

"I'd say hello, and he'd just look at me without saying anything," Suh said. Once, Cassidy yelled at him to stay away as he was backing up his car. "After that, I never talked to him again."

Cassidy had worked for Valley Transportation Authority since at least 2012, according to the public payroll and pension database Transparent California, first as a mechanic from 2012 to 2014, then as someone who maintained substations.

Gov. Gavin Newsom, speaking emotionally in front of a county office where flags flew at half-staff, said victims' relatives were "waiting to hear from the coroner, waiting to hear from any of us, just desperate to find out if their brother, their son, their dad, their mom is still alive."

"It begs the damn question, 'What the hell is going on in the United States of America?'"

Another man wounded in the attack was in critical condition at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, spokesperson Joy Alexiou said.

The bloodshed comes amid a rise in mass killings after the pandemic had closed many public places and kept people confined to their homes last year.

A database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University that tracks every mass killing over the last 15 years shows that the San Jose attack is the 15th mass killing so far in 2021, all of them shootings.

Eighty-six people have died in the shootings, compared with 106 for all of 2020. The database defines mass killings as four or more people dead, not including the shooter, meaning the overall toll of gun violence is much higher when adding in smaller incidents.

At the White House, President Joe Biden ordered flags to be flown at half-staff and urged Congress to act on legislation to curb gun violence.

"Every life that is taken by a bullet pierces the soul of our nation. We can, and we must, do more," Biden said in a statement.

San Jose, the 10th-largest city in the U.S. with more than a million people, is about 50 miles (80 kilome-

ters) south of San Francisco in the heart of Silicon Valley.

Trains were already out on morning runs when the shooting occurred. Light rail service was suspended and replaced with bus bridges.

Wednesday's attack was Santa Clara County's second mass shooting in less than two years. A gunman killed three people and then himself at a popular garlic festival in Gilroy in July 2019.

The Gilroy attack was on Mayor Liccardo's mind Wednesday as text messages flooded in, reporting the shooting and fire.

"Not again," he thought as he jumped in his car and raced to City Hall. Transit authority workers told him they knew Cassidy.

"You try to understand what would possess someone to do that much harm," Liccardo said by phone. "It's unfathomable."

Taiwan struggles with testing backlog amid largest outbreak

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Facing Taiwan's largest outbreak of the pandemic and looking for rapid virus test kits, the mayor of the island's capital did what anyone might do: He Googled it.

"If you don't know, and you try to know something, please check Google," Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je quipped.

Praised for its success at keeping the virus away for more than a year, Taiwan had until May recorded just 1,128 cases and 12 deaths. But the number of locally transmitted cases started growing this month and it soon became clear that the central government was ill prepared not only to contain the virus, but to even detect it on a large scale due to a lack of investment in rapid testing.

That left officials like Ko scrambling to catch up as the number of new infections climbed to some 300 a day. Ko's search put him in contact with six local companies who make rapid tests and his government was soon able to set up four rapid testing sites in a district that had emerged as a virus hotspot.

Rapid tests, experts say, are a critical tool in catching the virus in its early days. The alternative that Taiwan has been relying on — tests that have to be sent out to a lab for processing — has led to backlogs that may be obscuring the true extent of the outbreak.

"You want to identify those infected cases as soon as possible," to contain the spread, said Ruby Huang, a professor in the medical college at National Taiwan University. "And then you're basically running against time."

With so few cases, Taiwan had been a bubble of normalcy for most of the pandemic. Schools stayed open, people went to bars and restaurants, and the island's economy was among the few globally that saw positive growth.

Its success was built largely on strict border controls that primarily allowed in only citizens and long-term residents, who then faced mandatory two-week quarantines.

From time to time it found small clusters of infections and stamped them out through contact tracing and quarantines. Last month authorities found a cluster involving pilots from the state-owned China Airlines.

Stopping the virus this time would prove difficult, in part because under government policy pilots were only required to quarantine for three-days and did not need a negative test to get out of quarantine. Soon employees at a quarantine hotel where China Airlines flight crew stayed started getting sick — and so did their family members.

The virus had escaped quarantine and was spreading locally, mostly in Taipei and surrounding areas.

The government in Taiwan — where only about 1% of the population have been vaccinated — responded by ordering a lockdown, closing schools and switching offices to remote work or rotating shifts. Contact tracers identified 600,000 people that needed to quarantine themselves.

The biggest roadblock has been testing.

Government policy throughout the pandemic has been to rely on polymerase chain reaction, or PCR, tests, which are seen as the gold standard for diagnosis but must be processed using special machines in a lab. The government has not encouraged rapid tests, which are quicker and cheaper but potentially less accurate.

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In and around Taipei, labs have been working overtime in recent weeks but are still struggling to process all the samples.

Tim Tsai said on just a single day last week his lab in New Taipei city received 400 samples from hospitals to test. He said his lab was only able to process about 120 samples a day.

"Our medical technicians, they were leaving work at midnight," he said.

The government's Central Epidemic Command Center said in a statement that all 141 government designated labs have the capacity to process 30,000 PCR tests a day. However, it declined to provide the actual number of tests being processed.

It said it was "continuing to work with relevant labs to research ways to accelerate and expand our capacity, without impacting accuracy."

Throughout the pandemic the government has maintained there are few benefits to mass testing, with the health minister saying last year that public funds and medical resources could better be used elsewhere.

The government instead has emphasized a strategy of contact tracing and isolation and only testing those with symptoms and direct contact with someone infected.

"This is more efficient, effective and accurate," said Chen Chien-jen, the island's former vice president, who led the pandemic response last year before retiring.

Experts say such a strategy may have been appropriate when case numbers were low, but needed to change as infections spread.

"You should have a two-pronged approach. You do the quarantine, but you should do massive wide-spread testing," said K. Arnold Chan, an expert on drug and medical products regulation at National Taiwan University. "For whatever reason the government is completely unprepared."

Taiwanese companies developed rapid tests for COVID-19 early last year, but the majority of their sales have been overseas.

"Back then the CDC didn't support rapid tests, and there was no epidemic," said Edward Ting, a spokesperson for Panion and BF Biotech, which has had its own test since March 2020. "We tried to sell, but it wasn't possible."

The central government finally appears to be coming around, with the health minister last week asking local governments to set up rapid testing sites. Ting said his company has since had calls from governments across the island asking about its tests.

The central government also is now offering subsidies for labs to buy new machines to process PCR tests.

Aaron Chen, whose company developed a machine that can process up to 2,000 PCR test samples every four hours, said he has diverted two machines bound for export to be used locally instead.

Ko, the mayor of Taipei, said his city has purchased 250,000 rapid test kits. Though the city is still relying on PCR tests to confirm actual cases, Ko said the rapid tests better allow him to monitor the situation on the ground.

Ko, a former surgeon, said it was important to be open to change.

"There's a phrase in Chinese: One thrives in times of calamity and perishes in soft times. Because when you're very successful you are not forced to improve. Only when you fail, then are you forced to improve," said Ko. "We were too successful in the past year."

GOP set to block 1/6 panel, stoking Senate filibuster fight

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republicans are ready to deploy the filibuster to block a commission on the Jan. 6 insurrection, shattering hopes for a bipartisan probe of the deadly assault on the U.S. Capitol and reviving pressure on Democrats to do away with the procedural tactic that critics say has lost its purpose.

The vote expected Thursday would be the first successful use of a filibuster this year to halt Senate legislative action. Most Republicans oppose the bill, which would establish a commission to investigate the attack by Donald Trump supporters over the election. With Democrats in support but the Senate evenly split, 50-50, the tally is likely to fall short of the 60-vote threshold to launch debate.

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"We have a mob overtake the Capitol, and we can't get the Republicans to join us in making historic record of that event? That is sad," said Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, the assistant Democratic leader.

"That tells you what's wrong with the Senate and what's wrong with the filibuster," he said.

Congress is at an inflection point as lawmakers and the country try to move past the horror of Jan. 6, when the former president's supporters laid siege to the Capitol in a failed effort to overturn Joe Biden's election. The House already approved the commission bill with some Republican support, but a potential filibuster by GOP senators is sparking fresh debate over whether the time has come for Democrats to change the rules and lower the threshold to 51 votes to prevent such brazen acts of obstruction.

Trump has made it clear he opposes the formation of any panel to investigate the mob siege. With the former president wielding influence, Democrats are warning that if Republicans are willing to use the filibuster to stop an arguably popular measure, it shows the limits of trying to broker compromises, particularly on bills related to election reforms or other aspects of the Democrats' agenda.

"They are shining a spotlight: There is no bill that stands up to Trump and the 'Big Lie' that can get 10 Republicans," said Eli Zupnick of Fix Our Senate, which advocates for filibuster changes.

Ahead of the vote, the mother of the late Capitol Police officer Brian Sicknick said Wednesday she would meet with lawmakers to try to persuade them to act. Sicknick was among many officers protecting the building, some seen in videos in hand-to-hand combat with mob. He collapsed immediately after engaging with the rioters and died the next day.

"I suggest that all Congressmen and Senators who are against this bill visit my son's grave in Arlington National Cemetery and, while there, think about what their hurtful decisions will do to those officers who will be there for them going forward," Gladys Sicknick said in a statement.

"Putting politics aside, wouldn't they want to know the truth of what happened on January 6?" she said.

A small number of Republicans, including Utah Sen. Mitt Romney and Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, have said they expect to back the House-passed bill. Others, including Maine Sen. Susan Collins, have proposed tweaks to the legislation to try to attract more votes. But the effort had so far failed to yield additional support.

"What we want is closure," Murkowski said Wednesday.

Mostly, the GOP senators will follow Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who has declared the bill a "purely political exercise," since Senate committees are already looking into security shortfalls.

McConnell, who once said Trump was responsible for "provoking" the mob attack on the Capitol, now says of Democrats: "They'd like to continue to litigate the former president, into the future."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer is essentially challenging Senate Republicans to take a stand after 35 of their GOP colleagues voted for the commission bill in the House.

The talks over potential changes to the legislation come as Republicans have struggled over whether they will support the commission bill and how to respond to the insurrection as many in their party have remained loyal to Trump. The former president told his supporters the morning of Jan. 6 to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat. He has repeatedly said the election was stolen, even though his claims have been refuted by courts and election officials across the country.

Collins has said she is working with other senators to try to find a compromise, and West Virginia Democrat Joe Manchin has been part of that effort, according to two people familiar with the informal talks who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private negotiations.

"I want to see a commission," Collins said Wednesday. "I am working very hard to secure Republican votes."

But senators and others took note when Manchin, in a statement with Arizona Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, implored colleagues to act, calling the attack "horrific" and bipartisan commission a "critical step."

Two centrist Democrats, Manchin and Sinema have been prominent holdouts against changing the Senate filibuster rules to allow 51 votes for passage of legislation. They side with Republicans in warning Democrats off making any changes, even though both parties have voted in recent years to allow the lower threshold for confirming nominations for judges and administration officials. Their message to colleagues ahead of

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the commission vote was widely seen as a signal of their unease with using the filibuster tool to block a bill that arguably could expect to draw broad support.

The 1/6 commission vote will become "exhibit A" on why the filibuster needs to be changed, said Grant Tudor, a policy advocate at the organization Protect Democracy.

Collins' amendment seeks to remedy some of the chief Republican complaints about the proposed commission. It would require the Democratic-appointed chair and the Republican vice chair of the panel to "jointly appoint" staff, changing House language that only required the chair to consult with the vice chair. It would also terminate the commission 30 days after a final report is issued, instead of 60 days, an effort to avoid their work spilling into the election year.

Both the House version and Collins' amendment would require the final report to be issued by Dec. 31, 2021.

Still, most Republicans have held fast to their opposition. North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis said he was still "unlikely" to support the bill. He said he believes the year-end deadline is unrealistic.

Republicans have also pointed to a bipartisan Senate report that is expected to be released next month, saying it will be sufficient to fix security problems in the Capitol.

Four of the rioters died during the insurrection, including a woman who was shot and killed by police as she tried to break into the House chamber with lawmakers still inside. Dozens of the officers defending the Capitol were brutally beaten by the rioters. Hundreds of people have been arrested.

Biden orders more intel investigation of COVID-19 origin

By ZEKE MILLER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Wednesday ordered U.S. intelligence officials to "redouble" their efforts to investigate the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, including any possibility the trail might lead to a Chinese laboratory.

After months of minimizing that possibility as a fringe theory, the Biden administration is joining worldwide pressure for China to be more open about the outbreak, aiming to head off GOP complaints the president has not been tough enough as well as to use the opportunity to press China on alleged obstruction.

Biden asked U.S. intelligence agencies to report back within 90 days. He directed U.S. national laboratories to assist with the investigation and the intelligence community to prepare a list of specific queries for the Chinese government. He called on China to cooperate with international probes into the origins of the pandemic.

Republicans, including former President Donald Trump, have promoted the theory that the virus emerged from a laboratory accident rather than naturally through human contact with an infected animal in Wuhan, China.

Biden in a statement said the majority of the intelligence community had "coalesced" around those two scenarios but "do not believe there is sufficient information to assess one to be more likely than the other." He revealed that two agencies lean toward the animal link and "one leans more toward" the lab theory, "each with low or moderate confidence."

