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“THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE AND OTHERS IS HOW LONG THEY SPEND TIME FEELING SORRY FOR THEMSELVES.”

-BARBARA CORCORAN

Chicken Soup
for the Soul

Service Notice: Victor Zweber

Memorial Services for Victor Zweber, 86, of Aberdeen will be 11:00 a.m., Saturday, June 12th at Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Pastor Diane Hoines will officiate. Inurnment will take place at Homer Cemetery, Pierpont.

Visitation will be held at the funeral chapel on Friday from 5-7 p.m.

Vic passed away June 4, 2021 at his home in Aberdeen.



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

Thoughts from Kaitlin O'Neill, Miss South Dakota 2021

What gave you the idea to pursue this dream and the ups and downs of the journey?

Six years ago I competed in my first local pageant after a friend convinced me to give it a try. After my first year at state, I caught the bug and never looked back! It was not always a flat road, but I always took something away from the valleys and that really aided in my triumphs at the top! As I grew and reflected more on myself, I further developed my SII (Social Impact Initiative) which really motivated me to truly make a difference. My SII is titled "Healthy Mind, Healthy Body, Healthy You" and is all about helping people who struggle with mental, physical, or emotional health find a healthy balance between those and grow as an individual. This platform is extremely personal to me as I have struggled with mental health personally and I want to be that support system that I felt like I didn't have when I was going through my hard times.

What was going through your mind when you won Thursday night, Friday night, and when they called your name Saturday?

Each night of prelims, there is a prelim winner for talent and on-stage question. Winning talent has been one of my biggest goals (besides taking the title) ever since I started competing 6 years ago. I worked extra hard this year trying to create a talent that could really be a top talent contender! I felt pretty good about my performance Thursday night, but I wasn't sure what the judges would think especially compared to the other talents. It is really like comparing apples and oranges when you put a dancer up against a vocalist or instrumentalist. It really comes down to preference. When I was announced as the Top Talent Winner, I was ecstatic! I just knew my hard work had finally paid off!

When I was announced as the top score for On-Stage Question on Friday night, I was mind blown! I never in a million years would have expected to win that award as it is one of my biggest insecurities. I did put in a ton of work, but I never thought I would get to that level!

Going into finals on Saturday, I knew I would do well but there is never a guarantee that a double prelim winner will take home the title. In preparation for that night and as the competition went on, I made sure to stay focused as I did not want to lose the momentum! After all the competition was over and they were announcing other awards before the crowning, they awarded me with the top Private Interview Award! Again, I never would have imagined that my name would ever be called in relation to that award! At that moment I had a strong feeling I had made it, but it wasn't until the end when they officially said my name that I could breathe again!

This whole experience was just amazing! Over the years, I have grown so much and am so grateful for the experiences and opportunities the Miss South Dakota Organization has presented me. I strongly encourage all girls from 13-25 to consider going out for Miss SD or Miss SDOT (Outstanding Teen) as you will truly see amazing growth!

Yours truly,
Miss South Dakota 2021, Kaitlin O'Neill

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Groton Jr Legion Grabs Lead In Fourth Inning To Defeat Claremont

Groton Jr Legion stole the lead late in the game in a 9-8 victory over Claremont on Monday. Groton Jr Legion trailed 7-6 in the bottom of the fourth inning when Jesse K induced Logan R to hit into a fielder's choice, but two runs scored.

Claremont scored five runs in the third inning, but Groton Jr Legion still managed to pull out the victory. Ben G, Will C, and Cole B all drove in runs in the frame.

Groton Jr Legion captured the lead in the first inning. Logan was hit by a pitch, driving in a run.

In the top of the third inning, Claremont tied things up at five when Will singled on the first pitch of the at bat, scoring one run.

After Claremont scored one run in the top of the second, Groton Jr Legion answered with one of their own. Claremont scored when Cole drew a walk, scoring one run. Groton Jr Legion then answered when Colby D singled on a 2-1 count, scoring one run.

Colby led things off on the mound for Groton Jr Legion. The bulldog lasted two innings, allowing zero hits and four runs while striking out four.

Dawson V was on the pitcher's mound for Claremont. The hurler surrendered nine runs on three hits over three innings, striking out three. Jesse threw one inning in relief.

Tate L, Jordan B, Colby, and Kaleb A each collected one hit to lead Groton Jr Legion.

Claremont stole seven bases during the game as two players stole more than one. Ben led the way with four.

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The painting of the new water tower commenced Monday. The painting started in the afternoon on the east side, in the shade, as the sunny side was too hot for painting. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Guthmiller at State A Golf Meet

The State A Girls Golf Meet is being played at the Spearfish Canyon Country Club, Spearfish. Groton Area's Carly Guthmiller is in 50th place after the first day of the meet. She shot a 56 in the front nine and a 53 in the back nine for a total score of 109. The meet concludes today.

Photos by Joel Guthmiller



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 ***

CDC COVID-19 Study Shows mRNA Vaccines Reduce Risk of Infection by 91 Percent for Fully Vaccinated People

Vaccination Makes Illness Milder, Shorter for the Few Vaccinated People Who Do Get COVID-19

A new CDC study finds the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines authorized by the Food and Drug Administration (Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna) reduce the risk of infection by 91 percent for fully vaccinated people. This adds to the growing body of real-world evidence of their effectiveness. Importantly, this study also is among the first to show that mRNA vaccination benefits people who get COVID-19 despite being fully vaccinated (14 or more days after dose 2) or partially vaccinated (14 or more days after dose 1 to 13 days after dose 2).

"COVID-19 vaccines are a critical tool in overcoming this pandemic," said CDC Director Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH. "Findings from the extended timeframe of this study add to accumulating evidence that mRNA COVID-19 vaccines are effective and should prevent most infections — but that fully vaccinated people who still get COVID-19 are likely to have milder, shorter illness and appear to be less likely to spread the virus to others. These benefits are another important reason to get vaccinated."

The findings come from four weeks of additional data collected in CDC's HEROES-RECOVER study of health care workers, first responders, frontline workers, and other essential workers. These groups are more likely to be exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 because of their occupations. Preliminary results from this study were first announced in March 2021.

In the new analysis, 3,975 participants completed weekly SARS-CoV-2 testing for 17 consecutive weeks (from December 13, 2020, to April 10, 2021) in eight U.S. locations. Participants self-collected nasal swabs that were laboratory tested for SARS-CoV-2, which is the virus that causes COVID-19. If the tests came back positive, the specimens were further tested to determine the amount of detectable virus in the nose (i.e., viral load) and the number of days that participants tested positive (i.e., viral shedding). Participants were followed over time and the data were analyzed according to vaccination status. To evaluate vaccine benefits, the study investigators accounted for the circulation of SARS-CoV-2 viruses in the area and how consistently participants used personal protective equipment (PPE) at work and in the community. Once fully vaccinated, participants' risk of infection was reduced by 91 percent. After partial vaccination, participants' risk of infection was reduced by 81 percent. These estimates included symptomatic and asymptomatic infections.

To determine whether COVID-19 illness was milder, study participants who became infected with SARS-CoV-2 were combined into a single group and compared to unvaccinated, infected participants. Several findings indicated that those who became infected after being fully or partially vaccinated were more likely to have a milder and shorter illness compared to those who were unvaccinated. For example, fully or partially vaccinated people who developed COVID-19 spent on average six fewer total days sick and two fewer days sick in bed. They also had about a 60 percent lower risk of developing symptoms, like fever or chills, compared to those who were unvaccinated. Some study participants infected with SARS-CoV-2 did not develop symptoms.

Other study findings suggest that fully or partially vaccinated people who got COVID-19 might be less likely to spread the virus to others. For example, fully or partially vaccinated study participants had 40 percent less detectable virus in their nose (i.e., a lower viral load), and the virus was detected for six fewer days (i.e., viral shedding) compared to those who were unvaccinated when infected. In addition, people who were partially or fully vaccinated were 66 percent less likely to test positive for SARS-CoV-2 infection for more than one week compared to those who were unvaccinated. While these indicators are not a direct measure of a person's ability to spread the virus, they have been correlated with the reduced spread of other viruses, such as varicella and influenza.

Overall, the study findings support CDC's recommendation to get fully vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as you can. Everyone 12 years and older is now eligible to get a COVID-19 vaccination in the United States. CDC has several surveillance networks that will continue to assess how FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccines are working in real-world conditions in different settings and in different groups of people, such as different age groups and people with different health statuses.

Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Dominique Clare

We hit the midpoint of OTAs this past week. At this point of the offseason, we have now had a chance to check out the rookies, free agent signings, and most returning players. To get you ready for the 2021 season, we'll break down the Vikings' roster position by position. The Minnesota Vikings' roster will look quite a bit different than it did last season. The Vikings have had a very busy offseason. They are still not done yet as they just agreed to terms with cornerback Bashaud Breeland, who most recently played with the Kansas City Chiefs.

This week, we continue our roster breakdown with the running backs.

Dalvin Cook – Many would say that Dalvin Cook is the best player on the Minnesota Vikings. He has been a top running back in the NFL the last two seasons having his name mentioned in NFL MVP talks several times. The Vikings offense revolves around Cook and for good reason.

Entering his 5th season, Cook is coming off the best season of his career. Last year he ran for 1557 yards from scrimmage reaching the end zone 16 times. He also had 361 receiving yards on 44 receptions. He has appeared in two straight Pro Bowls but was snubbed of being an All-Pro in 2020. Looking ahead to this upcoming season, expect the Vikings to continue to lean on Dalvin Cook. Offensive Coordinator Klint Kubiak will keep the same scheme his father Gary Kubiak used last season with a few news twists. .

Alexander Mattison – Alexander Mattison is an amazing change of pace to Dalvin Cook. He has a more physical running style that hurts defenses in a different way when Cook is off the field. The last two seasons Mattison reached just under 500 yards. With improved offensive line play, he should be able to surpass 500 yards for the first time in his career.

As long as he doesn't miss giant holes like he did against the Seattle Seahawks that ultimately lost the Vikings the game, Mattison is a great second running back.

Ameer Abdullah – Third string running backs don't get a lot of action usually. Many of them make their mark on special teams. That is where Ameer Abdullah comes in. He is a solid reserve running back who excels on special teams. He is good in the return game and plays a role on just about every special team until. Abdullah has solidified his spot unless a new face can beat him at his own game.

Kene Nwangwu – Much like Abdullah, Kene Nwangwu has an opportunity to be a backup running back and a special teams force for the Vikings. He is one that fans should be rooting for because he ran a 4.29 second 40-yard dash at his pro day. You simply can teach that kind of speed. He could be a weapon in the return game.

CJ Ham – You can't talk about the running back position for Vikings without mentioning CJ Ham. While Ham's actual running opportunities are limited, he is a major part of the success of Dalvin Cooks emergence. Ham is a smart and excellent lead blocker. He opens up lanes for the running backs to get to the next level of defenders



Day shift
and night
shift
assemblers!

**Competitive starting wage
with monthly tier increases!
Full benefit package!**

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www.uslbm.com/careers or
call Diane at 605-448-2929**

Britton



Help Wanted at Groton Area

The Groton Area School District is seeking qualified and motivated individuals for the following position for the 2021-2022 school year.

Transportation Director. The Groton Area School District has an opening for the position of Transportation Director. This position is full-time year round with a comprehensive benefits package and salary dependent on education and experience. Criminal background check and pre-employment drug test required. Applicant must hold valid South Dakota Commercial Driver License with School Bus and Passengers endorsements and clean driving record. Interested parties should complete and submit the auxiliary staff application form. Open until filled.

Elementary Special Education Paraprofessional. The Groton Area School District is seeking applicants for the position of Special Education Paraprofessional. Starting salary is \$12.10/hour and position includes comprehensive benefits package. Criminal background check required. Interested parties should complete and submit the auxiliary staff application form. Open until filled.

MS/HS Special Education Paraprofessional. The Groton Area School District is seeking applicants for the position of Special Education Paraprofessional. Starting salary is \$12.10/hour and position includes comprehensive benefits package. Criminal background check required. Interested parties should complete and submit the auxiliary staff application form. Open until filled.

Applications are available at www.grotonarea.com or at the district office – 502 N 2nd Street, Groton.

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That's Life by Tony Bender: Things on my mind

They ought to outlaw doorbells on TV commercials

Our society is grappling with the implications of social media and how much control companies should exert on these platforms. A weighty question to be sure, a balancing act between private ownership and the First Amendment, but the thing that's driving me and Gus the Wonder Pug crazy are the doorbells on television commercials. I dread seeing Uber Eats on the screen. This has to stop! It's bad enough when Gus hears or sees another dog onscreen, but this ringing... he just goes nuts, and the weird thing is, I'm not sure Gus has heard a doorbell in real life. I'm not even sure ours works. It's all very Pavlovian and irritating as heck.

Dust in the Wind

If you're not praying for rain, you'd better get religion quick. It's been a long time since my lawn crunched underfoot—certainly not this early in the year, and we've gotten a small inkling of what our grandparents and great-grandparents went through in the Dirty Thirties with the recent walls of dust in the air. No-till farming has gone a long way toward managing erosion, but landowners have still lost tons of soil to drought and wind. Like me, you've seen aging shelterbelts ripped out and not replaced, and I wonder if we've forgotten what the Dust Bowl should have taught us. When you're driving in a stiff crosswind when you pass a shelterbelt, what happens? You end up overcorrecting when the force of the wind disappears for that stretch. Shelterbelts are an effective way to combat erosion. We all ought to be planting more trees, farmers and civilians alike.

Twins torment

I've got a Twins game in my future. I have tickets right behind the Twins dugout. Can you believe the last game I saw was in the final season in the Metrodome? I managed to get us a tour of the inner workings and Dylan was astounded when Derek Jeter passed by. We got to see A-Rod taking swings in an indoor batting cage, and later Mariano Rivera shut down Joe Mauer for the save. Well, you'd be hard-pressed to find a team as snake-bit as the Twins this year between injuries and an implosion in the bullpen. What's worse for me personally is that I was so enthused about this season I added MLB to my streaming service only to discover the Twins were blacked out! I've forgotten my password and haven't worked up the fortitude to go through tech support to figure out how to cancel the service, so I'm paying \$25 a month not to watch the Twins. Which might be worth it.

Pandemic numbers

At last count, more than half of the total U.S. population had been vaccinated—61% of those 12 and older, 172 million total, and now states are bribing people with prizes and Budweiser is even offering free beer if we meet President Biden's goal of vaccinating 70 percent of the population with at least one dose by July 4. Now, that's the America I know and love. Slowly but surely people are coming around to the logic of getting vaccinated. No, there's no grand conspiracy involved, no plot to inject microchips into you so you can be tracked. Heck, you've got a phone, don't you? The only one who knows more about you than Verizon is God, and sometimes she has to ask them. Our phones are getting spooky. The other day I was thinking—just thinking—about irises, which tells you how boring I've become, and what shows up on Facebook 30 minutes later? An ad for irises.

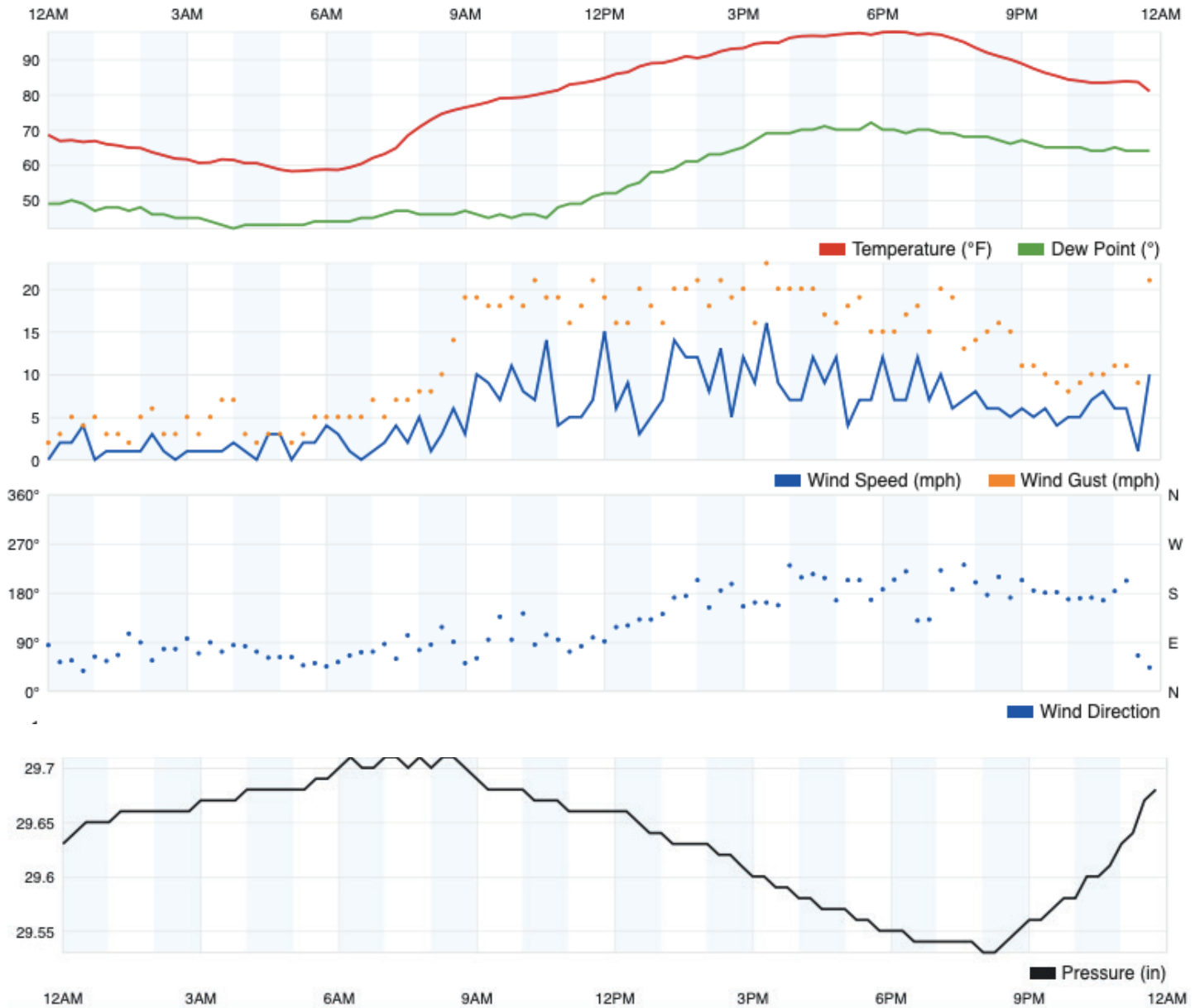
Never forget

Memorial Day is in the rear-view mirror. June 6 was the 77th anniversary of D-Day, and on June 5, David Dushman, the last surviving soldier who helped liberate Auschwitz passed away at 98. It reminded me of the time in the 1980s when I stopped at an old gas station in rural Colorado, the kind of place where old-timers gather for a cool soda and a game of cards, so I stayed for a while. During my visit, and I'm not sure how this came about, the proprietor shared with me photo albums—original black and white original photos of the death camps he'd help liberate. There were bodies stacked like logs in dump trucks. Emaciated corpses everywhere. A reminder that sometimes the line between good and evil is so stark war is inevitable. God bless the warriors who defend righteous causes.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

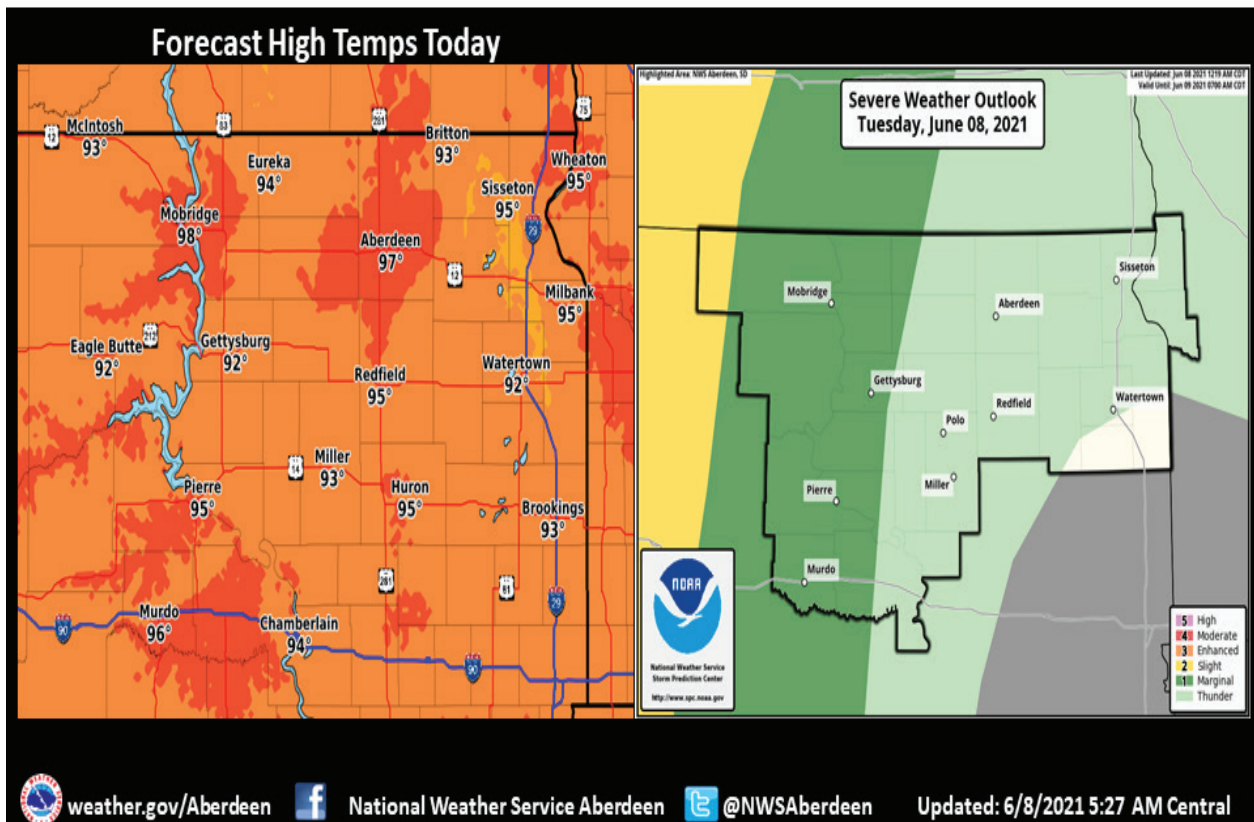


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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
Mostly Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny then Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Hot
High: 97 °F	Low: 70 °F	High: 97 °F	Low: 67 °F	High: 97 °F

Another Hot One Today With Storms Possible Tonight



Breezy to windy conditions will once again help to dry things out even more today as temperatures shoot right back up into the 90s, close to 100 degrees this afternoon. A line of strong to perhaps severe storms will develop across western South Dakota late this afternoon and evening. This activity is anticipated to track into the Missouri valley toward sunset or later into the early overnight hours. The main threats with any strong to severe storm will be damaging winds. The heat will persist through Thursday with a better chance for severe storms Thursday night into Friday morning.

Heat Impacts: Vulnerable Populations



PREGNANT



NEWBORNS



CHILDREN



ELDERLY



CHRONIC ILLNESS

Everyone is at risk from the dangers of extreme heat, but these groups are more vulnerable than most. Age and certain conditions make the body less able to regulate temperature.



NEVER leave anyone alone in a closed car



Use air conditioners and stay in the shade



Drink plenty of water, even if not thirsty



Wear loose-fitting, light-colored clothing

weather.gov



While everyone is at risk from the dangers of extreme heat, these groups are more vulnerable than most. Age and certain conditions make the body less able to regulate temperature. Here's a few heat safety reminders: Never leave anyone alone in a closed car, and lock vehicles when not in use. Drink plenty of water. Wear loose-fitting light colored clothing. Take extra breaks if outdoor work is necessary. Seek out shade or air conditioning. Try to plan outdoor activities for early in the day, or later in the evening.

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Today in Weather History

June 8, 2004: Over eight inches of rain fell near Okreek in rural Todd County causing nearly \$200,000 in damage to local roads. Lightning destroyed the Okreek Community Center.

1951: A tornado was captured on motion pictures for the first time in the USA. Click [HERE](#) for more information from a weather history blog.

2001: Tropical Storm Allison hits Houston, Texas, for the second time in three days. Louisiana and southern Texas were inundated with rain. Baton Rouge received 18 inches over just a couple of days. Some portions of Texas racked up 36 inches by June 11.