"The United States will also keep working with like-minded partners around the world to press China to participate in a full, transparent, evidence-based international investigation and to provide access to all relevant data and evidence," said Biden.

His statement came after weeks of the administration endeavoring to avoid public discussion of the lab leak theory and privately suggesting it was farfetched.

In another sign of shifting attitudes, the Senate approved two Wuhan lab-related amendments without opposition, attaching them to a largely unrelated bill to increase U.S. investments in innovation.

One of the amendments, from Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., would block U.S. funding of Chinese "gain of function" research on enhancing the severity or transmissibility of a virus. Paul has been critical of Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious-disease expert, and aggressively questioned him at a recent Senate hearing over the work in China. The other amendment was from GOP Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa and it would

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prevent any funding to the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Both were approved without roll call votes as part of the broader bill that is still under debate in the Senate.

As for the origin of pandemic, Fauci, a White House coronavirus adviser, said Wednesday that he and most others in the scientific community "believe that the most likely scenario is that this was a natural occurrence, but no one knows that 100% for sure."

"And since there's a lot of concern, a lot of speculation and since no one absolutely knows that, I believe we do need the kind of investigation where there's open transparency and all the information that's available, to be made available, to scrutinize," Fauci said at a Senate hearing.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday that the White House supports a new World Health Organization investigation in China, but she added that an effective probe "would require China finally stepping up and allowing access needed to determine the origins."

Biden still held out the possibility that a firm conclusion may never be reached, given the Chinese government's refusal to fully cooperate with international investigations.

"The failure to get our inspectors on the ground in those early months will always hamper any investigation into the origin of COVID-19," he said.

The Chinese embassy in Washington, without mentioning the Biden order, accused unnamed political forces of being fixated on a blame game while ignoring the urgent need to combat the pandemic.

"Smear campaign and blame shifting are making a comeback, and the conspiracy theory of 'lab leak' is resurfacing," it said in a statement posted Wednesday on its website.

Administration officials continue to harbor strong doubts about the lab leak theory. Rather, they view China's refusal to cooperate in the investigation — particularly on something of such magnitude — as emblematic of other irresponsible actions on the world stage.

Privately, administration officials say the end result, if ever known, won't change anything, but note China's stonewalling is now on display for the world to see.

The State Department, which ended one Trump-era probe into the Chinese lab theory this spring, said it was continuing to cooperate with other government agencies and pressed China to cooperate with the world.

"China's position that their part in this investigation is complete is disappointing and at odds with the rest of the international community that is working collaboratively across the board to bring an end to this pandemic and improve global health security," said spokesman Ned Price.

Research into the origins of the virus is critically important, said Arinjay Banerjee, a virologist at the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization in Saskatchewan, Canada, because, "If you don't know where it came from, how are you going to stop it from spreading it again?"

"The great probability is still that this virus came from a wildlife reservoir," he said, pointing to the fact that spillover events — when viruses jump from animals to humans — are common in nature, and that scientists already know of two similar beta coronaviruses that evolved in bats and caused epidemics when humans were infected, SARS1 and MERS. "The evidence we so far have suggests that this virus came from wildlife," he said

However, the case is not completely closed. "There are probabilities, and there are possibilities," said Banerjee. "Because nobody has identified a virus that's 100% identical to SARS-CoV-2 in any animal, there is still room for researchers to ask about other possibilities."

Andy Slavitt, Biden's senior adviser for the coronavirus, said Tuesday that the world needs to "get to the bottom ... whatever the answer may be."

"We need a completely transparent process from China; we need the WHO to assist in that matter," Slavitt said. "We don't feel like we have that now."

Stephen Hawking's archive, office acquired for UK public

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

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LONDON (AP) — London's Science Museum and the Cambridge University library said Wednesday they have acquired a large collection of items belonging to late physicist Stephen Hawking, from his personalized wheelchairs to landmark papers on theoretical physics and his scripts from his appearance on "The Simpsons."

The entire contents of Hawking's office at Cambridge — including his communications equipment, memorabilia, bets he made on scientific debates and office furniture — will be preserved as part of the collection belonging to the Science Museum Group.

Hawking occupied the office at the university's department of applied mathematics and theoretical physics from 2002 until shortly before his death in 2018.

Highlights will go on display at the London museum early next year. Museum officials are also hoping to create a touring exhibition in the U.K. before setting up a permanent display in London.

Meanwhile, his vast archive of scientific and personal papers, including a first draft of his bestselling "A Brief History of Time" and his correspondence with leading scientists, will remain at Cambridge University's library.

The institutions' acceptance of Hawking's archive and office meant that his estate settled 4.2 million pounds (\$5.9 million) in inheritance tax.

This was done through a U.K. government plan which allows those who have such tax bills to pay by transferring important cultural, scientific or historic objects to the nation. Artefacts accepted under the plan are allocated to public collections and available for all.

Hawking studied for his PhD at Cambridge and later became the university's Lucasian Professor of Mathematics, the same post that Isaac Newton held from 1669 to 1702.

Cambridge's acquisition of the 10,000-page archive means that Hawking's papers will join those of Newton and Charles Darwin at the university library, where they will soon be free for the public to access.

"The archive allows us to step inside Stephen's mind and to travel with him round the cosmos to, as he said, 'better understand our place in the universe,'" said Jessica Gardner, the university's librarian.

"This vast archive gives extraordinary insight into the evolution of Stephen's scientific life, from childhood to research student, from disability activist to ground-breaking, world-renowned scientist," she added.

Diagnosed with motor neuron disease at 22 and given just a few years to live, Hawking survived for decades, dying in 2018 at 76. His work on the mysteries of space, time and black holes captured the imagination of millions, and his popular science books made him a celebrity beyond the preserves of academia. Hollywood celebrated his life in the 2014 biopic "The Theory of Everything."

Hawking's children, Lucy, Tim and Robert, said they were pleased that their father's work will be preserved for the public for generations to come.

"My father would be so pleased and I think maybe at the same time, just a tiny bit overwhelmed that he was going to form part of the ... history of science, that he was going to be alongside the great scientists, the people whose work he really admired," Lucy Hawking said.

Ohio announces 1st \$1 million Vax-a-Million lottery winner

By ANDREW WELSH-HUGGINS Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A southwestern Ohio woman won the state's first \$1 million Vax-a-Million vaccination incentive prize, while a Dayton-area teen was awarded the first full-ride college scholarship offered by the program, the state announced Wednesday night.

The winners were selected in a random drawing Monday and had their information confirmed before the formal announcement at the end of the Ohio Lottery's Cash Explosion TV show.

The lottery announced that Abbigail Bugenske of Silverton near Cincinnati was the \$1 million winner, while Joseph Costello of Englewood near Dayton was the college scholarship winner.

"We're excited that this has inspired so many Ohioans to get vaccinated, and we're thrilled to announce the winners of the first round of drawings," said Gov. Mike DeWine.

More than 2.7 million adults signed up for the \$1 million prize and more than 104,000 children ages 12

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to 17 entered the drawing for the college scholarship, which includes tuition, room and board, and books. Four more \$1 million and college scholarship winners will be announced each Wednesday for the next four weeks.

DeWine, a Republican, announced the program May 12 to boost lagging vaccination rates.

The Ohio Lottery conducted the first drawing Monday afternoon at its draw studio in Cleveland using a random number generator to pick the winners ahead of time, and then confirmed the eligibility of the ultimate winner.

Participants must register to enter by phone or via the Vax-a-Million website. Teens can register themselves, but parents or legal guardians must verify their eligibility. The names of entrants who don't win will be carried over week to week. The deadline for new registrations is just before midnight on Sunday.

"I know that some may say, 'DeWine, you're crazy! This million-dollar drawing idea of yours is a waste of money,'" the governor said when he announced the incentive. But with the vaccine now readily available, the real waste, "is a life lost to COVID-19," the governor said.

The concept seemed to work, at least initially. The number of people in Ohio age 16 and older who received their initial COVID-19 vaccine jumped 33% in the week after the state announced its million-dollar incentive lottery, according to an Associated Press analysis.

But the same review also found that vaccination rates are still well below figures from earlier in April and March.

More than 5.2 million people in Ohio had at least started the vaccination process as of Monday, or about 45% of the state. About 4.6 million people are done getting vaccinated, or 39% of the state. Nationally, more than 165 million Americans have started the vaccination process, or about nearly 50% of the population. More than 131 million are fully vaccinated, or nearly 40%.

Vax-a-Million is open to permanent Ohio residents who have received either the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine or their first part of the two-dose Pfizer or Moderna vaccination.

DeWine's proposal inspired similar vaccine-incentive lotteries in Colorado, Maryland, New York state and Oregon.

In Colorado, Democratic Gov. Jared Polis says the state will have a weekly lottery for five residents to win \$1 million Tuesday to incentive COVID-19 vaccinations. Colorado is setting aside \$5 million of federal coronavirus relief funds that would have gone toward vaccine advertising for five residents to win \$1 million each.

Forecast: 40% chance Earth to be hotter than Paris goal soon

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

There's a 40% chance that the world will get so hot in the next five years that it will temporarily push past the temperature limit the Paris climate agreement is trying to prevent, meteorologists said.

A new World Meteorological Organization forecast for the next several years also predicts a 90% chance that the world will set yet another record for the hottest year by the end of 2025 and that the Atlantic will continue to brew more potentially dangerous hurricanes than it used to.

For this year, the meteorologists say large parts of land in the Northern Hemisphere will be 1.4 degrees (0.8 degrees Celsius) warmer than recent decades and that the U.S. Southwest's drought will continue.

The 2015 Paris climate accord set a goal of keeping warming to a few tenths of a degree warmer from now. The report said there is a 40% chance that at least one of the next five years will be 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) higher than pre-industrial times — the more stringent of two Paris goals. The world is already 1.2 degrees Celsius (2.2 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than pre-industrial times.

Last year, the same group forecasted a 20% chance of it happening.

The doubling of the odds is due to improvements in technology that show it has "actually warmed more than we thought already," especially over the lightly-monitored polar regions, said Leon Hermanson, a climate scientist at the United Kingdom's Met Center who helped on the forecast.

"It's a warning that we need to take strong action," Hermanson said.

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Pennsylvania State University climate scientist Michael Mann, who wasn't part of the report, said he is "almost certain" the world will exceed that Paris warming threshold at least once in the next few years. But he said one or two years above 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) isn't as worrisome as when the overall trend of temperatures stays above that level.

Mann said that won't happen probably for decades and could still be prevented.

Mother of cop who died after Jan. 6 urges 1/6 commission

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans are poised to block legislation that would create a commission on the Jan. 6 insurrection, despite both a bipartisan effort to salvage the bill and a last-minute push by the mother of a Capitol Police officer who collapsed and died after the siege.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has set up a Thursday procedural vote on the bill, challenging Republicans to support it after 35 of their GOP colleagues voted for it in the House. But it was unlikely that Democrats would be able to win the 10 Republican votes necessary to authorize the independent investigation, a remarkable turn of events just months after the worst attack on the Capitol in more than 200 years.

The bill as passed by the House would set up a bipartisan panel to investigate what happened when hundreds of former President Donald Trump's supporters violently broke into the Capitol and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden's win.

On Wednesday, the mother of Capitol Police officer Brian Sicknick said she would meet with lawmakers ahead of the vote to try to convince them to act. Sicknick collapsed immediately after engaging with the rioters and died the next day.

"I suggest that all Congressmen and Senators who are against this Bill visit my son's grave in Arlington National Cemetery and, while there, think about what their hurtful decisions will do to those officers who will be there for them going forward," Gladys Sicknick said in a statement Wednesday. "Putting politics aside, wouldn't they want to know the truth of what happened on January 6?"

A small number of Republicans, including Utah Sen. Mitt Romney and Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, have said they expect to back the House-passed bill. Others, including Maine Sen. Susan Collins, have proposed small tweaks to the bill to try and attract more votes. But the effort had so far failed to yield additional support.

The talks come as Republicans have struggled over whether to support the bill — and with how to respond to the insurrection in general as many in their party have remained loyal to Trump. The former president told his supporters the morning of Jan. 6 to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat and has repeatedly said the election was stolen, even though his claims have been refuted by courts and election officials across the country.

Most Republicans are expected to follow the lead of Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, who put the issue in stark political terms Tuesday after meeting with his caucus. McConnell said that Democrats pushing the commission would like to litigate Trump's actions and "continue to debate things that have been done in the past," and that they should move to block it. The action would mark the first time Republicans have blocked significant legislation since Democrats claimed control of the Senate in January.

Trump has come out against it, calling the bill a Democratic "trap." He urged his fellow Republicans to do the same.

McConnell voted in February to acquit Trump of inciting the insurrection after the House impeached him, but gave the speech immediately after that vote saying that the former president was "practically and morally responsible for provoking the events of that day." He said last week that he was "open" to the House bill that would form a commission, but came out the next day against it.

Collins has said she is working with other senators to try to find a compromise, and West Virginia Democrat Joe Manchin has been part of that effort, according to two people familiar with the informal talks. The people spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private negotiations.