1953 - The worst tornado of record for the state of Michigan killed 116 persons. Flint MI was hardest hit. The tornado, half a mile in width, destroyed 200 homes on Coldwater Road killing entire families. (The Weather Channel)

1966 - A tornado ripped right through the heart of the capitol city of Topeka KS killing sixteen persons and causing 100 million dollars damage. The tornado, which struck during the evening, cut a swath of near total destruction eight miles long and four blocks wide. It was the most destructive tornado of record up until that time. (David Ludlum)

1974 - Severe thunderstorms spawned at least twenty-three tornadoes in Oklahoma during the afternoon and evening hours. One of the tornadoes struck the town Drumright killing sixteen persons and injuring 150 others. A tornado struck the National Weather Service office in Oklahoma City, and two tornadoes hit the city of Tulsa. Thunderstorms in Tulsa also produced as much as ten inches of rain. Total damage from the storms was around thirty million dollars. It was the worst natural disaster of record for Tulsa. (Storm Data)

1987 - Thunderstorms in the northeastern U.S. produced large hail and damaging winds in Vermont injuring two persons. Thunderstorms in Ohio produced wind gusts to 75 mph near Akron, and deluged Pittsfield with two inches of rain in thirty minutes. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Overnight thunderstorms in Iowa produced 5.20 inches of rain at Coon Rapids. Thunderstorms in the Florida Keys drenched Tavernier with 7.16 inches of rain in 24 hours. Eleven cities in the central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather over the Central Gulf Coast Region during the day and evening. Severe thunderstorms spawned 17 tornadoes, including one which injured ten persons and caused a million dollars damage at Orange Beach, AL. Thunderstorm winds gusting to 90 mph killed three persons and injured four others at Mobile AL. Thunderstorms also deluged Walnut Hill and Avalon Beach, FL, with eight inches of rain. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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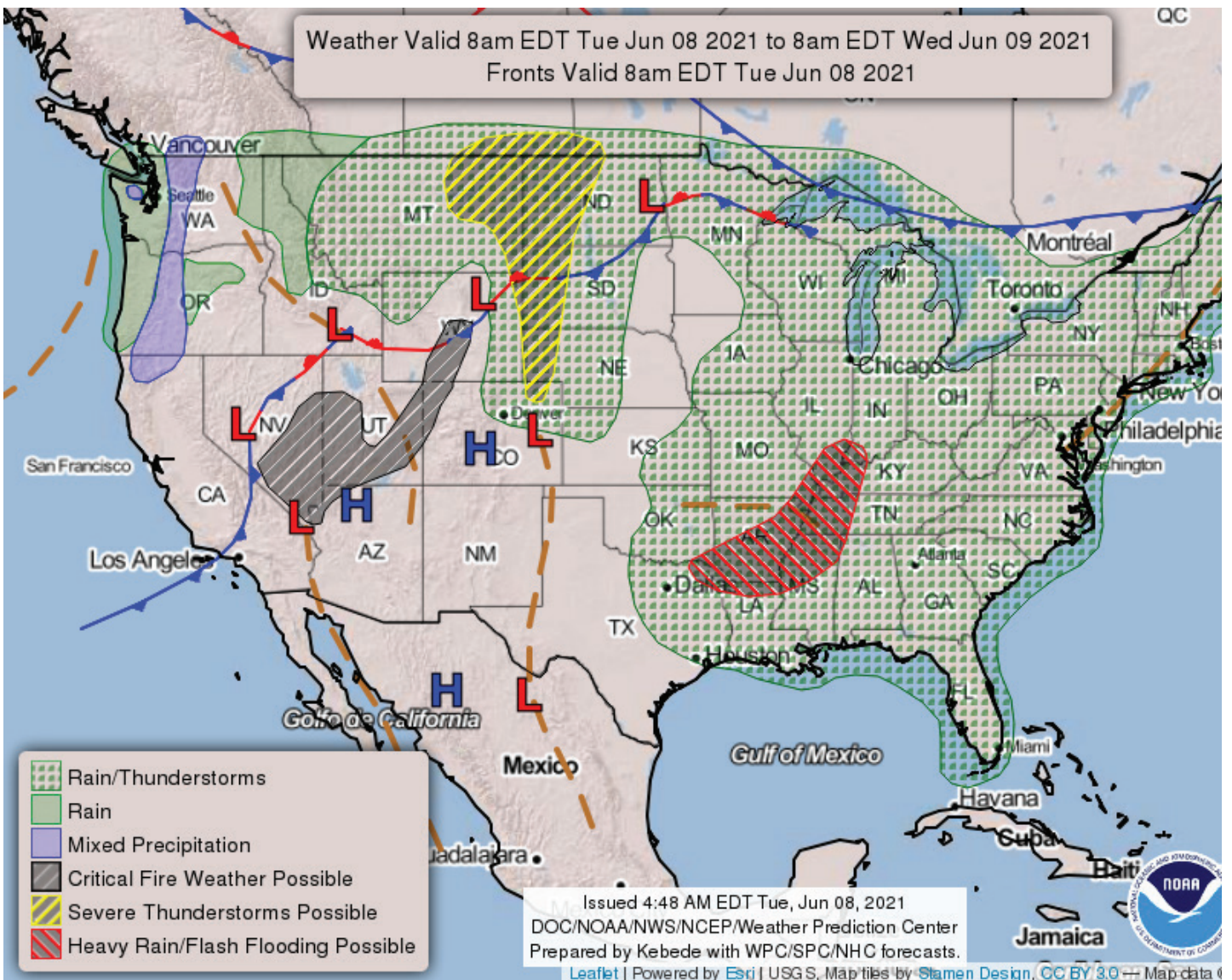
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 97.7 °F (Record High)
Low Temp: 58.2 °F
Wind: 23 mph
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 98° in 2000
Record Low: 32° in 1938
Average High: 78°F
Average Low: 53°F
Average Precip in June.: 0.78
Precip to date in June.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 8.03
Precip Year to Date: 3.97
Sunset Tonight: 9:21 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:45 a.m.



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TRUE POWER AND MERCY

"God has spoken once." Then it seems as if he thought for a moment and then corrected himself. "No," he said, "Twice I have heard this: That power belongs to God!" God had spoken a second time directly to him, but it seems as though he had forgotten about it. That is the value of waiting in silence before God: we can recall His past blessings. When we are patient, we allow God to do His work in our lives and give us His directions!

David was surrounded by false gods and idols. But there was a dramatic difference between his God and the gods of those who did not worship the living God. David's God, the one true living God, addressed David and His chosen people in words, visions, dreams, angelic visitations and finally in and through His incarnate Son, Jesus.

The fact that God speaks directly to us is a basic difference between Himself and idols. David made a simple, straightforward, significant statement: "...You, O God are strong...You, O God are loving." David drew a clear distinction between his God and other gods. His God was involved in His life and the lives of His people in guiding and guarding them, in protecting and providing for them.

We could never enjoy or understand, recognize or appreciate the love of God if He did not demonstrate His power, strength, and might. We see His strength and faithfulness in the many victories He gave David over his foes. We can understand the depth of His love and mercy when He forgave David for his sins. And, what He did for David He will do for all who love Him and accept His salvation.

Prayer: You are mighty, Lord, not only when You defeat powerful enemies, but when You forgave our sins. Help us to realize all that is ours through You! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: God has spoken once, Twice I have heard this: That power belongs to God. Psalm 62:11b-12a

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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

News from the Associated Press

South Dakota lawmakers reject school rules for medical pot

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers on Monday rejected rules proposed by Gov. Kristi Noem's administration that would have set parameters for students who need to use medical marijuana at school.

A legislative committee sent the rules back to the Department of Education for revision after complaining that they would have required access to medical pot in private schools and did not spell out what activities would be off-limits to students who used medical marijuana.

While voters passed a law that requires state agencies to roll out a medical pot program this year, progress has been slow-going. Noem had proposed delaying the implementation of the law, arguing that her administration needed more time to study the issue and create a program, but that effort failed in the Senate. The Republican governor is now tasked with overseeing the program rollout, even though she opposed it when it was on the ballot in November.

The Department of Education must come up with policies that allow students with a medical marijuana ID card to use the drug while at school. It has until the beginning of the school year to finalize the rules, though the state will not begin issuing ID cards until November.

Secretary of Education Tiffany Sanderson had proposed rules to allow schools and school nurses to opt out of administering medical marijuana but that would have allowed caregivers to enter schools to do so. Medical marijuana advocates said that arrangement would have placed an unnecessary burden on the parents and caregivers of students who need medical marijuana for conditions such as epilepsy. Lawyers from the Department of Health said their approach would give flexibility to schools to develop a plan with students who used medical marijuana.

But lawmakers, looking to further limit medical pot use by students, sent the proposal back to the Department of Education.

Republican Rep. Kevin Jensen said he would like to see the rules detail whether students using medical marijuana are allowed to participate in athletics or classes that use machinery. Rep. Jon Hansen, another Republican, argued that the law would not require private schools to allow students to use medical marijuana on the premises.

"We're shooting at a moving target here," Jensen said. "There are a lot of agencies that are really involved with a lot of change here but I'm really uncomfortable moving forward with certain rules when all of those pieces aren't in place yet."

Some health experts say medical cannabis, when given in the correct dosing, can be used by children without producing a high, though researchers are still studying the issue. The American Academy of Pediatrics opposes using medical marijuana, but has also said it recognizes it may be an option for "cannabinoid administration for children with life-limiting or severely debilitating conditions and for whom current therapies are inadequate."

The Department of Education will next rework the state rules and try to get final approval from the legislative committee tasked with signing off on state agency rule changes.

This story has been corrected to show the name of the South Dakota lawmaker who spoke at the committee is Rep. Kevin Jensen, not Rep. Phil Jensen.

Workers break ground on giant turf sports complex

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Workers have broken ground on a giant artificial turf sports complex in Sioux Falls.

The Sanford Sports Complex issued a statement Monday saying it will add 18 outdoor fields that include

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nearly 1.7 million square feet of turf. The fields all will have lights. Planners envision the complex hosting baseball, softball, soccer, lacrosse and other activities starting in 2022.

The additions are expected to bring in about 1 million new visitors to the complex over five years.

The project is funded through a \$300 million gift from Denny Sanford. The money also will cover a virtual hospital and an expansion of graduate medical education.

Sioux Falls council scraps scooter ordinance

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Sioux Falls City Council has scrapped a proposal to allow motorized foot scooters downtown.

Alders Alex Jensen and Christine Erickson's proposal would have allowed licensed ride-sharing programs to place the scooters downtown. People would have had to ride them on the sidewalks, though, and other council members voiced concerns about safety in areas with high foot traffic and drunk people using the scooters.

The proposal is set to be withdrawn from the council's Tuesday meeting agenda, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported.

Groton woman wins Miss South Dakota crown

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Groton woman has captured the 2021 Miss South Dakota crown.

The Rapid City Journal reported Kaitlin O'Neil won the title Saturday night. She bested 14 other women from across the state to earn an \$8,000 scholarship with a platform entitled "Bloom - Healthy Mind, Healthy Body, Healthy You."

O'Neill graduated from Minnesota State University-Mankato, where she majored in dance and marketing. She will compete in the Miss America Pageant in December.

Harris turns focus to Mexico on trip to address migration

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris is closing out her first foreign trip Tuesday with a visit to Mexico and a meeting with President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a key but complicated ally in the Biden administration's efforts to curb the spike in migration at the U.S. border.

While López Obrador committed in a previous virtual meeting with Harris that the U.S. can "count on us" to help address the issue of irregular migration, the Mexican president has in the past blamed President Joe Biden for the increase in migration at the border. And he was chummy with his predecessor, President Donald Trump, despite Trump's hardline policies toward migrants.

Early last month, he also accused the U.S. of violating Mexico's sovereignty for giving money to non-governmental organizations that were critical of his government.

But Harris, in her role dealing with the root causes of increased migration from the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, as well as Mexico, has sought to strengthen diplomatic relations with the Mexican president. She's held multiple phone calls and a virtual bilateral meeting with him, and Tuesday will provide the latest indication of whether her efforts will bear fruit for either nation.

"We have a partnership, a longstanding partnership. Other than Canada, we are the closest neighbors to each other," Harris told reporters Monday night. "That is the basis of the conversation I will have with him — is with that spirit, that we have to be partners."