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In a statement with Arizona Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, a fellow moderate Democrat, Manchin said that the attack was "horrific" and that the bipartisan commission is a "critical step."

Four of the rioters died during the insurrection, including a woman who was shot and killed by police as she tried to break into the House chamber with lawmakers still inside.

Dozens of the officers defending the Capitol were brutally beaten by the rioters as they easily pushed past them and broke into the building, and Sicknick died the next day. Video shows two men spraying him and another officer with a chemical, but the Washington medical examiner said Sicknick suffered a stroke and died from natural causes. The men have been charged with assaulting the officers.

Collins' amendment, released by her office Wednesday afternoon, would require the Democratic-appointed chair and the Republican vice chair to "jointly appoint" staff, changing House language that only required the chair to consult with the vice chair. It would also terminate the commission 30 days after a final report is issued, instead of 60 days, an effort to avoid their work spilling into the election year. Both the House version and Collins' amendment would require the final report to be issued by Dec. 31, 2021.

"I want to see a commission, we need a commission, there are a lot of unanswered questions," Collins said Wednesday. "I am working very hard to secure Republican votes."

Still, most Republicans have held fast to their opposition. North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis said that he had received text of the proposal from Collins, but that he was still "unlikely" to support the the bill. He said he believes the year-end deadline is unrealistic.

Republicans have also pointed to a bipartisan Senate report that is expected to be released next month, saying it will be sufficient to fix security problems in the Capitol. The report by the Senate Rules Committee and the Senate Homeland and Governmental Affairs Committee is expected to focus on the mistakes made by law enforcement and the security command at the Capitol.

Senate Homeland Chair Gary Peters, D-Mich., said that his panel's report will be important but that it was intended to identify ways to quickly secure the Capitol. There is more work to do, he said.

A commission "would be able to do a deeper dive into what led up to the attack on the Capitol, and be able to really spend the kind of time necessary to do a very thorough evaluation," Peters said.

It's so far unclear whether Schumer would be open to considering amendments to the legislation, if the Senate were to move ahead. He has repeatedly said that the procedural vote will show "where every member stands" on the insurrection and indicated that Democrats will use Republicans' positions against them.

Congress "is not going to just sweep Jan. 6 under the rug," Schumer said.

Century after massacre, Black Tulsans struggle for a voice

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — In the early days of Oklahoma's statehood, an angry white mob fanned by rumors of a Black uprising burned a thriving African American community in the oil boomtown of Tulsa. Although the area was quietly rebuilt and enjoyed a renaissance in the years after the 1921 Race Massacre, the struggle among Black people over their place in the city didn't end.

This month, local and state leaders will formally recognize and atone for the massacre, which claimed up to several hundred lives, with a series of ceremonies that includes a keynote address by national voting rights advocate Stacey Abrams. President Joe Biden is also coming to the city, the White House announced. But Black Tulsans say that, amid the kind words, efforts both direct and subtle still aim to curb their influence and withhold their fair share of power.

OKLAHOMA HISTORY

Before statehood in 1907, Oklahoma was home to Native American tribes pushed out of other regions by white expansion. Then the government decided to open up this land, too, and it became attractive to former slaves who were fleeing persecution in the South. It was also home to Black people who had been brought to the territory by slave-holding tribes.

Some African Americans participated in the land runs in the late 1800s. They included E.P. McCabe, the leader of a movement who hoped to make Oklahoma a majority-Black state free from white oppression.

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"(McCabe) actually recruited Black people to come to Oklahoma on the theory that Oklahoma was the new promised land for these folks," said Oklahoma historian Hannibal Johnson, author of several books about Oklahoma's Black history. "Oklahoma didn't really live up to its billing, obviously."

Instead, white settlers, many from surrounding Confederate states, poured into the territory, bringing with them views of Black people as inferiors who had to be kept in check. After Oklahoma became a state, the first law approved was a Jim Crow statute requiring segregation of rail cars and depots.

"Oklahoma, in many ways although arguably not a Southern state in terms of racial policy, began to mimic the Deep South," Johnson said.

THE TULSA RACE MASSACRE

In the 1920s, during the so-called Harlem Renaissance when African Americans were migrating from the South, Tulsa had a Black community of close to 10,000 people on the north side of the Frisco railroad tracks. The city was flush with money from the booming oilfields, and Black residents held jobs as hotel porters, car mechanics, laborers and domestic workers. The Greenwood district, known as Black Wall Street, was the wealthiest Black community in the United States, with its own stores, restaurants and other Black-owned businesses.

On May 31, 1921, carloads of Black residents, some of them armed, rushed to the sheriff's office downtown to confront white men who were gathering apparently to abduct and lynch a Black prisoner in the jail. Gunfire broke out, and over the next 24 hours, a white mob inflamed by rumors of a Black insurrection stormed the Greenwood district and burned it, destroying all 35 square blocks. Estimates of those killed ranged from 50 to 300.

THE BLACK COMMUNITY NOW

A hundred years later, African Americans still live on the city's north side and account for about 16% of Tulsa's population of 400,000, or double the proportion found in Oklahoma overall. The median income of Black households is \$25,979, about half that of white households in Tulsa County.

For decades after the massacre, doctors, ministers and lawyers, along with the faculty of Booker T. Washington High School and the publishers of the Oklahoma Eagle newspaper, provided leadership. But Black residents had little say in the city's government because Tulsa had at-large voting for its city commission. A Black person wasn't elected to the council until 1990, after a ward system was introduced.

Tulsa's Black community is now more politically engaged than it once was, according to community activists. In 2020, a 34-year-old Black man who came to Tulsa through the Teach for America program won the Democratic nomination in the race for Tulsa's congressional seat, and a 30-year-old Black community organizer finished second in the city's mayoral race.

The killings of two unarmed Black men by white Tulsa law enforcement officers in recent years energized some young Black voters, said Charles Wilkes, a 27-year-old community organizer.

In 2015, a white reserve sheriff's deputy shot and killed Eric Harris, 44, during an arrest. A year later, police officer, Betty Shelby fatally shot Terence Crutcher, who had his hands raised. Shelby said she thought he was reaching for a weapon.

"We've seen shootings time and time and time again," Wilkes said.

Tulsa's Black community has seen an influx of foundation and nonprofit funding, much of it for improving public schools and fighting poverty. In 2018, the city was dubbed tops in the nation for philanthropy by the readers of the Chronicle of Philanthropy, and Black community organizations have multiplied.

State Rep. Monroe Nichols, a Democrat from Tulsa, said the Black community must now focus on boosting voter turnout — Oklahoma overall had the lowest voter turnout in the nation in 2020.

"I think the interest is there," he said. "I just think the engagement isn't there yet."

CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION

Oklahoma's leadership, overwhelmingly white and conservative, is no longer in denial about the race massacre, which for decades received only brief mention in state history books.

State and local officials have supported the observance of the anniversary. A new multimedia museum has been embraced as a step toward recognizing the lessons of the incident. Republican U.S. Sen. James Lankford is a member of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission.

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But atonement for the past hasn't meant an end to hostile moves in the present, Black community members say. They cite Oklahoma Republicans' support for national GOP efforts to limit voting opportunities, and especially Lankford's plan to challenge the certification of the 2020 presidential election over ballots cast in cities with large Black populations.

Lankford backed off those plans after insurrectionists stormed the U.S. Capitol and later issued an apology to Black Tulsans.

"I can assure you, my intent to give a voice to Oklahomans who had questions was never also an intent to diminish the voice of any Black American," he said.

Oklahoma's Gov. Kevin Stitt also was a member of the commission, but was removed after he signed a bill to prohibit the teaching of certain concepts of race and racism in public schools.

Meanwhile, the GOP-dominated Legislature has responded to Black Lives Matter protests over social injustice by cracking down on protesters. One new law makes blocking a street a misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail. The measure also provides legal immunity in some cases to motorists who run into demonstrators on the road.

"If rioters are surrounding someone's car, threatening that person, they have a right to protect their family," said Stitt, who was criticized on Twitter by Martin Luther King Jr.'s daughter for signing the measure.

Oklahoma's voting laws are also among the most restrictive in the nation, with only 3 1/2 days of early in-person voting. Mailed-in absentee ballots must be notarized, which Nichols said can be particularly difficult for people with low incomes.

Though wielding less political clout than Black people in Old South states with large Black populations, African Americans in Oklahoma are showing more potential as they combine with higher educated white voters to elect more Democrats in the big cities. Tulsa and Oklahoma City are now increasingly Democratic, with seven African American legislators.

But the Legislature's conservative Republican leadership keeps this group on the margins. Seventy-two of the 81 bills introduced by Black legislators this year never received a committee hearing, according to an Associated Press analysis. Only two made it to the governor's desk.

"There's just not respect for the Black experience or Black voices," Nichols said.

House Majority Floor Leader Rep. Jon Echols, a Republican, said Black members may be deflected because they're pushing more liberal bills in a conservative Legislature.

"It's not a function of race," he said.

AP-NORC poll: More Americans believe anti-Asian hate rising

By TERRY TANG and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A majority of Americans across racial and ethnic groups believe discrimination has worsened in the last year against Asian Americans, who became the target of attacks after being unfairly blamed for the coronavirus pandemic.

A poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds 60% of Americans say discrimination against Asian Americans has swelled compared with a year ago, including 71% of Asian Americans, 66% of Black Americans, 59% of white Americans and 55% of Hispanic Americans.

Nearly half of Americans believe Asian Americans encounter "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of discrimination in the U.S. today. The poll also finds about 6 in 10 Americans say racism in the U.S. in general is a "very" or "extremely" serious problem. And a majority of Asian Americans say they feel unsafe in public because of their race.

Susan Lee, of Sacramento, California, said friends initiated conversations with her about racism as random attacks on Asians became more frequent, but the 72-year-old Chinese American noted a key difference between friends who were Asian and non-Asian.

"My non-Asian friends are probably more astonished that this is occurring," Lee said. "I think Chinese or 'Asians' have always been looked at as a positive asset. I think they are puzzled by that situation."

Barbara Canchola, 76, of El Paso, Texas, said she would have answered "not at all" if she had been asked

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pre-pandemic if Asian Americans face racism. Canchola, who identifies as Hispanic, said she associated anti-Asian discrimination as something way in the past like Japanese American internment camps during World War II.

"I really wouldn't think they are facing any kind of discrimination because I happen to think they're very well educated — most of them — and they don't face that much scrutiny," Canchola said. "However, ever since the pandemic began and it was labeled a 'China thing,' that's where it all began."

She attributes her new outlook to all the television coverage "where the people are being assaulted on the street out of the blue."

Renee Tajima-Pena, an Asian American Studies professor at the University of California, Los Angeles and co-producer of the PBS docuseries "Asian Americans," isn't surprised some people have never thought of Asian Americans as victims. The dominant narrative has always been they are successful, don't speak up and, therefore, encounter little racism.

"The model minority myth is such a drug for Americans," Tajima-Pena said.

Between March 2020 and this past March, more than 6,600 anti-Asian hate incidents have been documented by Stop AAPI Hate, a national reporting center. The encounters range from verbal harassment to attacks that ended fatally, including the March 16 Atlanta-area shootings that killed six Asian women.

The Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino, found that Asian-targeted hate crimes in the largest U.S. cities rose 145% in 2020 compared with 2019, even though hate crimes overall declined 6%. In the first quarter of this year, anti-Asian crimes reported to police in 16 major cities and counties jumped 164% from the same time period last year.

"That's why people understand now the violence Asian Americans face," Tajima-Pena said. "People couldn't avoid it in the press or the national conversation. People are gathering data and talking about it."

Fifty-seven percent of Asian Americans say they feel unsafe in public "often" or "sometimes" because of their race, similar to the share of Black Americans and higher than the share of Hispanic or white Americans. Because the survey was conducted in English and Spanish, it is representative of the English-speaking Asian American population but may not include those who primarily speak a language other than English.

Glendon Yuri-Sweetland, 34, of Brewer, Maine, blames former President Donald Trump for the increased discrimination against Asian Americans. Trump's constant referrals to COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" and other racist terms are still embedded in a lot of minds, he said.

"As my husband would say, 'It's only stirring the pot,'" Yuri-Sweetland said. "But I think that even just having that platform for a while, our former president probably has had enough exposure to get his message out."

Close to half of Americans are "very" or "extremely" concerned that incidents of violence targeting Asian Americans have increased because of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the poll, including about two-thirds of Asian Americans.

President Joe Biden last week signed the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act. The legislation will put a Justice Department official in charge of a review of anti-Asian hate crimes and will allot federal grants for law enforcement training and hate crime hotlines.

Tajima-Pena believes the visibility of Asian Americans outside of their communities has fundamentally changed in the past year and it isn't going to fade. And videos like the one showing the brutal beating of a Filipino American woman in New York City as three people stood by and watched have undoubtedly contributed to the greater awareness.

"I think the narrative is shifting," Tajima-Pena said. "It's like 2020 was really the year where our response was 'Stop AAPI hate'. ... The flip side of it is in 2021, people are really looking at solutions and solidarity."

Amazon to buy MGM, studio behind James Bond and 'Shark Tank'

By JOSEPH PISANI AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Online shopping giant Amazon is buying MGM, the movie and TV studio behind James Bond, "Legally Blonde" and "Shark Tank," with the hopes of filling its video streaming service with more

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stuff to watch.

Amazon is paying \$8.45 billion for MGM, making it the company's second-largest acquisition after it bought grocer Whole Foods for nearly \$14 billion in 2017.

The deal is the latest in the media industry that's aimed at boosting streaming services to compete against Netflix and Disney+. AT&T and Discovery announced last week that they would combine media companies, creating a powerhouse that includes HGTV, CNN, Food Network and HBO.

Amazon doesn't say how many people watch its Prime Video streaming service, but more than 200 million people have access to it because they pay for Prime membership, which gives them faster shipping and other perks.

Amazon said Wednesday that it would use MGM's vast library, which includes famous characters such as Rocky, RoboCop and Pink Panther, to create new movies and shows.

"It's going to be a lot of fun work," said Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, during the company's shareholder meeting on Wednesday. "People who love stories are going to be the big beneficiaries."

Sucharita Kodali, an e-commerce analyst at Forrester Research Inc., said streaming companies need shows people can't watch elsewhere in order to stand out and be competitive.

"There is an arms race to get what you can while the window is open," she said. Plus, the price tag is just a tiny fraction of Amazon's valuation, which is nearing \$2 trillion.

Known for its roaring lion logo, MGM is one of the oldest studios in Hollywood, founded in 1924 when films were still silent. But its shine has faded considerably over the years. In the mid-1980s, it sold much of its pre-1948 catalog, including "The Wizard of Oz" and "Gone with the Wind," which is now owned by Warner Bros. And its sprawling California lot was bought by Sony.

For much of the past decade, MGM juggled bankruptcy and a revolving door of owners while its new releases dwindled. Long up for sale, MGM's desirability was lessened, not just because of its partially auctioned-off library, but because its prized property — James Bond — isn't owned outright. MGM splits ownership of it with Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson, who have ultimate control over the franchise. The release of the latest James Bond entry, "No Time to Die," has been on hold through the pandemic, with a fall release now planned.

Its other upcoming movies include Paul Thomas Anderson's next film, "Soggy Bottom," starring Bradley Cooper; Ridley Scott's "House of Gucci," with Lady Gaga and Adam Driver; and the upcoming Aretha Franklin biopic "Respect," with Jennifer Hudson. Its library still includes more than 4,000 movies, including "Silence of the Lambs" and "Thelma & Louise," and 17,000 TV shows, such as reality TV staples "Shark Tank" and "The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills." Amazon will also get cable channel Epix out of the deal.

Amazon already has its own studio, but has had mixed results. Two of its shows, "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" and "Fleabag," won best comedy series Emmys. Although it has won several Oscars, including most recently for "Sound of Metal," many of its films have failed to click with audiences at the box office. Recently, Amazon has been spending on sports and splashy shows. It will stream "Thursday Night Football" next year and is producing a "Lord of the Rings" show, which reportedly cost \$450 million for its first season alone.

Seattle-based Amazon.com Inc. declined to say when it expects the deal to be finalized. But when it does, it will make Amazon, already one of the most powerful and valuable companies in the world, even bigger. Regulators around the world are scrutinizing Amazon's business practices, specifically the way it looks at information from businesses that sell goods on its site and uses it to create its own Amazon-branded products.

A report by the House Judiciary Committee in October called for a possible breakup of Amazon and others, making it harder for them to buy other businesses and imposing new rules to safeguard competition. And the deal came a day after the company was hit with an antitrust lawsuit by the District of Columbia, accusing Amazon of creating policies that makes its sellers unable to offer lower prices for their products outside of Amazon.com, pushing up prices for consumers.

On Wednesday, some lawmakers urged regulators to scrutinize the MGM deal closely.

"This is a major acquisition that has the potential to impact millions of consumers," said Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a Democrat from Minnesota. "The Department of Justice must conduct a thorough investigation to

ensure that this deal won't risk harming competition."

Rep. Ken Buck, a Republican from Colorado, said in a tweet that he is deeply concerned with the deal and that mergers and acquisitions involving monopolies need a greater level of scrutiny.

Amazon, founded in 1995 as an online bookstore, has become a \$1.6 trillion behemoth that does a little bit of everything. It has a delivery business network that gets orders to people in two days or sooner; sells inhalers and insulin; has a cloud-computing business that powers the apps of Netflix and McDonald's; and it has plans to send more than 3,200 satellites into space to beam internet service to Earth.

At least 2 Exxon board members lose seats in climate fight

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Exxon Mobil's shareholders have voted to replace at least two of the company's 12 board members with directors who are seen as better suited to fight climate change, bolster Exxon's finances and guide it through a transition to cleaner energy.

The results, which Exxon called preliminary, were announced by the company after its annual shareholder meeting Wednesday. Exxon said that because of the complexities of the voting process, inspectors might not be able to certify final voting results for "some period of time." It was unclear whether one additional board member was also unseated in the shareholder vote.

Regardless of the final tally, the outcome represents a setback for Exxon's leadership. It coincides with growing pressure on publicly traded companies to more urgently revamp their businesses to address what critics see as a intensifying global crisis.

On Wednesday, a Dutch court ordered Royal Dutch Shell to cut its carbon emissions by a net 45% by 2030 compared with 2019 levels in a landmark case brought by climate activism groups. The court ruled that the energy giant had a duty to reduce emissions and that its current reduction plans were insufficient.

The dissident slate of Exxon directors was proposed by a hedge fund called Engine No. 1, which asserted that the company's current board was ill-equipped to handle the transformations that are reshaping the energy sector.

The alternative directors put forward by the hedge fund were also backed by many of the nation's most powerful institutional investors. The vote reflected a broader push among consumers, investors and government leaders to pivot away from fossil fuels and invest in a future in which energy needs are increasingly met with renewable sources.

While the votes were being tallied, Exxon paused the shareholder meeting to allow people more time to vote. Anne Simpson, a managing director at the California Public Employees' Retirement System, known as CalPERS and one of the institutional investors that backed the alternative slate of directors, called that move "highly unusual."

Nevertheless, it was a "day of reckoning" for Exxon and for investors, Simpson said.

On the hot-button issue of climate change, she said, "investors are moving from talk to action, and it's also going to reverberate around board rooms internationally."

In addition to CalPERS, which is America's largest pension fund, other major institutional investors that joined the challenge to Exxon's leadership included the New York State Common Retirement Fund and the California State Teachers' Retirement System, known as CalSTRS.

"It's a historic vote that represents a tipping point for companies that are unprepared for the global energy transition," said Aeisha Mastagni, a portfolio manager at CalSTRS.

The investors who backed the alternative group of board members had complained that compared with some other oil giants, Exxon has failed to commit itself sufficiently to cleaner energy, from wind, solar or other sources.

Companies sometimes work with dissident shareholders to accept suggested changes to boards. Exxon, though, had resisted the challenge. It argued that it was already committed to addressing the climate crisis, with plans to add new board members, including one with expertise in climate change. It has also highlighted its plan, still in the early stages, to use the Houston Ship Channel to capture and store carbon

dioxide offshore.

The company also said it was satisfied with its existing directors.

"Our current board of directors is among the strongest in the corporate world," said Darren Woods, chairman and CEO of Exxon, adding that the board provided exceptional guidance during a particularly tough period for the industry.

Among other problems, oil companies have struggled since the viral pandemic significantly reduced demand for fuel. Exxon lost \$22 billion in 2020 and reported its largest-ever losses in the fourth quarter.

During Wednesday's shareholder meeting, Charlie Penner, head of active engagement for Engine No. 1, asserted that "no matter the outcome of today's vote, this is a board that needs to look in the mirror."

The two candidates whom Exxon said shareholders elected from the Engine No. 1 slate were Gregory Goff, a former CEO of Andeavor, a petroleum refining and marketing company formerly known as Tesoro; and Kaisa Hietala, a former executive vice president of renewable products at Neste. In that position, Hietala was credited with boosting the company's renewable diesel and jet fuel offerings.

Exxon said it had not yet determined whether a third dissident board candidate put forward by Engine No. 1, Alexander Karsner, had also been elected. Karsner, a senior strategist at X, Alphabet Inc.'s innovation lab, has been an investor in energy infrastructure and clean-technology startups.

In addition to choosing the two dissident board members, shareholders elected eight current members of Exxon's board. Just who would fill the remaining two seats on the board was too close to call, Exxon said. Vying for those two seats were four people nominated by Exxon and one who was nominated by Engine No. 1.

Exxon did not say when the final results would be released.

Across the economy, climate-related initiatives are gaining momentum in corporate board rooms. At least 25 climate-related shareholder proposals made it onto shareholder ballots this year. Those that had been voted on before the Exxon vote received support from 59% of shareholders on average, according to Institutional Shareholder Services.

That is up substantially from 2015, when Glass Lewis, a firm that advises institutional investors, reviewed 14 shareholder proposals that sought additional disclosures on climate-related issues, such as the financial risks posed by a changing climate or by climate-related regulations. None of them succeeded.

In 2017, there were 21 such shareholder proposals that went to a vote; three received over 50% approval, Glass Lewis said.

New wolf killing laws trigger push to revive US protections

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Wildlife advocates pressed the Biden administration on Wednesday to revive federal protections for gray wolves across the Northern Rockies after Republican lawmakers in Idaho and Montana made it much easier to kill the predators.

The Center for Biological Diversity, Humane Society and Sierra Club filed a legal petition asking Interior Secretary Deb Haaland to use her emergency authority to return thousands of wolves in the region to protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Republican lawmakers pushed through legislation in recent weeks that would allow hunters and trappers to kill unlimited numbers of wolves in Idaho and Montana using aggressive tactics such as shooting them from ATVs and helicopters, hunting with night-vision scopes and setting lethal snares that some consider inhumane. Idaho's law also allows the state to hire private contractors to kill wolves.

Wolves in the region lost federal endangered protections in 2011 under an act of Congress after the species had rebounded from widespread extermination last century.

Hundreds of wolves are now killed annually by hunters and trappers in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. Yet the population remains strong — more than 3,000 animals, according to wildlife officials — because the wolves breed so successfully and can roam huge areas of wild land in the sparsely populated Northern Rockies.

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The new laws had been opposed by some former wildlife officials and reflect an increasingly partisan approach to predator management in state houses that are dominated by Republicans. Supporters of restoring protections say the changes will tip the scales and drive down wolf numbers to unsustainable levels, while also threatening packs in nearby states that have interconnected populations.

They argue the changes violated the terms that allowed state management of wolves, and want Haaland to act before the looser hunting rules start going into effect in Idaho on July 1.

"The (U.S. Fish and Wildlife) Service was very clear that a change in state law that allowed for unregulated, unlimited take of wolves would set off the alarm," said attorney Nicholas Arrivo with the Humane Society of the United States. "This is essentially an attempt to push the population down to the very minimum."

Wednesday's petition seeks to restore protections across all or portions of at least six states — Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, eastern Washington, eastern Oregon and a small area of northern Utah. It steps up pressure on the administration over wolf populations that were declared recovered when President Joe Biden served as vice president under former President Barack Obama.

Biden also inherited a legal fight in the Midwest over the Trump administration's removal of protections for wolves in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan.

In both regions, hunting groups and livestock producers successfully lobbied for more permissive hunting regulations to counter persistent wolf attacks on livestock and big game animals.

Idaho lawmakers who sponsored a law signed earlier this month by Republican Gov. Brad Little said they wanted to reduce the state's 1,500 wolves to the allowed minimum of 150 to protect livestock and boost deer and elk herds.

In Montana, Republican Gov. Greg Gianforte — who received a warning this year for trapping a wolf without taking a required certification class in violation of state rules — signed a law last month requiring wolf numbers to be reduced, although not below 15 breeding pairs of the animals.

"It wasn't to reduce them to zero, it was to reduce them to a sustainable level," said Greg Lemon with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. "We've got the track record and the statutory framework to ensure they are managed to that sustainable level."

Montana U.S. Sen. Jon Tester, who offered the 2011 legislation that put wolves under state control, declined to comment directly on the new laws but said science needs to drive decisions on wolves.

"It is up to state officials in Montana to continue to ensure that population numbers remain adequate so wolves don't get relisted," the Democratic lawmaker said in a statement.

In Idaho, hunting rules already had been incrementally loosened over the past decade without causing a huge spike in the number of wolves killed, said Idaho Fish and Game spokesperson Roger Phillips. Hunters and trappers killed about 500 wolves in the state in 2020.

Idaho officials will be able to closely track how many are killed under the new rules through a mandatory reporting system. However, if problems emerge, any changes would have to be made by lawmakers after they took away wolf management decisions from state wildlife commissioners, Phillips said.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has long contended it's not necessary for wolves to be in every place they once inhabited to be considered recovered. Spokesperson Vanessa Kauffman would not say if federal officials were looking at the new laws. The agency has 90 days to decide if protections may be warranted, but has not always met deadlines with previous petitions.