The meeting follows Harris' Monday visit to Guatemala, where she met with President Alejandro Giamattei. To coincide with their meeting the Biden administration announced a number of new commitments to combat trafficking, smuggling, and corruption, as well as investments in economic development in the country. But on Tuesday, her meeting with López Obrador isn't expected to deliver as many concrete commitments.

The two will witness the signing of a memorandum of understanding that will establish greater coopera-

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tion between the two nations on development programs in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. Harris aides say they'll discuss vaccine sharing, the economic and security relationship between the two nations, and dealing with the root causes of migration from other countries in the region. Harris speaks frequently of the need to improve economic conditions for residents of the region, so they don't feel compelled to make the trek to the U.S. border.

The memorandum of understanding, according to special envoy Ricardo Zúñiga, who traveled with Harris on the trip, marks a new level of cooperation, and is important because the two nations have "some of the same issues" when it comes to irregular migration.

"It's very important to show that the United States and Mexico are collaborating and trying to improve conditions on the ground among our neighbors, because of the importance that other countries in Central America have for both of us," he told reporters traveling with Harris.

Harris will spend the rest of the day meeting with female entrepreneurs and labor leaders in the nation.

The meeting comes just days after the country's midterm elections, during which López Obrador's party appeared poised to maintain their majority in Mexico's lower chamber of the congress, but fell short of a two-thirds majority as some voters boosted the struggling opposition, according to initial election results.

Harris is not expected to address the election results during her meeting with the president, but the bloody campaign — nearly three-dozen candidates or pre-candidates were killed as drug cartels sought to protect their interests — are certain to loom over their conversations. The government's inability to provide security in parts of the country is of interest to the U.S. in an immigration context, both for the people who are displaced by violence and the impact it has on a severely weakened economy trying to reemerge from the pandemic.

Still, while aides say corruption was a central focus of her meeting with Giammattei, it's unclear whether she'll raise the issue with López Obrador.

But the increase in migration at the border has become one of the major challenges confronting Biden in the early months of his first term, with Republicans seizing on an issue they see as politically advantageous as polling suggests Americans are less favorable towards Biden's approach to immigration than they are towards his policies on the economy and the COVID-19 pandemic.

They've tried to make Harris the face of that immigration policy, charging she and Biden are ignoring the issue because both have yet to visit the southern border. Harris told reporters Monday in Guatemala that she was focused on addressing the root causes of migration in a way that delivers "tangible" results "as opposed to grand gestures."

Regardless of the eventual outcome of her meetings Tuesday, Mexico will remain a key partner in enforcement efforts at the border.

Illegal border crossings have increased steadily since April 2020, after Trump introduced pandemic-related powers to deny migrants the opportunity to seek asylum, but further accelerated under Biden, who quickly scrapped many of Trump's hardline border policies — most notably the "Remain in Mexico" program to make asylum-seekers wait in Mexico for court dates in U.S. immigration court.

Shortly after taking office, Biden also exempted unaccompanied children from Title 42, named for a section of an obscure 1944 public health law that allows authorities to deny entry to prevent the spread of disease. Mexico agreed to take back its own citizens under Title 42 authorities, as well as people from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

U.S. border authorities encountered nearly 19,000 unaccompanied children in March, the highest on record. Overall, it had more than 170,000 encounters on the border in April, the highest level in more than 20 years though the numbers aren't directly comparable because getting stopped under pandemic-related authorities carries no legal consequences, resulting in many repeat crossings.

Mexicans accounted for 36% of encounters with people who crossed illegally in April, the largest nationality according to the latest monthly data available from U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Hondurans were second with 22% and Guatemalans were third with 17%.

In March, López Obrador also blamed Biden for the increase in migration at the U.S. border, charging in

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a March press conference that the Biden administration had created "expectations" that "there would be a better treatment of migrants."

"And this has caused Central American migrants, and also from our country, wanting to cross the border thinking that it is easier to do so," he said.

Global glitch: swaths of internet go down after cloud outage

LONDON (AP) — Multiple major websites went offline briefly Tuesday after an apparent outage at the cloud service company Fastly, and there were still reports of sporadic disruptions after the company patched the problem about an hour later.

Dozens of sites including the New York Times, CNN, Twitch, Reddit, the Guardian, and the U.K. government's home page, could not be reached.

San Francisco-based Fastly acknowledged a problem just before 1000 GMT. It said in repeated updates on its website that it was "continuing to investigate the issue."

About an hour later, the company said: "The issue has been identified and a fix has been applied. Customers may experience increased origin load as global services return."

A number of sites that were hit early appeared to be coming back online.

Some visitors trying to access CNN.com got a message that said: "Fastly error: unknown domain: cnn.com." Attempts to access the Financial Times website turned up a similar message while visits to the New York Times and U.K. government's gov.uk site returned an "Error 503 Service Unavailable" message, along with the line "Varnish cache server," which is a technology that Fastly is built on.

Down Detector, which tracks internet outages, said: "Reports indicate there may be a widespread outage at Fastly, which may be impacting your service."

Fastly describes itself as an "edge cloud platform." It provides vital but obscure behind-the-scenes cloud computing services to many of the web's high profile sites, by helping them to store, or "cache," content in servers around the world, allowing users to fetch it more quickly and smoothly instead of having to access the site's original server.

AP analysis: COVID prolonged foster care stays for thousands

By SALLY HO and CAMILLE FASSETT The Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Leroy Pascubillo missed his daughter's first step, her first word and countless other precious milestones. After being born addicted to heroin, she had been placed with a foster family, and he anxiously counted the days between their visits as he tried to regain custody. But because of the pandemic, the visits dwindled and went virtual, and all he could do was watch his daughter — too young to engage via computer — try to crawl through the screen.

They are among thousands of families across the country whose reunifications have been snarled in the foster care system as courts delayed cases, went virtual or temporarily shut down, according to an Associated Press analysis of child welfare data from 34 states.

The decrease in children leaving foster care means families are lingering longer in a system intended to be temporary, as critical services were shuttered or limited. Vulnerable families are suffering long-term and perhaps irreversible damage, experts say, which could leave parents with weakened bonds with their children.

The AP's analysis found at least 8,700 fewer reunifications during the early months of the pandemic compared with the March-to-December period the year before -- a decrease of 16%. Adoptions, too, dropped — by 23%, according to the analysis. Overall, at least 22,600 fewer children left foster care compared with 2019.

"Everybody needed extra help, and nobody was getting extra help," said Shawn Powell, a Parents for Parents advocacy program coordinator in King County, Washington.

For months, King County, like many parts of the country, suspended nearly all hearings except emergency orders, which led to prioritizing child removals -- sparked by child welfare reports or other red flags

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-- over family reunifications. Adoptions slowed to a trickle. Services needed for reunification — psychiatric evaluations, random drug testing, group therapy, mental health counseling, housing assistance, and the public transportation to access these services — also were limited.

For foster care children, even doctor's appointments must be approved by a judge, and frustrated lawyers say matters as routine as that were affected.

During the period examined in AP's analysis, the total foster care population dropped 2% overall -- likely a result of the significant decrease in child abuse and neglect reports, where the process to remove a child from a home typically begins.

National data show that the average stay in foster care is about 20 months, which means the children most affected during the early months of the pandemic were those in the foster care system long before the pandemic.

Those in foster care are disproportionately children of color and from poor families, national data also show. Those groups tend to have more contact with social service agencies that are mandated to report potential abuse and neglect, which means the pandemic has amplified not just the challenges of poor parenting but of parenting while poor.

"The systemic problems around racism and poverty in COVID and how people are treated in the child welfare system may be compounding," said Sharon Vandivere of the national think tank group Child Trends, who noted that longer stays in foster care are inherently traumatic and make reunifications less likely. "It was bad before, and it's probably made it even worse."

For D.Y., a Black teenager living at a Seattle-area group home, the pandemic has magnified the loneliness and isolation of being in the care of child protective services. He's been out of his mother's custody since 2016, after an abuse report found she physically disciplined her children. He had visits with her in the years following, and lawyers expected his mom would regain custody and D.Y. could go home in the fall of 2020. Then the pandemic hit and rocked his case and life.

Because of new COVID-19 protocols and staffing shortages, already-limited privileges at the institutional group home were scaled back or revoked. In-person visits with his mom ended. Group activities all but disappeared. Inside, he resented wearing a mask and washing his hands constantly. With each exposure scare in the living facility, he and others had to quarantine.

When he resumed in-person school, he hoped officials would find it safe to see his mom again, too — but that didn't happen for months. He watched helplessly as his sister - who was placed with relatives and had a case further along in the system when the pandemic began - was returned home to their mom last summer. D.Y. was happy for them, but he wants the same: to taste his mom's cooking, to make eggs in his own kitchen, to sit on the couch with his family with no masks.

"I still want her to baby me," the 13-year-old boy said of his mother, who declined to comment for this story while the cases of D.Y. and her third child remain active. "I can tell she has high faith of when I'll come home. I don't know if it's going to happen anymore."

The AP is not naming D.Y., instead referring to him by the initials used in his lawsuit against the Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Families. The lawsuit accuses the state of providing inadequate care as D.Y. was bounced through 50 placements before the pandemic, some days housing him in a motel or the agency's office building. The state declined to comment on his case and lawsuit.

But Frank Ordway, chief of staff at the state's child welfare agency, blamed the court system's closures for the drop in reunifications and implored those that still haven't fully reopened to prioritize cases like D.Y.'s.

"When those systems aren't working, those families and those children are left in limbo," Ordway said. "Our job as an agency is to help keep those families together and to get them together. Not being able to do so because of the pandemic was a wrenching experience."

King County Superior Court Commissioner Nicole Wagner, a presiding judge in the family court system, said court staff, attorneys, social workers and counselors did their best, but that no one knew how to address unprecedented issues in the pandemic. For example, she said, she wanted in-person visits for children but couldn't order social workers with underlying conditions to monitor them when required by law.

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Wagner said she hopes lessons from the pandemic will help redefine how the system supports already struggling families in the process of reunification.

"It's scary, it's overwhelming, it's frightening. And it's about the most important things in your life: your children," Wagner said. "There's no doubt in my mind that the pandemic absolutely, 100% has disproportionately impacted the more vulnerable populations."

Illinois was the only state that kept apace on its foster care exits. Others in AP's analysis acknowledged a significant drop but said that each foster care case has unique circumstances beneath the numbers.

Many states, for example, extended its support to those on the cusp of aging out of state care during the pandemic. This policy change effectively protected foster care youths from being kicked out of their living arrangements if they still needed a place to stay, but it also affected the number of foster care exits.

Connecticut — which had one of the largest drops in exits, at 36% — waited until May 2021 to fully return to in-person visits, which serve as a key metric to judge whether parents are prepared to regain care and custody of their children.

The state "never stopped serving children and families, and we found that conducting some of our work virtually is both more efficient and, in some cases, preferred by our clients," a Connecticut Department of Children and Families spokesman said in a statement.

Leroy Pascubillo, now 51, had used drugs over the course of four decades, but said he started working toward sobriety immediately after his daughter's birth in February 2019.

The court put him in the only drug rehab center in the Seattle area that allows children to stay on site with their fathers. He had a few in-person visits with his daughter each week, and he was told that if he got through the initial stages of the program, she could join him there in March 2020 while he completed treatment. The pandemic upended that plan.

"You start building that relationship, and then it's taken away and you try to start it all over again," he said. All the more painful was that he knew his daughter, now 2, also had no contact with her mother. Pascubillo said she hasn't participated in the custody case, and she couldn't be reached by the AP.

Once courts began to hear existing cases again, Pascubillo was able to reunite with his daughter, complete rehab and land a Seattle apartment with the help of state and nonprofit services. He wants to work as a parent advocate to help other fathers find their way back to their kids. He still weeps over the time he's lost and the four-month delay in reuniting with his daughter.

"It felt like 40 years. I figured she would have forgotten me. But as soon as I looked at her and sang 'baby, baby, baby,' she started kicking like she was in the womb," Pascubillo said. "We have this bond."

US identifies 3,900 children separated at border under Trump

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The Biden administration said Tuesday that it has identified more than 3,900 children separated from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border under former President Donald Trump's "zero-tolerance" policy on illegal crossings, providing one of the more detailed accounts of a chapter in U.S. immigration history that drew widespread condemnation.