Wolves were wiped out across most of the U.S. by the 1930s under government-sponsored poisoning and trapping campaigns. They were reintroduced from Canada into the Northern Rockies in the 1990s and expanded over the past two decades into parts of Oregon, Washington and California.

The population in the Midwest has grown to some 4,400 wolves. In Colorado, voters last year passed a measure requiring the state to begin reintroducing wolves in coming years.

San Francisco area deaths add to US mass shootings in 2021

Eight people are dead after an employee opened fire at a San Francisco Bay Area transit agency early Wednesday in San Jose, California. The attacker was identified as 57-year-old Sam Cassidy, according to

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two law enforcement officials, and the district attorney said Cassidy also killed himself. Authorities were also at a San Jose home owned by Cassidy where firefighters responded to a blaze around the same time as the shooting.

The bloodshed comes in a year that has seen a sharp increase in mass killings as the nation emerges from pandemic restrictions that closed many public places and kept people confined to their homes.

A database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University that tracks every mass killing over the last 15 years shows that San Jose is the 15th mass killing so far in 2021, all of them shootings. Eighty-six people have died in the shootings, compared with 106 for all of 2020. The database defines mass killings as four or more people dead, not including the shooter, meaning the overall toll of gun violence is much higher when adding in smaller incidents.

Here are a few recent mass shootings.

ATLANTA

Eight people were killed by a gunman at three Atlanta-area massage businesses in attacks that began the evening of March 16. Seven of the slain were women, and six were of Asian descent. Police charged a 21-year-old white man with the killings. There was deep skepticism over the shooter's claim his motive was sex addiction. There was public clamoring for hate crime charges, especially among the Asian American community, which has faced rising numbers of attacks since the coronavirus pandemic took hold.

BOULDER, COLORADO

About a week later, on March 22, a shooter at a supermarket in Boulder, Colorado, killed 10 people, including a police officer who was the first to respond to the scene. The suspect bought a firearm at a local gun store after passing a background check. Investigators are working to determine the motive for the shooting and why the suspect chose the King Soopers grocery store.

ORANGE, CALIFORNIA

On March 31, a gunman killed four people and critically wounded a fifth at a Southern California office building. He knew all the victims. Apparently before opening fire, he chained shut the gates to two entrances, delaying police from getting inside. Among the victims was a 9-year-old boy who was found cradled in the arms of a woman believed to be his mother. The woman was the only survivor among those shot. The others killed were a man and two women.

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA

A week later, on April 7, former NFL player Phillip Adams shot six people. Robert Lesslie, a prominent doctor, was killed along with his wife, two of their grandchildren and two air conditioning technicians who were working at their home. Adams also killed himself. His brain is now being examined for possible degenerative disease that has been shown to cause violent mood swings and other cognitive disorders in some athletes and members of the military.

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

On April 15, eight people were shot and killed at a FedEx facility by a former employee, Brandon Scott Hole, 19, of Indianapolis, who fired randomly before dying by suicide. Four of the victims were members of Indianapolis' Sikh community, and the deaths were another blow to the Asian American community. Agents with the FBI's Indianapolis field office questioned Hole last year after his mother called police to say that her son might commit "suicide by cop."

Howard names College of Fine Arts for Chadwick Boseman

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — While studying at Howard University, young Chadwick Boseman helped lead a student protest against plans to merge his beloved College of Fine Arts into the College of Arts and Sciences.

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He failed in that goal, but 20 years later, the acclaimed actor is being posthumously honored as the namesake of Howard's newly re-established Chadwick A. Boseman College of Fine Arts.

Boseman, who graduated in 2000 with a bachelor's degree in directing, died in August at 43 of colon cancer. He rose to prominence playing a succession of Black icons in biographical films: Jackie Robinson, singer James Brown and Thurgood Marshall.

The South Carolina native's portrayal of African superhero Black Panther spawned a thousand memes and its cultural impact launched him to broader stardom. At the time of his death, Boseman's character was poised to become an anchor of the Marvel Comics movie machine, with multiple sequels planned.

Howard University President Wayne Frederick said he and Boseman discussed ways of reviving the College of Fine Arts multiple times.

"It was always important to him," Frederick told The Associated Press. "His commitment was very strong."

The announcement comes a few weeks after fellow Howard alum Phylicia Rashad was announced as the fine arts college's new dean. Boseman and Rashad met during his undergrad years, and Boseman publicly cited her as a mentor.

Boseman declared his love for the school in a 2018 commencement speech, praising, "the magic of this place. Almost anything can happen here."

Boseman's family said his student protest proved his passion for his alma mater.

"Chad fought to preserve the College of Fine Arts during his matriculation at Howard and remained dedicated to the fight throughout his career, and he would be overjoyed by this development," the Boseman family said in a statement.

Boseman's widow, Simone Ledward-Boseman, called him "a very proud Bison" and said the naming of the school "brings this part of his story full-circle and ensures that his legacy will continue to inspire young storytellers for years to come."

Howard Fine Arts alumni include actors Taraji P. Henson, Oscar-nominated cinematographer Bradford Young, and singers Roberta Flack and Jessye Norman, as well as Rashad and her sister, Kennedy Center Honors recipient Debbie Allen.

GM's newest vehicle: Off-road, self-driving rover for moon

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — General Motors is teaming up with Lockheed Martin to produce the ultimate off-road, self-driving, electric vehicles — for the moon.

The project announced Wednesday is still in the early stages and has yet to score any NASA money. But the goal is to design light yet rugged vehicles that will travel farther and faster than the lunar rovers that carried NASA's Apollo astronauts in the early 1970s, the companies said.

"Mobility is really going to open up the moon for us," said Kirk Shireman, a former NASA manager who is now Lockheed Martin's vice president for lunar exploration.

The rovers used by the Apollo 15, 16 and 17 moonwalkers ventured no more than 4 1/2 miles (7.6 kilometers) from their landers. GM also helped design those vehicles.

NASA last year put out a call for industry ideas on lunar rovers. The space agency aims to return astronauts to the moon by 2024, a deadline set by the previous White House.

Their initial rovers will be designed to carry two astronauts at a time, according to company officials. A brief company video showed a large, open rover speeding over lunar slopes, with more headlights in the distance.

This is "just a glimpse of how we see the opportunity playing out," said Jeff Ryder, a vice president for GM Defense.

By operating autonomously when needed, Shireman noted, the rovers can keep astronauts safely away from dangerous spots like the permanently shadowed craters at the moon's South Pole. Frozen water gathered from these dark corners could be used for drinking, growing plants and creating rocket fuel.

Autonomy could also improve efficiency, with astronauts focused on collecting rocks as a rover follows

behind like a puppy, he said.

In a separate venture begun two years ago, Toyota partnered with the Japanese Space Agency to build a pressurized electric-powered lunar rover for astronauts. They're calling it the Lunar Cruiser.

GM and Lockheed Martin's vehicle will be unpressurized, meaning that riders will need to wear spacesuits at all times. There's room for both models, according to Shireman.

Defiant Belarus leader slams EU sanctions on plane diversion

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Belarus' authoritarian president lashed out Wednesday at Europe for trying to "strangle" his country with sanctions over the diversion of a passenger jet, and he accused a dissident journalist arrested after the flight landed in Minsk of working to foment a "bloody rebellion."

In a long, rambling speech to lawmakers and top officials, President Alexander Lukashenko defended his decision to tell the Ryanair flight to land in his country, maintaining his contention that there was a bomb threat against it. He called it an "absolute lie" that a fighter jet he scrambled forced the plane to land.

European Union leaders have denounced the move as an act of air piracy. Ryanair has said its crew was instructed to land. The plane was searched on the ground, and no bomb was found — but Raman Pratasevich, a 26-year-old journalist and activist, and his Russian girlfriend were detained.

"I acted in a lawful way, protecting people in line with international rules," said the 66-year-old Lukashenko, who has ruled the ex-Soviet nation with an iron fist for more than a quarter century, relentlessly stifling dissent.

He fumed at the EU, accusing the West of waging what he said was "no longer just an information war but a modern hybrid war" against his country of 9.3 million.

Lukashenko doubled down on the idea that there was a grave security risk, saying the plane was not far away from the Astravets nuclear power plant and that he had ordered air defense systems to high alert.

"We acted in strict accordance with aviation safety rules," he said, claiming the crew hesitated for about a quarter hour before following the Belarusian flight controllers' directions to land in Minsk. "It's the captain who makes a decision according to all instructions and rules, and we offered our help. The captain was thinking for 15 minutes and consulting the bosses and Vilnius airport staff."

He said the crew hesitated for so long that Belarusian authorities no longer expected the crew to turn back to Minsk, since the plane was already near the Lithuanian border, but they did. The Belarusian MiG-29 was sent to help direct the Ryanair plane to land and facilitate communication in case of problems.

"They should have been thankful to us!" Lukashenko exclaimed. "We did everything to save people."

But he also alleged that Pratasevich and his associates were working with foreign spy agencies to "organize a massacre and a bloody rebellion in Belarus."

He also warned his other foes abroad that the authorities will go after them.

"We know your faces, and it's just a matter of time for you to be brought to account before the Belarusian people," he said.

Lukashenko has faced unprecedented pressure at home with months of protests following his reelection to a sixth term in an August 2020 vote that the opposition rejects as rigged. But he has only increased the crackdown, and more than 35,000 people have been arrested since the protests began, with thousands beaten.

Pratasevich, who left Belarus in 2019, has become a top foe of Lukashenko. He ran a popular messaging app that had a key role in helping organize the huge protests.

In Poland, Pratasevich's parents said they fear for his welfare and made an emotional plea for assistance.

"World, please stand up and help. I urge you very much because they will kill him, they will kill him!" Natalia Pratasevich said through tears in an interview in Warsaw.

Her son appeared in a video broadcast on Belarusian state TV on Monday in which he confessed to some of the charges against him.

Natalia Pratasevich said her son's nose appeared to be broken and he seemed to be wearing makeup to

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cover facial bruises. The journalist's father, Dmitry Pratasevich, said his son must have been forced to make the confession.

Ivan Tertel, head of the Belarusian state security agency that still goes under its Soviet-era acronym KGB, said Pratasevich told investigators about "the sponsors of subversive activities against Belarus, its mechanisms and special services and politicians behind it" and promised to release details soon.

Pratasevich, who fled to Lithuania in 2019, was charged in absentia with staging mass riots and fanning social hatred. Those carry a prison sentence of up to 15 years, and some fear he could face more serious charges, including some that carry the death penalty.

In response to Pratasevich's arrest and the diversion of the flight, which was traveling between two EU countries, European leaders agreed to ban Belarusian airlines from using the airspace and airports of the 27-nation bloc. They urged European airlines to avoid Belarus airspace. They agreed to draft more sanctions on officials linked to the diversion and ones targeting businesses provide income for Lukashenko's government.

"Our ill-wishers outside and inside the country have changed their methods of attacking the state," he said. "That's why they switched from organizing riots to trying to strangle us."

He said Western sanctions are driven by "their envy, helplessness and anger that they have failed to carry out an armed rebellion and a coup in Belarus."

Lukashenko said Belarus "is in the center of Europe, and if something flares up here, it could trigger another world war."

"We will respond firmly to any sanctions, attacks and provocations. Not because we want to provoke a fight in the center of the continent. We don't want it, we have had enough of it, but because you in the West are giving us no other choice," he said.

He promised to retaliate by loosening border controls against Western-bound illegal migration and drug trafficking.

"We were stopping migrants and drugs — now you will catch them and eat them yourself," he said.

Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko said the country could halt Western cargo shipments via Belarus.

"Our measures would be quite painful for the countries that have taken an openly hostile stance — from import bans to restrictions on transit," he said. "Still, we hope that those who rush to pass the point of no return to sober up and think twice before entering a slippery path of economic war in which there will be no winners."

Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei also said Belarus could opt out of the EU's Eastern Partnership in view of the new sanctions. The program is part of EU efforts to help Belarus and other ex-Soviet nations distance themselves from Moscow's influence and integrate into the West.

AP FACT CHECK: House GOP falsely blames Biden for gas prices

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER and HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Heading into the Memorial Day travel weekend, House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy and other members of his party are falsely blaming President Joe Biden for higher gasoline and lumber costs.

Gas prices have risen in recent weeks because a key pipeline was forced to close after a cyberattack on the Colonial Pipeline. And lumber shortages — which existed during former President Donald Trump's administration — were worsened by an unexpected housing boom.

Shortages have bedeviled the economy this spring, but most economists attribute the bulk of them to the difficulties of restarting the U.S. and global economies.

A look at the claims and reality:

MCCARTHY: "Gas prices are the highest since 2014 — just as summer starts. The recent hack of the Colonial Pipeline exposed the flaws of Biden's approach to our country's energy policies. On day one he signed an executive order cancelling the Keystone XL Pipeline." — blog post Monday.

REP. LIZ CHENEY, R-Wyoming: "From cancelling the Keystone Pipeline to banning new oil & gas leas-

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ing on federal lands, Biden's energy policies are having devastating consequences. We've already seen a glimpse of this devastation with prices skyrocketing & gas shortages hitting communities across the country." — tweet Friday.

THE FACTS: Biden's action on the Keystone XL pipeline has nothing to do with the recent spike in gasoline prices. The pipeline handles crude oil, running from Canada to Texas through the Midwest, not gasoline, which had shortages on the East Coast after the Colonial Pipeline hack.

Biden's order on his first day in office rescinded the construction permit for an extension to the main Keystone pipeline, which is still operating and runs about 2,687 miles (4,324 km) from Alberta to Illinois and Texas.

An expanded 1,210-mile (1,947-km) pipeline was planned to allow the system to carry up to 800,000 barrels of crude oil a day, passing through Montana, South Dakota and Nebraska.

But shortages of crude oil haven't been a factor.

Noteworthy is that while gas prices are at their highest level in six years, oil prices are still slightly below where they were in 2018. That suggests oil supplies are adequate and the refining and distribution of gasoline — through such networks as the Colonial Pipeline — are the problem.

MCCARTHY: "Despite gas prices being at historic lows this time last year, the average price for a gallon of gas is currently an astounding \$3.10. That's the highest it's been since 2014, the last time Joe Biden was in the White House." — blog post on Monday.

REPUBLICANS on the HOUSE BUDGET COMMITTEE: "Biden's policies have led to the highest gas prices in six years." — tweet Tuesday.

THE FACTS: Biden's policies aren't behind the price increases. Gas prices are up because of a rapid and unexpected bounce-back in demand, and because of lingering problems from the forced shutdown early this month of the Colonial Pipeline, which provides 45% of the fuel consumed on the East Coast.

McCarthy's comparison to a year ago is also misleading. Gasoline prices didn't fall at the time because of the Trump administration, as Trump often claims; they plunged because of the coronavirus forcing people to abandon their offices, schools, business trips and vacations. Underscoring the connection to the pandemic shutdown, U.S. gas prices were at their lowest in April 2020 when people were staying home most but have mostly risen since then, according to U.S. Energy Information Administration, even when Trump was still in office.

In recent weeks, the biggest factor has been the cyberattack on the Colonial Pipeline. Even though it has been back in operation for nearly two weeks, many states, mostly in the South, still haven't fully recovered.

Roughly one-quarter of gas stations in North and South Carolina and Georgia are without gas, according to GasBuddy.com, which tracks gas prices nationwide. In Florida, 9% of stations have run out and in Tennessee, it's 14%. Overall, more than 6,000 stations have run out, Gas Buddy's Patrick DeHaan says.

Prices have also increased because the economy has reopened much more quickly than most analysts expected. Stimulus payments to American households, including \$1,400 checks that were distributed in March, have helped Americans ramp up spending.

RONNA MCDANIEL, head of the Republican National Committee: "... Lumber prices have increased 400%. We have real problems ... (House Speaker Nancy) Pelosi will do anything not to talk about the Biden failures." — tweet May 20.

THE FACTS: She's also wrong to link rising lumber prices to Biden "failures." This spike as well is related to rising demand and a sharp economic rebound.

At the start of the pandemic in March 2020, sawmills actually cut their output of lumber, anticipating that sales of new homes would slow, according to economists at TD Bank. Instead, Americans — and families in other countries — sought more room during the quarantine and bought new homes or sought to renovate. That pushed up demand for lumber, even as supply was reduced, sending lumber prices higher.

The National Association of Homebuilders has pointed to insufficient domestic production dating back to Trump for the increases.

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"When prices began their historic rise in August 2020, NAHB reached out extensively to the Trump administration, members of Congress and to lumber mills calling for prompt action to address supply shortages that were harming small businesses, home builders and ultimately, the overall economy" and is continuing to do so under the Biden administration, according to the group's website.

Some of the price gains in lumber and other commodities reflect strong consumer demand for goods like housing and cars, which is actually a good sign for the economy. Most officials at the Federal Reserve, the agency charged with keeping inflation in check, have repeatedly said that inflation will tick up as the country reopens, but the increases will likely be temporary, as supply bottlenecks are worked out.

The long-delayed Tony Awards finally have a date — Sept. 26

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The long-delayed Tony Awards have been given a fall air date and a four-hour streaming canvas to celebrate the pandemic-shortened Broadway season that upended the theater world.

Producers of the telecast announced Wednesday that the Tonys will be held Sept. 26 and will air on CBS as well as Paramount+. As if making up for lost time, the usual three-hour event has added a fourth hour.

This year, the award show will start at 7 p.m. ET/4 p.m. PT on Paramount+ exclusively, then two hours later continue on CBS with a live concert event "featuring superstar Broadway entertainers and Tony Award winners re-uniting on stage to perform beloved classics and celebrate the joy and magic of live theater." Capping the evening will be the awarding of the three top awards: best play, best play revival and best musical.

"There is nothing that compares to the magic of live theater — and we are thrilled to be able to share its celebratory return and the incredible talent and artistry of the abbreviated 2019-2020 season with theater fans everywhere," said a statement from said Charlotte St. Martin, president of The Broadway League, and Heather Hitchens, president and CEO of the American Theatre Wing.

There was no word on whether there would be a host.

The news was met with excitement from theater fans but with grumbles that the bulk of the awards — the acting, directing and technical ones — would only be accessible to Paramount+ customers. The plan is similar to that employed by the Grammys — the bulk of those awards are streamed in a pre-show event — although that is accessible for free.

Broadway theaters abruptly closed on March 12, 2020, knocking out all shows — including 16 that were still scheduled to open in the spring. Broadway shows have been given the green-light to restart and the first will be "Hadestown" on Sept. 2.

Organizers are looking for a Broadway theater to be the base for the in-person event. But presumably, the Sept. 26 date for the Tonys means that the nominated shows can be ready to perform on the telecast from their respective home theaters to cut down on overcrowding.

This season's nominations were pulled from just 18 eligible plays and musicals, a fraction of the 34 shows the season before. During most years, there are 26 competitive categories; this year there are 25 with several depleted ones.

The sobering musical "Jagged Little Pill," which plumbs Alanis Morissette's 1995 breakthrough album to tell a story of an American family spiraling out of control, has the most nominations with 15.

There are three best musical nominees: "Jagged Little Pill," "Moulin Rouge: The Musical" and "Tina — The Tina Turner Musical." And there are five best play nominees: "Grand Horizons," "The Inheritance," "Sea Wall/A Life," "Slave Play" and "The Sound Inside."

Nipping on the heels of "Jagged Little Pill" for overall numbers of nominations is "Moulin Rouge!," a jukebox adaptation of Baz Luhrmann's hyperactive 2001 movie about the goings-on in a turn-of-the-century Parisian nightclub, that got 14 nods.

Two very different offerings are tied with 12: "Tina — The Tina Turner Musical," which tells the rock icon's life with songs that include "Let's Stay Together" and "Proud Mary," and "Slave Play," Jeremy O. Harris' ground-breaking, bracing work that mixes race, sex, taboo desires and class. The dozen nods make "Slave

Play" the most nominated play in Tony history.

Divided US Catholic bishops will debate Communion policy

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops plans to devote part of its national meeting next month to the sensitive issue of which Catholics are worthy of receiving Communion, despite calls for a delay.

Dozens of bishops had requested the USCCB president, Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez, postpone the debate until a later meeting, when they could meet in person rather than virtually. But prompt action is being sought by some conservative bishops who want to signal that President Joe Biden and other Catholic politicians who support abortion rights should not receive Communion.

The conservatives are now heartened, as Gomez confirmed in a memo Saturday that the topic is on the agenda of the June meeting. A vote is scheduled on whether the conference's Committee on Doctrine should draft a document addressing the Communion issue and present it at a later date.

An explanation of the agenda item makes clear that one of the subtopics will be the receiving of Communion by cultural and political leaders.

Denver Archbishop Samuel Aquila, one of the conservatives engaged in the discussions, issued a statement Tuesday praising Gomez and saying he "followed the correct procedures to facilitate this critical discussion as a body of bishops."

Aquila referred to a May 7 letter to Gomez from the head of the Vatican's doctrine office, Cardinal Luis Ladaria, urging the U.S. bishops to deliberate carefully and minimize divisions before proceeding with any action on the Communion issue.

"It was clear from it that the USCCB's plan to discuss and debate this important issue is warranted and encouraged," Aquila said. "In contrast, the publication of the letter calling for a halt to discussion at our June meeting on this vital issue risks creating an atmosphere of factionalism, rather than unity amongst the bishops."

The bishops who requested a delay did not release their letter publicly or issue statements about it. According to The Pillar, an online news outlet covering the Catholic Church, the signatories included Cardinals Blase Cupich of Chicago and Wilton Gregory of Washington, the latter of whom has made clear that Biden is welcome to receive Communion at his archdiocese's churches.

But in a recent essay, Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego made a case against the campaign to deny Biden and others Communion.

"It will bring tremendously destructive consequences," McElroy wrote. "The Eucharist is being weaponized and deployed as a tool in political warfare. This must not happen."

San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, one of the conservatives, criticized the request to delay the debate.

"I'm deeply grieved by the rising public acrimony among bishops and the adoption of behind-closed-doors maneuvers to interfere with the accepted, normal, agreed-upon procedures of the USCCB," Cordileone said in a statement. "Those who do not want to issue a document on Eucharistic coherence should be open to debating the question objectively and fairly with their brother bishops, rather than attempting to derail the process."

Cordileone thanked Gomez "for his integrity in assuring that the procedures of our bishop's conference are followed" and said he looked forward to "serene dialogue" about Communion policies at the June meeting.

Aquila, in his statement, suggested that Catholics endanger their souls if they receive Communion "in an unworthy manner."

"As bishops, we are failing in our duty as shepherds if we ignore this truth and how it is manifesting itself in today's society, especially with regards to those in prominent positions who reject fundamental teachings of the Church and insist that they be allowed to receive Communion," Aquila said.

Cardinal Ladaria's letter to Gomez in May made several points that could affect how the USCCB handles the issue:

— He said any new statement should not be limited to Catholic political leaders but broadened to en-

compass all churchgoing Catholics regarding their worthiness to receive Communion.

— He questioned the USCCB policy identifying abortion as “the preeminent” moral issue, saying it would be misleading if any new document “were to give the impression that abortion and euthanasia alone constitute the only grave matters of Catholic moral and social teaching that demand the fullest accountability on the part of Catholics.”

— He said that if the U.S. bishops pursue a new policy, they should confer with bishops’ conferences in other countries “both to learn from one another and to preserve unity in the universal church.”

Court orders Royal Dutch Shell to cut net emissions by 45%

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A Dutch court on Wednesday ordered Royal Dutch Shell to cut its carbon emissions by net 45% by 2030 compared to 2019 levels in a landmark case brought by climate activism groups, which hailed the decision as a victory for the planet.

The Hague District Court ruled that the Anglo-Dutch energy giant has a duty of care to reduce emissions and that its current reduction plans were not concrete enough.

The decision could set a precedent for similar cases against polluting multinationals around the world. Activists gathered outside the courtroom erupted into cheers as the decision was read out loud.

“The climate won today,” said Roger Cox, a lawyer for the Dutch arm of Friends of the Earth, which was one of the organizations behind the case.

“This ruling will change the world. Worldwide, people are in the starting blocks to take legal action against oil companies following our example,” Cox added.

The Hague court did not say how Royal Dutch Shell should achieve the ordered cutback, saying the energy giant’s parent company “has complete freedom in how it meets its reduction obligation and in shaping the Shell group’s corporate policy.”

In a written reaction, Shell said it expects to appeal the “disappointing court decision.”

The company said it is already “investing billions of dollars in low-carbon energy, including electric vehicle charging, hydrogen, renewables and biofuels. We want to grow demand for these products and scale up our new energy businesses even more quickly.”

At a hearing in December, Shell lawyer Dennis Horeman said a ruling against the company could create a situation “in which countless parties can hold each other accountable for their role in that (energy) transition through the courts” and give judges “a central role in an active and delicate political process.”

Shell says it has set “an ambition to be a net-zero emissions energy business by 2050, or sooner.”

The court said in an English language summary of its ruling that Shell was not currently in breach of its obligation to reduce emissions, as the environmental groups had argued, because the parent company was tightening its emissions policy.

But it ruled that Shell’s policy “is not concrete, has many caveats and is based on monitoring social developments rather than the company’s own responsibility for achieving a CO2 reduction.”

“Therefore, the court has ordered RDS to reduce the emissions of the Shell group, its suppliers and its customers by net 45%, as compared to 2019 levels, by the end of 2030, through the corporate policy of the Shell group.”

A group of seven environmental and human rights organizations and some 17,000 Dutch citizens filed the case in 2018, calling on the court to order Shell to cut emissions in line with the global goals set out in the Paris climate agreement. That equates to Shell cutting emissions 45% by 2030.

The court ruled on the claims by six of the groups.

The case in the Netherlands is the latest in a string of legal challenges filed around the world by climate activists seeking action to rein in emissions, but it is believed to be the first targeting a multinational company.