The Biden administration's Family Reunification Task Force count of 3,913 children separated from July 1, 2017, to the end of Trump's presidency is well below the more than 5,500 children identified by the American Civil Liberties Union in court filings, based on government information.

The task force said it identified "nearly all" children who were separated under the zero-tolerance policy but will review another 1,723 cases since July 2017, which would bring total cases examined to 5,636, close to the ACLU tally. The discrepancy appears to stem largely from a federal court ruling in San Diego that excluded 1,723 children who were separated for reasons other than Trump's zero-tolerance policy, such as risk of child endangerment or questions about parentage.

The task force will also try to determine if children were separated during the first six months of Trump's presidency, starting in January 2017, which was outside the scope of the ACLU lawsuit. That could raise

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the final number.

Of the 3,913 children, 1,786 have been reunified with a parent, mostly during Trump's tenure, parents of another 1,965 have been contacted and the whereabouts of 391 have not been established. Many who have been contacted were released to other family members.

The report provided data that hadn't been previously released. Nearly 60% of children separated under the zero-tolerance policy were Guatemalans (2,270), followed by Hondurans (1,150), Salvadorans (281), Mexicans (75), Brazilians (74) and Romanians (23).

The Border Patrol's Yuma, Arizona, sector recorded the highest number of separations of the agency's nine sectors on the Mexican border with 1,114. The Rio Grande Valley in Texas, which dominated media attention as the busiest corridor for illegal crossings by far, was second with 1,025 separations. The El Paso, Texas, sector, which was site of a trial run of the policy in 2017 that was not publicly disclosed at the time, was third with 982 separated children.

The Biden administration has vowed to reunite parents who are still apart from their children, but the pace has been slow and it is unclear how high that number will go. The first four parents were returned to the United States last month, part of what the task force identified as an initial group of 62 people.

UN judges to rule on Ratko Mladic appeal against convictions

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Former Bosnian Serb military chief Ratko Mladic will hear Tuesday if U.N. judges have upheld or overturned his convictions and life sentence for masterminding genocide and other atrocities throughout Bosnia's 1992-95 war.

Mladic, known as the "Butcher of Bosnia" for leading troops responsible for a string of deadly campaigns including the 1995 Srebrenica massacre and the siege of Sarajevo, was convicted in 2017 and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The verdicts in the appeal case will all but wrap up U.N. prosecutions of crimes committed in the war that killed more than 100,000 people and left millions homeless.

Mladic, 79, was found guilty of genocide for leading the 1995 massacre in the eastern enclave of Srebrenica of more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys. It was the worst massacre on European soil since World War II.

Widows and mothers of Srebrenica victims began gathering outside the court in the Dutch city of The Hague hours before the judgment that will be delivered by a five-judge panel led by Zambian Presiding Judge Prisca Matimba Nyambe.

Mladic also was found guilty of other crimes including persecution, extermination, murder and terror. He was acquitted of a second genocide charge linked to a campaigns to drive non-Serbs out of several Bosnian towns early in the war. Prosecutors appealed that acquittal.

Mladic's former political leader, Radovan Karadzic, also was convicted of the same crimes and is serving a life sentence.

Mladic was first indicted in July 1995. After the war in Bosnia ended, he went into hiding and was finally arrested in 2011 and handed over to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia by the then-ruling pro-Western government of Serbia.

The U.N. tribunal has since shut its doors. Mladic's appeal and other legal issues left over from the tribunal are being dealt with by the U.N.'s International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, which is housed in the same building as the now-defunct court for the former Yugoslavia.

Mladic and his legacy still divide Bosnia. Bosniaks, mostly Muslims, view him as a villain and war criminal while many Bosnian Serbs still consider him a hero.

"I cannot accept any verdict," Serb war veteran Milije Radovic from the eastern Bosnian town of Foca told The Associated Press. "For me, he is an icon. And for the Serb people, he is an icon."

But the shadow of Mladic and Karadzic spreads far beyond the Balkans.

They even have been revered by foreign far-right supporters for their bloody wartime campaigns against Bosniaks.

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The Australian who shot dead dozens of Muslim worshippers in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 2019 was believed to be inspired by the wartime Bosnian Serb leaders, as well as Anders Breivik, the Norwegian white supremacist who shot dead 77 people in Norway in 2011.

Biden to get warm welcome from relieved but wary allies

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — When U.S. President Joe Biden flies to Europe this week, he will find his hosts welcoming but wary. His predecessor Donald Trump may be gone, but he leaves a long shadow.

Biden's first foreign trip as president starts Wednesday and includes a gathering of the Group of Seven wealthy nations by the seaside in southwest England, a NATO summit, a meeting with European Union chiefs, and then a tete-a-tete in Geneva with his Russian counterpart and adversary, Vladimir Putin.

For most of America's allies, Biden is a relief. Trump often sowed chaos, accusing the NATO military alliance of leeching off the United States, insulting the European Union and storming out of a G-7 summit in Canada in 2018. In contrast, Biden has stressed his support for international diplomacy and emphasized "America's renewed commitment to our allies and partners" in a recent Washington Post article.

"I think we can expect to see lots of rhetoric and lots of good-vibe messages in this first visit of Biden to Europe," said Renata Dwan, deputy director of international affairs think tank Chatham House.

But she added that five months into Biden's term, "it's time to be more than 'not Donald Trump.'"

Biden has already mended some fences with America's allies. The U.S. has rejoined the Paris climate accord that Trump renounced, ended a minor trade war with the EU over aviation rivalry and is backing attempts to revive a deal meant to limit Iran's nuclear ambitions that Trump abandoned.

"America is back. And we are happy you are back," European Council President Charles Michel told Biden in March, when the president joined a video summit of EU leaders.

Yet it's not all smooth sailing, especially for British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who is hosting the first G-7 summit in two years this weekend at the Carbis Bay resort in Cornwall.

Johnson wants to use the U.K.'s G-7 presidency to inject new purpose into the wealthy nations' club — undermined by Trump's unilateralism and sideswiped by the coronavirus pandemic — and to burnish the international image of a post-Brexit "Global Britain."

He's happy with Biden's commitment to fighting climate change that should help give momentum to November's COP26 global climate summit in Scotland. And Biden's promise to start sharing coronavirus vaccines with poorer countries — something aid agencies say should have happened sooner — chimes with Johnson's call for G-7 leaders to ensure the whole world is vaccinated by the end of 2022.

Closer to home, the British leader hopes Biden will agree to a trans-Atlantic travel corridor to help business and tourism recover from the pandemic. And he is seeking a U.K.-U.S. trade deal, touted by the British government as a plum post-Brexit economic prize.

But he has hurdles to overcome. A trade deal is not a Biden priority, and Johnson will have to work hard to charm a president who once called the prime minister a "physical and emotional clone" of Trump.

Biden has criticized Brexit, and is particularly concerned about its impact on Northern Ireland. Because of its land border with EU member Ireland, Northern Ireland has been given a special economic status that is causing friction between the U.K. and the bloc and heightening political tensions within Northern Ireland.

Biden, keenly aware of the key role the U.S. played in bringing about the Good Friday peace accord that ended decades of violence in Northern Ireland, has warned there will be no trade deal with Britain if Brexit undermines the peace deal.

There are tensions and divergences among U.S. and its other the allies, too. Biden has begun to rebuild ties with NATO, left angry and bewildered by Trump's unilateralism and his ambiguous relationship with Russia's Putin. Biden reassured the alliance that the U.S. backed NATO's doctrine of collective defense and would come to the rescue in the face of Russian aggression.

Britain and EU politicians generally support Biden's call for a "stable and predictable" relationship with Russia, but have low expectations of a breakthrough from his meeting with Putin.

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But the U.S. still wants NATO's European members and Canada to spend more on defense — a constant Trump refrain, now taken up by Biden, if in a more muted way.

And while Washington informed its allies about its decision to pull U.S. troops out of Afghanistan, the news came "late in the day," said Dwan, the analyst from Chatham House.

There is also continuing U.S-European friction over the Nord Stream 2 pipeline being built to bring gas from Russia to Germany under the Baltic Sea. A persistent irritant between the U.S. and Germany during the Trump years, the pipeline still faces bipartisan U.S. opposition over concerns it makes Europe more dependent on Russia, though Biden has sought to take some of the heat out of the issue.

And European nations are more cautious than the U.S. about confronting and curbing an increasingly assertive, economically surging China.

Dwan said European nations are eager "not to be caught in the middle of a of a bipolar tension. Europe knows how that looks and feels."

Even Britain, which has excluded Chinese firms from its 5G network and opened its doors to thousands of people from Hong Kong as Beijing squeezes the territory's freedoms, is cautious about the tough U.S. approach. Johnson has stressed that he is not a "knee-jerk Sinophobe" and wants to engage with China.

Thomas Gift, director of the Center on U.S. Politics at University College London, says that for all Biden's warm words for allies, his priorities remain at home: vaccinating the U.S. out of the pandemic, reviving the COVID-battered economy and renewing the United States' aging infrastructure.

"He's largely governing as a domestic president," Gift said.

And he said the discord of the Trump years have made America's allies look differently at the United States.

"I think public opinion in Europe has soured to an extent on the United States," Gift said, including concern about whether it's a reliable partner. "But I think European leaders, by and large, are eager to work with the U.S. They still understand that it is the most important global superpower — even if some of that power is getting eaten up by a rising China."

NRA's gun rights message lingers despite legal, money woes

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Liberals have cheered the highly public legal and financial jeopardy ensnaring the National Rifle Association, seeing the gun lobby's potential demise as the path to stricter firearms laws.

But, it turns out, the NRA's message has become so solidified in the Republican Party that even if the organization implodes from allegations of lavish spending and misuse of funds, its unapologetic pro-gun point of view will live on, as the heated debate increasingly shifts from Washington to the states.

Not even the shift in power to Democrats in the White House and Congress has been enough to push through new federal restrictions, and states continue to pass laws with far-reaching protections for gun owners.

Ever confident, the NRA, which is based in Fairfax, Virginia, says the suggestion it is receding is magical thinking on the left. The group promises it will emerge from its failed bankruptcy effort stronger, particularly as it seeks to relocate to the decidedly pro-gun rights state of Texas.

The durable nature of the NRA's clout is an exemplar of how difficult it is to claw back control from an entrenched lobbying powerhouse that has planted deep roots in the American political system with money, organization and relentless messaging.

"The NRA built up an impressive mountain of power over the course of 40 years. And despite their recent fall from grace, that power doesn't disappear overnight," Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., said in an interview.

Not to say there is no hope for gun control — far from it, said Murphy, whose own views are shaped by the massacre of 20 children in Newtown, Conn. on Dec. 14, 2012, and the subsequent (successful) effort by the NRA to stop gun legislation in the aftermath.

He said Democratic gains in Congress, despite the efforts by the NRA to stop candidates, are one mea-

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sure of a change in the dynamic. Another is a shift in some public opinion. A Gallup poll in 2019 found the percentage of people viewing the NRA favorably dropping below 50% for only the second time in three decades.

"There's no doubt that their political muscle is reduced," Murphy said, adding that the Georgia special elections for U.S. Senate, won by Democrats Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock in January, are a clear indication of that. "Democrats who support universal background checks are winning all over the country, including in states where you would have thought the NRA had a stranglehold."

One of Biden's first executive orders was on gun control. On Monday, the Justice Department announced model legislation for red-flag laws, which permit police to ask for the removal of firearms from people who may present a danger to themselves or others.

In March, the House passed two bills requiring background checks on all firearms sales and transfers and allowing an expanded 10-day review for gun purchases. But the legislation faces strong headwinds in the Senate, with some Republican support required for passage.

At the same time, though, the NRA has been growing, with 225,000 additional dues-paying members since January, its ranks now swelling to more than 5 million. Its embattled leader, Wayne LaPierre, has led the fund-raising efforts for nearly three decades, selling himself as an aggressive guardian of the Second Amendment right to bear arms.

He positioned the lobby as the major antagonist of Democratic administrations. Then, in 2016, the organization spent more than \$30 million on behalf of Donald Trump's campaign, according to Federal Election Commission data. The effort paid off — after back-to-back mass shootings in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, Trump seemed inclined to take action on extensive background checks but backed off after a phone call with the NRA.

But those successes were happening while the NRA was having major problems within. By 2018, the organization had a \$36 million deficit due to lavish spending. A class action lawsuit by members over mismanagement and a lack of transparency followed in 2019. And then, Democratic New York Attorney General Letitia James sued to disband the group, arguing it was "fraught with fraud and abuse." In D.C., the attorney general sued over improper diversion of funds.

The NRA filed for bankruptcy in January, but the effort was rejected by a judge. During the trial, an embarrassing deposition by LaPierre emerged in which he said he'd borrowed a friend's 108-foot (33-meter) yacht to hide multiple times between 2013 and 2018 after threats following multiple mass shootings.

Even with that inner turmoil, the NRA has also been behind hundreds of successful efforts to loosen gun laws in the states — most recently working to persuade states to abandon requirements that people get training and pass background checks to carry concealed handguns.

Six states have passed legislation removing or weakening concealed-carry permit requirements this year, most recently Texas. About 20 states now allow people to carry concealed weapons without a license.

Four more states have passed legislation banning police from enforcing federal gun laws, a preemptive shot at any new measures passed by Democrats.

The NRA is far from the only pro-gun group at the table in state legislatures now. In Utah, one of the first states to remove permit requirements this year, it was just one of at least six gun rights groups speaking in favor of the bill at the Capitol — and it wasn't the most outspoken one.

The number of generally pro-gun rights states outnumbers those that pass gun control measures 40 to 10, although the latter have more people, so the country's population is about evenly divided between the two camps. And a Pew Research Center report released in April found the number of Americans who favor stricter gun laws has declined this year to 53%, down from 60% in September 2019.

"Gun rights, the Second Amendment, the right to keep and bear arms is bigger than any organization," said Jordan Stein, communications director for the Gun Owners of America, one such group.

Gun owners would continue fighting if the organizations who often help them organize and coordinate around the issue were gone, he said.

Recent gun sales suggest a new zeal for owning a weapon. Gun dealers sold more than 2 million firearms in January, a 75% increase over the same month last year and the biggest-selling January on record, ac-

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According to the National Shooting Sports Foundation, an industry trade group. The FBI, meanwhile, reported 4.3 million firearm-related background checks, the highest monthly total since the system was created over two decades ago.

While the NRA is easily the best known gun lobby, Josh Horwitz, the executive director of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, said the real players are the state gun groups.

"The groups that work at the state level are much more powerful than they used to be," Horwitz said. "Even if the NRA went away tomorrow, and it may, (Senate Republican leader) Mitch McConnell is still going to be checking in with whatever the Kentucky gun rights alliance is, and the Ohio legislature is going to be checking in with the Buckeye Firearms Association.

"We're in a generational battle," he added. "Guns in America is going to be a big fight for a long time."

Despite its troubles, the NRA remains confident in its prowess.

The organization, which in January reported total assets of about \$203 million, liabilities of about \$153 million and \$31 million in bank loans, said in court papers it saw revenues drop about 7% because of the coronavirus pandemic. To cut costs, it laid off dozens of employees and canceled its national convention.

Last month, a federal judge in Dallas dealt another blow to the lobby when he dismissed its bankruptcy case, because he found it was not filed in good faith.

But it has also balanced its budget and is again in the black after years of deficits.

"Coupled with our typical excellent report card on legal and legislative advances and wins, the record is clear: the NRA is as strong and effective as ever as we confront President Biden's anti-gun agenda," said Andrew Arulanandam, the NRA's managing director for public affairs.

"Any suggestion to the contrary is wishful thinking from our adversaries."

Senate report details sweeping failures around Jan. 6 attack

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Senate investigation of the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol has uncovered broad government, military and law enforcement missteps surrounding the violent attack, including a breakdown within multiple intelligence agencies and a lack of training and preparation for Capitol Police officers who were quickly overwhelmed by the rioters.

The Senate report released Tuesday is the first — and could be the last — bipartisan review of how hundreds of former President Donald Trump's supporters were able to violently push past security lines and break into the Capitol that day, interrupting the certification of President Joe Biden's victory.

It includes new details about the police officers on the front lines who suffered chemical burns, brain injuries and broken bones and who told senators that they were left with no direction when command systems broke down. It recommends immediate changes to give the Capitol Police chief more authority, to provide better planning and equipment for law enforcement and to streamline intelligence gathering among federal agencies.

As a bipartisan effort, the report does not delve into the root causes of the attack, including Trump's role as he called for his supporters to "fight like hell" to overturn his election defeat that day. It does not call the attack an insurrection, even though it was. And it comes two weeks after Republicans blocked a bipartisan, independent commission that would investigate the insurrection more broadly.

"This report is important in the fact that it allows us to make some immediate improvements to the security situation here in the Capitol," said Michigan Sen. Gary Peters, the chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, which conducted the probe along with the Senate Rules Committee. "But it does not answer some of the bigger questions that we need to face, quite frankly, as a country and as a democracy."

The House in May passed legislation to create a commission that would be modeled after a panel that investigated the Sept. 11 terrorist attack two decades ago. But the Senate failed to get the 60 votes needed to advance, with many Republicans pointing to the Senate report as sufficient.

The top Republican on the Rules panel, Missouri Sen. Roy Blunt, has opposed the commission, arguing

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that investigation would take too long. He said the recommendations made in the Senate can be implemented faster, including legislation that he and Minnesota Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar, the rules committee chair, intend to introduce soon that would give the chief of Capitol Police more authority to request assistance from the National Guard.

The Senate report recounts how the Guard was delayed for hours on Jan. 6 as officials in multiple agencies took bureaucratic steps to release the troops. It details hours of calls between officials in the Capitol and the Pentagon and as the then-chief of the Capitol Police, Steven Sund, desperately begged for help.

It finds that the Pentagon spent hours "mission planning" and seeking multiple layers of approvals as Capitol Police were being overwhelmed and brutally beaten by the rioters. It also states that the Defense Department's response was "informed by criticism" of its heavy-handed response to protests in the summer of 2020 after the death of George Floyd in police custody.

The senators are heavily critical of the Capitol Police Board, a three-member panel that includes the heads of security for the House and Senate and the Architect of the Capitol. The board is now required to approve requests by the police chief, even in urgent situations. The report recommends that its members "regularly review the policies and procedures" after senators found that none of the board members on Jan. 6 understood their own authority or could detail the statutory requirements for requesting National Guard assistance.

Two of the three members of the board, the House and Senate sergeants at arms, were pushed out in the days after the attack. Sund also resigned under pressure.

Congress needs to change the law and give the police chief more authority "immediately," Klobuchar said.

The report recommends a consolidated intelligence unit within the Capitol Police after widespread failures from multiple agencies that did not predict the attack even though insurrectionists were planning it openly on the internet. The police's intelligence unit "knew about social media posts calling for violence at the Capitol on January 6, including a plot to breach the Capitol, the online sharing of maps of the Capitol Complex's tunnel systems, and other specific threats of violence," the report says, but agents did not properly inform leadership of everything they had found.

The senators also criticize the FBI and the Homeland Security Department for downplaying online threats and for not issuing formal intelligence bulletins that help law enforcement plan.

In a response to the report, the Capitol Police acknowledged the need for improvements, some of which they said they are already making. "Law enforcement agencies across the country rely on intelligence, and the quality of that intelligence can mean the difference between life and death," the statement said.

During the attack, the report says, Capitol Police were heavily compromised by multiple failures — bad intelligence, poor planning, faulty equipment and a lack of leadership. The force's incident command system "broke down during the attack," leaving officers on the front lines without orders. There were no functional incident commanders, and some senior officers were fighting instead of giving orders. "USCP leadership never took control of the radio system to communicate orders to front-line officers," the investigation found.

"I was horrified that NO deputy chief or above was on the radio or helping us," one officer told the committee in an anonymous statement. "For hours the screams on the radio were horrific(,) the sights were unimaginable and there was a complete loss of control. ... For hours NO Chief or above took command and control. Officers were begging and pleading for help for medical triage."

Acting Chief of Police Yogananda Pittman, who replaced Sund after his resignation, told the committees that the lack of communication resulted from "incident commanders being overwhelmed and engaging with rioters, rather than issuing orders over the radio."

The committee's interviews with police officers detail what one officer told them was "absolutely brutal" abuse from Trump's supporters as they ran over them and broke into the building. They described hearing racial slurs and seeing Nazi salutes. One officer trying to evacuate the Senate said he had stopped several men in full tactical gear who said "You better get out of our way, boy, or we'll go through you to get (the Senators)."

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The insurrectionists told police officers they would kill them, and then the members of Congress. One officer said he had a "tangible fear" that he might not make it home alive.

At the same time, the senators acknowledge the officers' bravery, noting that one officer told them, "The officers inside all behaved admirably and heroically and, even outnumbered, went on the offensive and took the Capitol back."

Global sting: FBI-encrypted app tricks organized crime

By MIKE CORDER and NICK PERRY Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A global sting involving an encrypted communications platform developed by the FBI has sparked raids and arrests around the world, delivering "an unprecedented blow" to crime gangs, law enforcement authorities said Tuesday.

Operation Trojan Shield involved police swoops in 16 nations. More than 800 suspects were arrested and more than 32 tons of drugs — cocaine, cannabis, amphetamines and methamphetamines were seized along with 250 firearms, 55 luxury cars and more than \$148 million in cash and cryptocurrencies.

"Operation Trojan Shield is a shining example of what can be accomplished when international law enforcement partners from around the world work together and develop state-of-the-art investigative tools to detect, disrupt and dismantle transnational criminal organizations," Calvin Shivers, assistant director of the FBI's Criminal Investigative Division, said at a news conference in The Hague.

It was, said Australian Federal Police Commander Jennifer Hearst, "a watershed moment in global law enforcement history."

Dutch National Police Chief Constable Jannine van den Berg said the operation dealt "an unprecedented blow to criminal networks, and this is worldwide."

The seeds of the operations were sown when law enforcement agencies earlier took down two other encrypted platforms, EncroChat and Sky ECC. That meant crime gangs which traffic drugs and organize underworld hits around the world were in the market for new secure phones.

The FBI had just what they needed. An app called ANOM that was installed on modified mobile phones.

"There was a void that was created by a lack of these encrypted platforms," said Shivers. "So that created an opportunity for collaboration with our international partners, to not only develop the specific tool but also to develop the process of gathering the intelligence and disseminating the intelligence."

The app formed the backbone of Trojan Shield, an operation led by the FBI that also involved the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the European Union police agency Europol and law enforcement agencies in more than a dozen countries.

The ANOM app was popular and got more popular as criminals told one another it was a safe platform. Over the past 18 months, the FBI provided encrypted devices to more than 300 crime gangs operating in more than 100 countries. That allowed police to look over the shoulders of criminals as they discussed hits, drug shipments and other crimes.

Intelligence gathered and analyzed "enabled us to prevent murders. It led to the seizure of drugs that led to the seizure of weapons. And it helped prevent a number of crimes," Shivers said.

Earlier Tuesday, authorities in Australia and New Zealand said they'd dealt a huge blow to organized crime after hundreds of criminals were tricked into using the messaging app.

Australian authorities said they arrested 224 people and seized more than four tons of drugs and \$35 million in an ongoing operation that dates back three years. New Zealand police said they had arrested 35 people and seized drugs and assets worth millions of dollars.

"Today, the Australian government, as part of a global operation, has struck a heavy blow against organized crime," Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison told reporters. "Not just in this country, but one that will echo around organized crime around the world."

European police last year delivered a major blow to organized crime after cracking an encrypted communications network, known as EncroChat, used by criminal gangs across the continent.

In March, Belgian police arrested dozens of people after cracking another encrypted chat system, called

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Sky ECC, and seizing more than 17 tons of cocaine.

The latest operation went even further.

"The success of Operation Trojan Shield is a result of tremendous innovation, dedication and unprecedented international collaboration," Shivers said. "And the results are staggering."

Biden to launch task force on bottlenecks in supply chains

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration has completed a 100-day review of supply chains and will form a task force to address the bottlenecks in the semiconductor, construction, transportation and agriculture sectors.

Administration officials said their goal is to increase domestic manufacturing, limit shortages of vital goods and reduce a dependence on geopolitical competitors such as China. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss recommendations and policies in the 250-page review being released Tuesday, noting that the goal is to get ahead of crises such as the computer chip shortage that has hurt automakers this year.

A shortage of raw materials has made it harder for the U.S. economy to recover from the coronavirus pandemic-induced recession. The supply bottleneck has helped fuel a bout of inflation that the administration believes will be temporary, though it has provided Republican lawmakers and some economists with grounds for criticizing Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package.