One of the first successful climate cases also was in the Netherlands, where the Supreme Court two years ago upheld a 2015 ruling requiring the government to cut emissions at least 25% by the end of

2020 from benchmark 1990 levels.

In February, a Paris court ruled that the French government had failed to take sufficient action to fight climate change in a case brought by four nongovernmental organizations. Last month, Germany's top court said the federal government must set clear goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions after 2030.

Donald Pols, director of Friends of the Earth Netherlands, called the ruling in The Hague, "a monumental victory for our planet, for our children and a big leap towards a livable future for everyone."

AP Interview: Michigan official warns of democracy threats

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and DAVID EGGERT Associated Press

LANSING, Michigan (AP) — Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson serves as the chief election official in Michigan, working alongside nearly 1,700 local officials who administer elections in the battleground state. In 2020, Benson was at the center of efforts to ensure a safe and secure election amid the COVID-19 outbreak. It also was the first major election in Michigan since voters approved a constitutional amendment in 2018 allowing no-excuse absentee voting. The number of absentee ballots jumped — from 1.2 million during the 2016 presidential election to 3.2 million in November 2020.

The Associated Press interviewed Benson, a Democrat and election law expert, about combatting disinformation surrounding the 2020 election, preparations for the 2024 presidential election and efforts by Republicans in Michigan and elsewhere to enact new limits on voting. Republicans argue new limits are needed, particularly on mail voting, to increase security and confidence in elections, although no widespread fraud was identified last year. Michigan's governor, a Democrat, is likely to veto any voting restriction passed by the GOP-controlled Legislature, but the state has a unique process that could allow voting bills to become law if enough citizens petition for it and the Legislature passes it.

The interview, held May 20, has been condensed.

AP: How do you combat the disinformation still surrounding the 2020 election?

BENSON: We have to recognize that we've got to work from the same set of facts. And those facts have to be based in evidence and truth, not in political agendas and in partisan efforts. Everyone who sees and knows the truth needs to call on every leader to tell the truth and to continue to remind people what the evidence and the truth is. Secondly, those who refuse to tell the truth ... those leaders in particular who continue to propagate the 'big lie' and even codify legislation in furtherance of it, there needs to be accountability. And particularly, there needs to be accountability for the tragedy that we saw in our Capitol on Jan. 6.

AP: Across the country, we are seeing several GOP-controlled legislatures seeking to exert more control over election officials. How concerned are you that we could end up seeing more of these outside ballot reviews like in Arizona or even takeovers of local election offices?

BENSON: I'm deeply concerned about the future of our democracy and about all of the things that we're seeing and have seen on a near weekly basis emerge throughout our country, but particularly in states that were high profile in 2020 -- Michigan, Georgia, Arizona, Nevada -- to consistently propagate the 'big lie,' propagate this idea, this falsehood that the election was anything but safe and secure, to codify legislation in furtherance of that and really undo a lot of the policies that led to such enormous turnout and security in 2020. ... I feel very strongly that the battles that we saw around 2020's election ... was just the beginning of what is clearly turning out to be a multi-year, strategic, nationally coordinated, partisan assault on the vote in our country and on our democracy. And we will see another battle in the 2022 elections around that truth and around the security of the vote, around access to the vote. But it's also all going to culminate, I believe, in an effort to try again in 2024 what those democracy deniers attempted to do in 2020 but failed. And in 2024, the bad actors, I believe, will be more coordinated, more strategic, better funded and will have the benefit of doing this work for a number of years. I'm deeply concerned about the future health of our democracy.

AP: We had a historic turnout last year and now we're seeing Republican lawmakers in several states, including Michigan, pushing new voting limits. What is behind this and what are the biggest dangers if

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these bills become law?

BENSON: It's a reaction that's being framed as 'we're reacting and trying to address voter fraud,' but the policies actually aren't doing that. They're actually reacting to the historic level of voter turnout that we saw across the board, across the aisle, not just in Michigan, but across the country. And I know that simply just by looking at the data and the impact of these bills — not just in Michigan but in Georgia and Texas, in Florida, in Iowa, in Wyoming, in Montana, in Arizona — all of which have the net impact of making it harder for people to get ballots, making it harder for people to return their ballots and making it harder for election administrators to do their jobs and secure the process and ensure that every valid vote is counted.

AP: Michigan is unique in that it has a citizen process that could see these voting bills become law despite opposition from Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. How concerned are you about that and what plans do you have to push back against this effort?

BENSON: I find it very alarming that any lawmaker would use such an undemocratic way of enacting rules over democracy as to what has been contemplated very publicly by a major political party in our state. ... Any short-term gains that may be won by a very anti-democratic process, where 4% of the voting-age population can determine the rules of democracy for the other 96%, won't last. ... In this immediate moment, my focus is on making sure people are educated on the impact of these policies and what they would actually do.

AP: As someone who focused on domestic extremism while working earlier in your career with the Southern Poverty Law Center, what went through your mind on Jan. 6 and what can be done to prepare for the 2024 election?

BENSON: Initially, what went through my mind, was I think was what went through almost everyone's mind, which was just devastation and deep sadness and, of course, fear of what could happen. ... This is what happens when you allow the 'big lie' to get out of control. And these people are acting on a lie and they're acting on and responding to a lie that they've been told by elected officials who they trust. And it has to stop. We have to just start telling the truth. ... The immediate next steps really just involve truth and accountability, in my view. And ultimately, then reconciliation once we can get through those first two steps. And what worries me is that we're not talking about any of those things.

AP Investigation: Myanmar's junta using bodies to terrorize

By ROBIN McDOWELL and MARGIE MASON Associated Press

Two black pickups speed down an empty city street in Myanmar before coming to a sudden stop. Security forces standing in the back of the trucks begin firing at an oncoming motorbike carrying three young men.

The bike swerves, crashing into a gate. More shots are fired as two of the passengers run away, while the third, Kyaw Min Latt, remains on the ground. Moans are heard as officers grab the wounded 17-year-old from the pavement, throwing his limp body into a truck bed before driving off.

The incident lasted just over a minute and was captured on a CCTV camera. It is part of a growing trove of photos and videos shared on social media that's helping expose a brutal crackdown carried out by the junta since the military's Feb. 1 takeover of the Southeast Asian nation.

An analysis by The Associated Press and the Human Rights Center Investigations Lab at the University of California, Berkeley, looked at cases where bodies of those targeted indiscriminately by police and the military are being used as tools of terror. The findings are based on more than 2,000 tweets and online images, in addition to interviews with family members, witness accounts, and local media reports.

The AP and HRC Lab identified more than 130 instances where security forces appeared to be using corpses and the bodies of the wounded to create anxiety, uncertainty, and strike fear in the civilian population. Over two-thirds of those cases analyzed were confirmed or categorized as having moderate or high credibility, and often involved tracking down the original source of the content or interviewing observers.

Since the military takeover, more than 825 people have been killed — well over two times the government tally — according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a watchdog organization that

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monitors arrests and deaths. The junta did not respond to written questions submitted by AP.

The HRC Lab examined hours of footage posted online over a two-month period showing dead bodies being snatched off the streets and dragged like sacks of rice before being thrown into vehicles and driven to unknown destinations. Some people have been disappeared or arrested one day and returned dead the next, their corpses mutilated with signs of torture, witnesses confirmed to AP.

Autopsies have been carried out without the permission of families. And some death certificates blame heart attacks or falls after violent attacks, contradicting witness accounts and images captured by protesters, journalists, or residents, including some who have been stealthily recording incidents with mobile phones through windows or from rooftops.

Cremations and exhumations of the deceased have been secretly conducted in the middle of the night by authorities. Other times, grieving families have been forced to pay military hospitals to release their loved ones' remains, relatives and eyewitnesses told the AP.

Though the incidents may seem random and unprovoked — including kids being shot while playing outside their homes — they are actually deliberate and systematic with the goal of demobilizing people and wearing them down, said Nick Cheesman, a researcher at Australian National University, who specializes in the politics of law and policing in Myanmar.

"That," he said, "is exactly the characteristic of state terror."

Taking a page from the army's historical playbook, experts say the violence also appears aimed at keeping the death toll artificially low and concealing evidence. But unlike past violence, the attacks are being captured on smartphones and surveillance cameras in real-time and could one day be used against the regime before international criminal courts, as has happened elsewhere in the world.

"It has always been the military's strategy to hide the mass crackdown there, the mass killing of the protesters," said Van Tran, a Cornell University researcher who studied the bloody 1988 and 2007 uprisings in Myanmar. "There are always large-scale operations in order to either cremate the bodies of people that were shot down or ... bulldoze and bury those bodies. So a lot of the time, families do not know where their children went."

Almost a quarter of the recent cases with known locations analyzed by the HRC Lab involved injured people or dead bodies snatched by security forces in the country's biggest city, Yangon, followed by Mandalay and Bago.

The largest number of those incidents, documented through posts on social media, was reported on March 27. Celebrated annually as Armed Forces Day, it commemorates the start of the military's resistance to Japanese occupation during World War II after more than a century of British colonial rule.

This year protesters dubbed it "Anti-Fascist-Resistance Day," and came out in large numbers in a stand against the military takeover.

It was on that day that motorbike rider Kyaw Min Latt was shot, though his family told AP the young carpenter had not been to a demonstration but was instead heading home from the job site to grab an early lunch with two friends.

Using satellite visuals, reverse image searches, and a sun-shadow calculator, the HRC Lab was able to verify that the shooting took place at 10:38 a.m. in front of a high school on Azarni Road in the southern town of Dawei. In the footage, two shots are heard and Kyaw Min Latt, who was sitting between the driver and a fellow passenger, is seen grabbing his head and falling sideways. Officers chased after the two other riders with guns raised. Another bang is then heard.

Sixteen minutes later, a passerby posted a picture on Facebook of blood-soaked concrete and flip flops near the white motorbike that security forces had carefully propped back up before taking Kyaw Min Latt's body.

Within two hours, the CCTV footage was also being shared widely across social media platforms.

That's how the teen's father received the news. He told AP he later learned his son had been taken to a military hospital. He rushed there to see him that afternoon and said the teen was still alive, but unconscious.

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"He was badly wounded," Soe Soe Latt said. "He opened his eyes when we were at the hospital, but could not say any words."

The boy died soon after, and his father said army doctors wanted to perform an autopsy. The family fought against it, but said the hospital would only release the body if they signed a paper saying their son died of head injuries from falling off the motorbike.

A photo published online before Kyaw Min Latt's funeral by Dawei Watch, a local news outlet, told a different story: There was a gaping wound in the teen's neck.

Myanmar has a long, tumultuous history of coups, military control, and ethnic conflicts.

A junta seized power in 1962, ending 14 years of civilian rule. That began five decades of censorship, mass arrests, disappearances, and dark isolation, resulting in harsh international sanctions that placed it roughly on par with North Korea.

Then in 2011, the country became the darling of the Obama administration and other Western governments when it started moving toward quasi-civilian rule and implementing political reforms as part of its long-promised "roadmap to democracy."

But, despite the newfound freedoms and political reforms in the past decade — from the first ATMs and KFC restaurants to high-speed Internet and smartphones — the military never really relinquished control.

A quarter of the seats in parliament were reserved for those in uniform, and the armed forces held onto key ministries. Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, now chairman of the junta's State Administrative Council, also had the power to impose a state of emergency if he felt national security was at risk.

But after the party headed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi won a landslide election last November, the military, known as the Tatmadaw, cried voter fraud. That triggered the February takeover and an emergency declaration, transferring all power to the top commander, on the morning the new parliament was set to begin.

Suu Kyi — who earlier supported security forces during their violent crackdown on ethnic Rohingya Muslims — and other leaders of her National League for Democracy party were put under house arrest. Hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life poured into the streets nationwide in protest.

Soon after, other NLD members were hauled in for questioning. Some of them would never return alive. Party officials said that family members were prohibited from collecting the body of one man who died at an interrogation center. Two other NLD members were returned as corpses to relatives the next day, drawing a sharp rebuke from the U.S. State Department.

Photos and videos posted on social media from several locations, and analyzed by the HRC Lab, show they appear to have been tortured, with the skin partially peeled from one man's face. Another had dried blood on his head and bruises covering his body.

"Just tell people he had a heart attack and died," a man who attended the cleaning of one victim's body told AP, recalling what doctors told family members.

Despite the attacks on NLD members, the anti-military demonstrations continued. Ordinary citizens soon found themselves targets of soldiers and police.

This month, relatives of one man in Bago Region's Pyay Township said security forces arrived at their home with guns drawn.

After beating 33-year-old Aung Khaing Myit, his sister told AP they took him away for questioning about his suspected involvement in a bomb blast. She said the officers swore nothing would happen to him, but he was heard screaming in a nearby room before falling silent.

The next day, the family was taken to a military hospital. They were told Aung Khaing Myit died while trying to jump out of a transport vehicle and that he was already placed inside a coffin. His sister said they were allowed to look at his bruised face, but not his entire body, and then authorities took him away for cremation over their objections.

"We knew they beat him to death," she said. "But they tried to lie to us."

And even if bodies are returned to families, it doesn't mean they will be buried and left to rest in peace.