The new task force will be led by the secretaries of Commerce, Agriculture and Transportation to focus on parts of the economy where there is a mismatch between supply and demand.

Besides the task force, the administration will take several other steps to bolster supply chains, with an effort spread across the government.

The Department of Health and Human Services will use the Defense Production Act to create a public-private partnership for manufacturing essential pharmaceutical drugs. It will also commit \$60 million to increase the production of pharmaceutical ingredients.

The Energy Department will release a blueprint to develop supplies for lithium batteries, in addition to providing roughly \$17 billion in loans for advanced batteries that would help shift the country to electric vehicles.

The Interior Department will create a working group to determine where critical minerals can be produced and processed in the United States. The Commerce Department plans to increase cooperation and investments within the semiconductor industry, while the Labor Department will announce \$100 million in grants for state-led apprenticeship programs.

The U.S. Trade Representative will lead a strike force to target foreign competitors with unfair practices that have eroded supply chains. The Agriculture Department will spend more than \$4 billion to strengthen the supply chain for food.

Canadian police say Muslim family targeted by deadly attack

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — A driver plowed a pickup truck into a family of five, killing four of them and seriously injuring the other in a deliberate attack that targeted the victims because they were Muslims, Canadian police said Monday.

Authorities said a young man was arrested in the parking lot of a nearby mall after the incident Sunday night in the Ontario city of London. Police said a black pickup truck mounted a curb and struck the victims at an intersection.

"This was an act of mass murder perpetuated against Muslims," Mayor Ed Holder said. "It was rooted in unspeakable hatred."

The extended family issued a statement identifying the dead as Salman Afzal, 46; his wife Madiha, 44; their daughter Yumna, 15; and a 74-year-old grandmother whose name was withheld. The hospitalized

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boy was identified as Fayez.

"Everyone who knew Salman and the rest of the Afzal family know the model family they were as Muslims, Canadians and Pakistanis," the statement said. "They worked extremely hard in their fields and excelled. Their children were top students in their school and connected strongly with spiritual their identity."

A fundraising webpage said the father was a physiotherapist and cricket enthusiast and his wife was working on a PhD in civil engineering at Western University in London. Their daughter was finishing ninth grade, and the grandmother was a "pillar" of the family, the page said.

The family said in its statement that the public needs to stand against hate and Islamophobia.

"This young man who committed this act of terror was influenced by a group that he associated with, and the rest of the community must take a strong stand against this, from the highest levels in our government to every member of the community," the statement said.

Nathaniel Veltman, 20, was in custody facing four counts of first-degree murder. Police said Veltman, a resident of London, did not know the victims.

Detective Supt. Paul Waight said police had not determined if the suspect was a member of any specific hate group. He said London police were working with federal police and prosecutors to see about potential terrorism charges. He declined to detail evidence pointing to a possible hate crime, but said the attack was planned.

About a dozen police officers combed the area around the crash site looking for evidence Monday. Blue markers on the ground dotted the intersection.

"We believe the victims were targeted because of their Islamic faith," Police Chief Stephen Williams said. "... There is no tolerance in this community who are motivated by hate target others with violence."

Canada is generally welcoming toward immigrants and all religions, but in 2017 a French Canadian man known for far-right, nationalist views went on a shooting rampage at a Quebec City mosque that killed six people.

One woman who witnessed the aftermath of the deadly crash said she couldn't stop thinking about the victims. Paige Martin said she was stopped at a red light around 8:30 p.m. when a large pickup roared past her. She said her car shook from the force.

"I was shaken up, thinking it was an erratic driver," Martin said.

Minutes later, she said, she came upon a gruesome, chaotic scene at an intersection near her home, with first responders running to help, a police officer performing chest compressions on one person and three other people lying on the ground. A few dozen people stood on the sidewalk and several drivers got out of their cars to help.

"I can't get the sound of the screams out of my head," Martin said.

From her apartment, Martin said she could see the scene and watched an official drape a sheet over one body about midnight. "My heart is just so broken for them," she said.

Zahid Khan, a family friend, said the three generations among the dead were a grandmother, father, mother and teenage daughter. The family had immigrated from Pakistan 14 years ago and were dedicated, decent and generous members of the London Muslim Mosque, he said.

"They were just out for their walk that they would go out for every day," Khan said through tears near the site of the crash. "I just wanted to see."

Qazi Khalil said he saw the family on Thursday when they were out for their nightly walk. The families lived close to each other and would get together on holidays, he said.

"This has totally destroyed me from the inside," Khalil said. "I can't really come to the terms they were no longer here."

The National Council of Canadian Muslims said Muslims in Canada have become all too familiar with the violence of Islamophobia. "This is a terrorist attack on Canadian soil, and should be treated as such," council head Mustafa Farooq said.

Nawaz Tahir, a London lawyer and Muslim community leader, said, "We must confront and stamp out Islamophobia and Islamic violence — not tomorrow, today, for the sake of our children, our family, our

communities.”

The mayor said flags would be lowered for three days in London, which he said has 30,000 to 40,000 Muslims among its more than 400,000 residents.

“To the Muslim community in London and to Muslims across the country, know that we stand with you. Islamophobia has no place in any of our communities. This hate is insidious and despicable — and it must stop,” Prime Minister Justin Trudeau tweeted.

Mixed city of Arabs and Jews remains on edge after violence

By ILAN BEN ZION and DAVID GOLDMAN Associated Press

LOD, Israel (AP) — Israeli security forces guard the streets of Lod, weeks after rioters torched patrol cars, synagogues and homes. Attackers who killed an Arab and a Jewish resident are still at large. And a mayor whom some blame for setting the stage for some of the worst domestic unrest in Israeli history remains in office.

Israel and Hamas reached a truce two weeks ago to end 11 days of fighting in the Gaza Strip. But the roots of the upheavals that wracked Israel’s mixed Jewish-Arab cities during the war have not been addressed, leaving those communities on edge.

“It’s hard for me to say what tomorrow will be like. To say that I will have the same trust, it’s hard to say,” said Rivi Abramowitz, a Jewish resident of Lod’s predominantly Arab Ramat Eshkol neighborhood.

Lod, about 16 kilometers (10 miles) southeast of Tel Aviv, next to the main international airport, is home to 77,000 people. About a third are Arabs — many of them descendants of Palestinians who formed the majority of the city before a mass expulsion amid the 1948 war around Israel’s creation.

An urban landscape of low-rise housing projects from the 1950s and ‘60s, the working-class city also is a bastion of hard-line Jewish politics. In the March 23 election, staunchly nationalist parties, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud party, won more than 60% of the vote in Lod.

Any tensions were largely below the surface — until last month.

Clashes between Jerusalem police and Palestinian protesters in and near the Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of Islam’s holiest sites, and the planned eviction of Palestinians from homes in an east Jerusalem neighborhood drove some Arab residents of Lod into the streets in protest.

On the night that war began between Israel and Hamas, the shooting of an Arab man by a Jewish resident of Lod touched off over a week of violence, and the city was placed under a state of emergency.

Similar disturbances, fueled by longstanding Arab grievances over discrimination and lack of opportunities, quickly spread to other mixed areas across the country.

In Lod, two residents were killed: Musa Hassuna, 32, by a suspected Jewish gunman, and Yigal Yehoshua, 56, by a suspected group of Arab attackers. No charges have been filed in either case, and police say investigations are ongoing.

Some Arab residents point to the election of Mayor Yair Revivo eight years ago as a turning point. Revivo has close ties with a religious nationalist movement known as the “Torah Nucleus,” which promotes what it calls Jewish values in impoverished cities.

Critics say Revivo, a member of Likud, has incited hate against Arabs, advanced discriminatory policies and empowered the Torah Nucleus in harmful ways. The group’s presence in Lod goes back some 25 years, but its numbers have swelled from two founding families to over 1,000 families today.

Before the rioting, Revivo railed against “Arab crime” in his city, calling it an “existential threat to the state of Israel.”

“Jewish criminals have a drop of compassion. Arab criminals, you don’t understand, don’t have any inhibitions,” he told Radio 103 in December.

In April, he urged the government to launch a military-style operation to clamp down on the “nightmare of gunfire, explosions, fireworks and calls to prayer amplified abnormally at 4 a.m.”

In a letter to Israel’s police chief and public security minister, Revivo described “an atmosphere of terror, a Wild West” perpetrated by Arab residents.

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Days before the May 10 riots, Revivo toured Lod with Itamar Ben Gvir, an ultranationalist lawmaker with anti-Arab views, outraging Arab residents.

Ruth Lewin-Chen of the Abraham Initiatives, a nonprofit group based in Lod that promotes coexistence, said its Arab population has grown increasingly frustrated.

She cited socioeconomic disparities between Jews and Arabs, violent crime and the absence of effective policing, planning and housing policies. She also pointed to the growing influence of the Torah Nucleus.

Many Arabs in Lod view the group with suspicion because of its ties with the West Bank settler movement. Some Arab residents refer to all of them collectively as "settlers."

During the unrest, Arabs targeted property belonging to the religious nationalist community. In response, armed West Bank settlers and other ultranationalists mobilized to Lod, fanning the flames.

"We are observant from the religious Zionist community. I don't see why we're put into the rubric of 'settlers,'" said Abramowitz, who has lived in Lod for six years with her husband, who was born in the town and whose parents were among the founders of the Torah Nucleus. "Nobody has come to throw out anybody."

Arab politician Mohammed Abu Shikri said that in his decades on Lod's city council, "I've never seen a mayor of a mixed city of Arabs and Jews who incites against Arabs, brings in settlers."

"I've known eight Lod mayors," he said. Until Revivo, "the mayors always had good relations with the Arabs."

Arabs comprise about 20% of Israel's population and are citizens with the right to vote. But they have long suffered from discrimination, and their communities are often plagued by crime, violence and poverty. They largely identify with the Palestinian cause, leading many Israelis to view them with suspicion.

A 2018 report by the Israel Democracy Institute noted disparities in Arab representation in mixed municipalities.

Although Arabs make up 30% of Lod's population, only 14% of municipal employees are Arabs, with only four on the 19-member city council. The city hasn't had an Arab deputy mayor in four decades, the report said.

"What does this say about the place of Arabs in the city?" asked Lewin-Chen. Lod lacks almost any facilities for "shared communal life," she said, and city hall does little to bring Jews and Arabs together.

A rare exception seems to be the Maccabi Lod boxing club, where Jewish and Arab athletes trained together. "Here we are like family," said coach Yaacov Wallach.

But signs of division are widespread. The town's community center has separate exercise and music classes for Arabs and Jews.

In the tense Ramat Eshkol neighborhood, members of the Torah Nucleus community held a circumcision ceremony for a newborn on a recent morning. The next day, an Arab family celebrated the birth of their boy. Although the events were just a block apart, there were no signs of the communities celebrating together.

Abramowitz, for her part, says she has cordial relations with her Arab neighbors. But she believes there are limits to how far things can go, saying she wants to "live together, but separately."

"There are after-school activities for Arabs, there are after-school activities for Jews," she said. "We are not interested in mingling — assimilation."

Revivo's office declined interview requests. But it dismissed claims of discrimination, saying he has worked "to improve the quality of life in the Arab community the likes of which hasn't been recalled since the founding of the city." It added that "throughout the city, Jews and Arabs live as good neighbors."

Samah Salaimeh, founder of Arab Women in the Center, a Lod-based advocacy group, said she's optimistic the unrest will be a "wake-up call that we can't continue this way."

Malek Hassuna, the father of the Arab killed in the unrest, stood by his son's grave, which sits beside those of several generations of the deeply rooted Lod family.

"If it's Jew or Arab, it's one blood," he said, expressing hope his grandchildren will live peacefully with their Jewish neighbors. "I want Lod to go back to how it was 40 or 50 years ago, how it was with coexistence with Jews."

Toddler who washed up on Norwegian island is identified

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — The body of a toddler that washed ashore on Norway's southwest coast on Jan.1 has been identified. It's a missing 15-month-old Iranian boy who died months earlier in the English Channel hundreds of miles away when the smuggling boat carrying him, his parents and siblings capsized, Norwegian police said.

After finding the body, police in Norway carried out DNA tests to establish the toddler's identity. Their conclusion was that it was Artin Irannezhad, who disappeared on Oct. 27, some 500 kilometers (310 miles) south of the Norwegian island of Karmøy where he was found.