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Nineteen-year-old Kyal Sin, better known as Angel, became a high-profile case after being shot in the head March 3 during a protest in Mandalay, galvanizing supporters to wear T-shirts and banners bearing her image. Thousands, outraged by her death, gathered for her funeral the next day.

But later that night, the flowers were removed from her grave and MRTV state television said her body had been exhumed by authorities so an official autopsy could be carried out, exonerating the police. All that remained at the site afterward was a bloody latex glove and other strewn debris.

Authorities later released a death certificate saying the bullet that killed her didn't match the caliber used by police, and that it came from the wrong direction for security forces to be responsible.

Shootings by soldiers and police were the reason Ye Yint Naing's mother had forbidden him to join a protest in northern Shan State. But that didn't stop the 15-year-old — he simply skipped breakfast that morning and snuck out while she was busy washing clothes in the back of the house.

He quickly met up with friends and headed to the rally, but an hour later tensions began to explode. After activists set a car on fire, Myanmar security forces responded by shooting into the crowd.

Ye Yint Naing was hit and fell to the ground. As he lay bleeding and calling for help, his friends watched paralyzed for two hours, unable to reach him because they feared they would be shot by a sniper standing watch, his brother told AP.

When the gunfire finally stopped, Ye Yint Naing's motionless body was loaded into an ambulance and driven away. Social media posts provided the first clues for family members about what happened to him.

A picture posted on Facebook by a sympathetic worker at a local cemetery showed them where the body was ultimately taken. Once there, Ye Yint Naing was cremated — which goes against Muslim burial customs — following an order by police.

"They actually wanted to hide the dead body," his brother said, adding he was able to get a bag with ashes and bits of bone to bury. "I have to say, 'Thank you,' to the person who cremated the body and took the photo. If not, it would have been hard for our family to find my younger brother because we would not know where he was taken."

Other secret cremations were confirmed in a mountainous trading town in the same state. Military trucks carrying soldiers and police rumbled into Aungban to stamp out a protest early on March 19th, firing off tear gas and bullets that left at least eight people dead, a witness told the AP.

Images from the scene posted on social media, showed one bloodied body lying next to a curb, and video captured men dressed in black uniforms kicking debris and randomly shooting their guns.

Security forces brought most of the corpses to the local cemetery that night and days later. They broke locks on the crematorium and used car tires to burn several bodies, witnesses said, until "all that remained was ash."

Terrified that their loved ones will not receive proper burials, some family members have started hiding bodies, racing to get them buried before security forces can claim them.

That was the case with 13-year-old Htoo Myat Win. He was hit in the chest by a stray bullet while sitting inside his home in the central town of Shwebo, Sagaing Region.

Video posted online showed security forces shooting while walking through the street, and a neighbor who witnessed the boy's death confirmed to AP that they were "spraying bullets" at houses.

Authorities came to ask the family for the boy's body, but they refused to hand it over and instead hid it at a local temple, the neighbor said, declining to give his name fearing retribution. "They cremated him the next day."

Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said there is a clear legal procedure in place when people die. Families are informed and autopsies are carried out.

"We never hide this number," he said at a press conference earlier this month.

However, the military has put the total killed nationwide at about 300, stressing that nearly 50 police have also died in the violence. Earlier, state-run TV called the more widely used figures from AAPP "fake" news, even though the highly regarded Thailand-based monitoring group often includes the victims'

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names, ages and photographs. It also details how and where they died as part of its tally, helping bolster the credibility of those numbers.

Ko Bo Kyi, the group's co-founder, noted the junta also claimed hundreds — instead of thousands — died during some of the country's biggest pro-democracy protests in 1988. He added that, just as in the past, their goal now is to maintain a climate of fear and uncertainty that immobilizes people and breaks their will.

"They believe if they kill, torture, and arrest the protesters, they can stop the demonstrations," he said.

But access to technology and social media since the recent military takeover could eventually be used to help build an international criminal case against the junta, while also making it difficult for foreign donors and developed nations to turn a blind eye to what could one day be classified as crimes against humanity.

"It's a whole new ballgame in terms of evidence in a way that will make prosecution possible many years from now if need be," said Richard Dicker, International Justice director at the nonprofit Human Rights Watch, noting that video footage from smartphones has also been used in other uprisings and conflicts, including crimes committed in Syria. "That wouldn't have been viable (in the past) because the evidence would have disappeared."

Still, despite the fact that security forces are aware their actions are being filmed, posted online, and seen around the world, they have continued their attacks on civilians unabated. Dicker said authoritarian governments have long silenced their opponents.

Normally, he added, these kinds of atrocities occur at night in the shadows. "What's new is that it is taking place on the streets and in public view."

Major Japan newspaper Asahi calls for Olympic cancellation

By STEPHEN WADE and KANTARO KOMIYA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's Asahi Shimbun newspaper on Wednesday called for the Tokyo Olympics to be canceled with the games set to open in less than two months.

It is the first of Japan's major newspapers to make the move and joins some regional newspapers that have recently added to the growing opposition to holding the Olympics.

Coming out against the Olympics could be significant since the newspaper, like many in Japan, is a sponsor of the postponed Tokyo Games that are scheduled to open on July 23. Asahi is typically liberal-leaning and often opposes the ruling party led by Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.

"We cannot think it's rational to host the Olympics in the city this summer," the newspaper said in its editorial under a headline that read: "We Demand PM Suga Decide Cancellation."

"Distrust and backlash against the reckless national government, Tokyo government and stakeholders in the Olympics are nothing but escalating," the editorial added. "We demand Prime Minister Suga to calmly evaluate the circumstances and decide the cancellation of the summer event."

Asahi has a morning circulation reported at 5.16 million, and 1.55 million for its evening edition. It is second in circulation behind Yomiuri Shimbun, and subsequently is the second largest circulating newspaper in the world behind Yomiuri.

Despite the editorial, there is no indication the International Olympic Committee or local organizers have any plans to pull the plug on the games. But opposition is mounting with only a tiny percentage of Japanese people now vaccinated.

Tokyo organizing committee CEO Toshiro Muto said Wednesday he was aware of the editorial, but offered little response.

Asahi is one of about 70 local Olympic sponsors that have chipped in almost \$3.5 billion to the organizing committee budget. It is also one of a half dozen newspapers that are sponsors.

"Of course, different press organizations have different views. And that's very natural," Muto said, adding local partners, or sponsors, continued to offer "support."

Senior IOC member Richard Pound said in an interview with Japan's Jiji Press last week 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.

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The British Medical Journal called last month for a hard look at going forward with the Olympics. Local medical officials have also been skeptical, and billionaire businessman Masayoshi Son suggested over the weekend that the IOC was forcing the Olympics on Japan.

"Right now, more than 80% of the nation's people want the Olympics postponed or canceled," said Son, the founder and CEO of SoftBank Group Corp. who also owns the SoftBank Hawks baseball team.

"Who is forcing this to go ahead, and under what rights?" Son added.

Asahi also criticized the IOC, calling it "self-righteous" and also lambasted IOC vice president John Coates. Last week, Coates was asked if the Olympics would be held if a state of emergency were in force.

"Absolutely, yes," he replied.

The newspaper said there was a "huge gap" between Coates' words and the sentiments "of the people."

"Despite its overgrown size and excessive commercialism and many other problems, the Olympics have been supported because of empathy for its ideals. ... But what is the reality now?" Asahi asked.

On Tuesday, the Japanese government said a warning by the United States to avoid travel to Japan would have no impact on holding the Olympics.

Japan has officially spent \$15.4 billion to organize the Olympics, and government audits suggest it might be much larger. The IOC gets billions from selling broadcast rights, which amounts to about 75% of its income.

Public opinion polls in Japan show between 60-80% want the Olympics canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and an online petition asking the games be canceled has gained 400,000 signatures in a few weeks.

Tokyo, Osaka and other regions of the country are under a state of emergency that is likely to be extended past its May 31 expiration.

Organizers and the IOC, often citing the authority of the World Health Organization, say the games can be held safely with 15,000 Olympic and Paralympic athletes entering Japan, joined by tens of thousands of judges, officials, sponsors, broadcasters and media.

Fans from abroad have already been banned, and organizers are to announce next month if any fans at all will be allowed into Olympic venues.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, May 27, the 147th day of 2021. There are 218 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 27, 1941, the British Royal Navy sank the German battleship Bismarck off France with a loss of some 2,000 lives, three days after the Bismarck sank the HMS Hood with the loss of more than 1,400 lives. Amid rising world tensions, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed an "unlimited national emergency" during a radio address from the White House.

On this date:

In 1861, Chief Justice Roger Taney, sitting as a federal circuit court judge in Baltimore, ruled that President Abraham Lincoln lacked the authority to suspend the writ of habeas corpus (Lincoln disregarded the ruling).

In 1896, 255 people were killed when a tornado struck St. Louis, Missouri, and East St. Louis, Illinois.

In 1933, the Chicago World's Fair, celebrating "A Century of Progress," officially opened. Walt Disney's Academy Award-winning animated short "The Three Little Pigs" was first released.

In 1935, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States*, unanimously struck down the National Industrial Recovery Act, a key component of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" legislative program.

In 1937, the newly completed Golden Gate Bridge connecting San Francisco and Marin County, California, was opened to pedestrian traffic (vehicles began crossing the next day).

In 1942, Doris "Dorie" Miller, a cook aboard the USS West Virginia, became the first African-American to

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receive the Navy Cross for displaying "extraordinary courage and disregard for his own personal safety" during Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.

In 1964, independent India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, died.

In 1968, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *United States v. O'Brien*, upheld the conviction of David O'Brien for destroying his draft card outside a Boston courthouse, ruling that the act was not protected by freedom of speech.

In 1993, five people were killed in a bombing at the Uffizi museum of art in Florence, Italy; some three dozen paintings were ruined or damaged.

In 1994, Nobel Prize-winning author Alexander Solzhenitsyn returned to Russia to the emotional cheers of thousands after spending two decades in exile.

In 1998, Michael Fortier (FOR'-tee-ur), the government's star witness in the Oklahoma City bombing case, was sentenced to 12 years in prison after apologizing for not warning anyone about the deadly plot. (Fortier was freed in January 2006.)

In 2018, LeBron James reached his eighth straight NBA Finals as the Cleveland Cavaliers beat the Boston Celtics 87-79 in Game 7 of the semifinals.

Ten years ago: Astronauts Mike Fincke and Gregory Chamitoff made history as the final spacewalkers of NASA's 30-year shuttle program, completing construction of the International Space Station with the smooth addition of an extension pole. President Barack Obama, visiting Poland, honored the memories of those slain in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising against Nazis. Gil Scott-Heron, 62, widely considered one of the godfathers of rap music, died in New York. Actor Jeff Conaway died at a hospital in Encino, California; he was 60.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama became the first American chief executive to visit Hiroshima, the city where the U.S. dropped the first atomic bomb during World War II, declaring it a fitting place to summon people everywhere to embrace the vision of a world without nuclear weapons.

One year ago: Protests over the death of George Floyd in police custody rocked Minneapolis for a second night, with some people looting stores and setting fires. Protests spread to additional cities; hundreds of people blocked a Los Angeles freeway and shattered windows of California Highway Patrol cruisers. The U.S. surged past a milestone in the coronavirus pandemic, with the confirmed death toll topping 100,000. For the first time, House lawmakers voted by proxy, a move aimed at avoiding the risks of travel to Washington during the pandemic. Boeing said it would cut more than 12,000 U.S. jobs through layoffs and buyouts as it dealt with a downturn in travel caused by the pandemic; at the same time, the company said it was resuming production of the 737 Max jetliner. Playwright and AIDS activist Larry Kramer died of pneumonia at 84.

Today's Birthdays: Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is 98. Author John Barth is 91. Actor Lee Meriwether is 86. Musician Ramsey Lewis is 86. Actor Louis Gossett Jr. is 85. R&B singer Raymond Sanders (The Persuasions) is 82. Actor Bruce Weitz is 78. Former Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) is 77. Singer Bruce Cockburn (KOH'-burn) is 76. South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster is 74. Singer-actor Dee Dee Bridgewater is 71. Actor Richard Schiff is 66. Singer Siouxsie Sioux (The Creatures, Siouxsie and the Banshees) is 64. Rock singer-musician Neil Finn (The Finn Brothers) is 63. Actor Peri Gilpin is 60. Actor Cathy Silvers is 60. Comedian Adam Carolla is 57. Actor Todd Bridges is 56. Rock musician Sean Kinney (Alice In Chains) is 55. Actor Dondré Whitfield is 52. Actor Paul Bettany is 50. Rock singer-musician Brian Desveaux (Nine Days) is 50. Country singer Jace Everett is 49. Actor Jack McBrayer is 48. Rapper Andre 3000 (Outkast) is 46. Rapper Jadakiss is 46. TV chef Jamie Oliver is 46. Alt-country singer-songwriter Shane Nicholson is 45. Actor Ben Feldman is 41. Actor Michael Steger is 41. Actor Darin Brooks is 37. Actor-singer Chris Colfer is 31. Actor Ethan Dampf is 27. Actor Desiree Ross (TV: "Greenleaf") is 22.