He and his family drowned when a group of migrants tried to cross the waterway from France to England, Camilla Tjelle Waage of the local police in Norway said in a statement Monday.

The Norwegian DNA results confirmed an earlier hypothesis that it was Artin and was aided by the child's close relatives in the Scandinavian country.

"This story is tragic, but at least it is good to be able to give the survivors an answer," Tjelle Waage said, adding it was "a painstaking process."

For years, migrants have attempted to reach Britain by crossing the English Channel — considered on one of the world's busiest waterways — in small, unseaworthy smuggling boats.

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Amid uncertainty, schools prepare for paid athlete endorsers

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Sports Writer

There is Arizona Edge and Buffs with a Brand. Oklahoma State rolled out OSU Elite and Texas Tech launched Beyond Verified.

Florida State unveiled Apex in April with a social media video that included clips of former Seminoles sports stars from Deion Sanders to Burt Reynolds. The program Alabama created to help its athletes monetize their names, images and likenesses is simply called The Advantage.

Behind the catchy names is a sense of urgency from the schools: College sports is entering a new era, one where athletes will be permitted to be paid endorsers and social media influencers without fear of running afoul of NCAA rules.

On July 1, laws in five states will go into effect that will usurp current NCAA regulations prohibiting NIL compensation for athletes. As of now, the NCAA is lagging behind on its pledge to "modernize" its rules on the subject, but schools from coast to coast are not waiting.

Some are tapping into on-campus resources. Others are partnering with outside companies such as INFLCR, Opendorse and Altius. All are simply hoping their compliance officers can keep up as they brace for a world in which NCAA athletes can earn money off their fame and celebrity.

The goal for each school is to portray itself as a place where athletes can build their brands, with help and expertise, and to then sell that on the recruiting trail — even if some of the details are still taking shape..

"We could name something 'Unleash,' toss a couple graphics together, some cool pictures and toss out our social media ad and call it done," said Bryan Blair, deputy athletic director at Washington State. "But I'd rather our coaches have some things that are at their disposal to talk through and then when we feel like we've got a better handle on where we're going, then we're ready to jump out and take advantage of this."

Most of the programming in place on campuses is focused on education, teaching athletes entrepreneurship, financial literacy and brand development.

At Wazzu, for example, Blair said athletes will have the opportunity to take a one-credit class at the business school that covers those areas. At Tennessee, NIL-related education will now be part of the school's entrepreneurship minor.

Arizona tapped into its Eller College of Management to create Arizona Edge, which gives athletes access to professors and experts affiliated with the university. Brent Blaylock, senior associate AD for compliance, said the goal is for athletes to be "empowered to be their own personal business entities."

Arizona's plan also includes a partnership with INFLCR, which has been working with schools for several years to help programs and athletes raise their online profiles.

In a public records request last month, AP requested contracts from each Power Five conference public school with any company that provides services related to name, image and likeness. The 23 schools that responded by publication time have committed nearly \$1.9 million to contracts that range from Oregon State's five-year, \$216,000 deal with Opendorse to the \$10,000 one-time payment Arizona State made to the company for providing photos athletes can use to enhance social media posts.

Those are modest numbers considering Power Five budgets often exceed \$100 million annually.

Still, every dollar counts, especially coming out of the pandemic, and plenty of schools have decided to hold off on joining up with one of the growing number of companies jumping into the NIL business.

Colorado formally announced Buffs with a Brand in June 2020, but a year later CU had yet to sign on deal with an outside firm.

"So we think, creating our own program internally makes sense," Colorado athletic director Rick George said. "But we also think having somebody like an INFLNCR or CLC that can help with the monitoring and giving us data points on what areas are working, what is the market value of certain things. I think all of those things are going to be really important as we move forward."

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UCLA, Iowa and Miami were also among the schools that had not yet partnered with an NIL company. "I purposely didn't want to because it's still changing," UCLA athletic director Martin Jarmond said. "Yeah, we know it's coming, but we don't know exactly what format yet."

The NCAA has had an NIL proposal ready to be voted on since January, but an inquiry from the Justice Department slowed things down. President Mark Emmert has insisted new NIL rules will be in effect by next football season and action could come when the Division I Council meets June 22-23.

While some states plunge ahead, the NCAA also hopes to get some help from Congress in the form of federal NIL legislation that would supersede state laws and provide uniformity. The NCAA wants "guardrails" around NIL compensation, restrictions that would curtail corruption and create a firewall between schools and athletes while still allowing them to be paid by third parties.

Some schools are looking to bulk up their compliance departments to deal with NIL.

"We are certainly still considering it, even in these tight financial times," said Brian Russell, who heads academic service and student-athlete development at Illinois.

An outside company could help a school monitor NIL deals athletes are making and assess market value, but what if the final version of whatever law that comes out of Capitol Hill prohibits schools from doing that?

"I wanted us to know what we needed first before just going to the market, because they'll sell you everything," Pittsburgh athletic director Heather Lyke said.

Indiana was one of the earliest schools to publicly embrace NIL, and the second in the country to announce a partnership with Opendorse. Nebraska, the alma mater of company founder Blake Lawrence, was the first.

Indiana announced the formation of a "first-of-its-kind" NIL task force in August and wants to be known as the "NIL school," said Jeremy Gray, senior associate athletic director.

But really, they all do. In college athletics, recruiting is everything and no school wants to be seen as falling behind when prospects and their parents have questions about NIL.

Those catchy NIL program names, with press releases and videos, make for an easy recruiting pitch — even if the only substantive differences from school to school are the names.

"I think a lot of these early announcements ... are about recruiting, but how much bang for your buck are you getting by announcing in January or February versus the announcement in June?" Blair said.

EXPLAINER: How will insurers cover a new Alzheimer's drug?

By TOM MURPHY AP Health Writer

Federal regulators have approved the first new drug for Alzheimer's disease in nearly 20 years, leaving patients waiting to see how insurers will handle the pricey new treatment.

Health care experts expect broad coverage of the drug, which was approved Monday. But what that means for patients will vary widely depending on their insurance plan. In some cases, that could mean coming up with several thousand dollars to pay for what the insurer didn't cover.

And there's no guarantee that every case will be covered.

Here's what you need to know:

WHAT WAS APPROVED?

The Food and Drug Administration said it granted approval to a drug from Biogen based on clinical research results that seemed "reasonably likely" to benefit Alzheimer's patients.

It's the only drug that U.S. regulators have said can likely treat the underlying disease, rather than just manage symptoms. The new drug, which Biogen developed with Japan's Eisai Co., did not reverse mental decline. It slowed it in one study.

The FDA's decision came despite the conclusion of its advisory committee that there wasn't enough evidence that the drug slowed the brain-destroying disease.

WHAT DOES IT DO?

It aims to help clear harmful clumps of a protein called beta-amyloid from the brain. The medication will be marketed as Aduhelm and is to be given as an infusion every four weeks.

WHAT WILL IT COST?

Biogen said the drug would cost approximately \$56,000 for a typical year's worth of treatment, and it said the price would not be raised for four years.

HOW WILL INSURERS COVER IT?

They will likely request some documentation first that the patient needs the drug. Many plans will require doctors to submit records and other paperwork justifying the treatment before they agree to cover it.

Insurers also will likely require pre-approval for brain scans needed to determine that the patient is a candidate for treatment, said Lance Grady of Avalere Health consultants.

He noted that some plans also may want to see the results of a scan before they decide to cover the next infusion, which could delay treatment.

IS COVERAGE GUARANTEED?

Medicare is widely expected to cover the treatment. Insurers that offer private or commercial coverage also will pay for care that doctors deem medically necessary.

That may not mean every case, though. If the treatment is proposed for a patient with advanced Alzheimer's, and research shows the drug isn't effective in that population, then the insurer may not pay for it.

"That happens all the time with drugs," said Robert Laszewski, a health care consultant and former insurance executive. "Just because the FDA says its safe doesn't mean it's appropriate for everybody."

WHAT WILL PATIENTS PAY?

That's impossible to say broadly.

It can depend on the person's coverage and their out-of-pocket maximum, which is a plan's limit for how much a patient pays in a year for in-network care before insurance picks up the rest of the bill.

Some patients who are already receiving a lot of care may not wind up with a huge added expense from the drug before they hit that limit.

Patients who have a supplemental plan for their Medicare coverage also may wind up with few out-of-pocket costs for the drug.

Patients with Medicare Advantage coverage, which is run by private insurers, or individual health insurance could pay several thousand dollars before they hit their plan's annual limit, depending on the plan.

"That could be very burdensome for someone, especially if a person is looking at this cost every single year, and they don't have an option to get a better health plan," said Stacie Dusetzina, an associate professor at Vanderbilt University and drug pricing expert. "It can add up."

ARE THE DRUGMAKERS HELPING?

Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Biogen plans to begin shipping millions of doses within two weeks.

The company says it will help patients figure out their options for financial assistance and find providers and care infusion sites. The drugmaker also is offering programs to help reduce the out-of-pocket cost for some patients with commercial coverage.

But people with Medicare and Medicare Advantage coverage cannot get drugmaker discounts like that. Health care researchers say most of the people who will need this drug will have some form of Medicare coverage.

Tearful reunion after mom saw photo of daughter at US border

By ACACIA CORONADO Report for America/Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Six years had passed since Glenda Valdez kissed her toddler goodbye and left for the United States — six years since she held Emely in her arms.

But here she was, at Texas' Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, tearfully embracing the little girl she left behind. And it happened only because she had glimpsed a televised photo of Emely, part of an Associated Press story on young people crossing the Mexican border alone.

"I love you so much," she whispered in Spanish in her 9-year-old daughter's ear. "My God, thank you."

It was a fairy tale ending — for the moment — to a complicated story, one that began in Honduras and with an unhappy relationship, according to Valdez, 26.

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Emely's father, she said, was absent and did not provide for them. When Valdez emigrated in pursuit of a better life, the girl was left in the custody of Valdez's mother. But Emely's father took her back.

Valdez said she only had sporadic contact with her daughter — the father preferred that they not speak regularly. Every so often, Valdez would get a video call; eventually, Emely told her that she had a new stepmother who was not kind to her.

Emely told her that her father — seeing that she was unhappy with her life in that household — had decided to send her away, without telling her where. He placed her in the care of an adult who over several weeks helped her journey to the U.S.-Mexico border.

Around midnight as the day turned to May 13, Border Patrol agents encountered Emely in La Joya, Texas. She had been walking in the brush for six hours with a group of strangers and had lost a shoe in the mud. She was sobbing uncontrollably.

"I was thirsty and we didn't have anything to drink and I didn't like it and I didn't know where I was going," Emely said in Spanish on Sunday.

When the agents found her, she said she had lost her mother's number, and did not know where her mother lived. Desperate, she gave reporters details she thought might identify her mom: "Her hair is curly, but sometimes she straightens it. And she has a lip ring."

Her mother was expecting her, she said. But Valdez said Sunday she had no idea her child had been sent to cross the border.

Valdez was at her home in Austin, watching a Univision newscast one afternoon in May, when she saw the picture of Emely in a red hoodie. She knew at once that it was her daughter. Desperate, she immediately began making calls to U.S. authorities, the network and refugee agencies.

"I was like in shock, honestly, because imagine you are watching the TV and you suddenly see your daughter," Valdez said. "And then even more to see her crying and everything she was saying broke my heart, honestly, everything she said there, that she was upset and crying and all that, and to see her image, barefoot and all was very difficult for me."

Emely said she was taken to a group home. But Valdez didn't know that, and for weeks she said she got only vague answers to her pleas for information. Be patient, she was told.

"I was just traumatized, like I spent many days crying, watching her video, looking through her photos and crying and crying and crying," Valdez said.

Last Wednesday, she got a call: Emely was in a government shelter. They would be reunited soon. And then, on Saturday, she was told to meet her daughter at the airport the next day. At the appointed time, she raced to the bottom of the stairs at the crowded arrivals terminal to hug her daughter.

Emely is part of a large increase in children traveling alone who are entering the United States from Mexico — nearly 19,000 in March (the highest number on record) and nearly 17,200 in April (the second highest). Almost one of every three unaccompanied children appearing at the border is from Honduras, second only to Guatemala.

Guided by federal law and a decades-old court settlement, the U.S. Health and Human Services Department seeks to place unaccompanied children in the "least restrictive setting" possible, which, in the vast majority of cases is a parent or close relative already living in the United States. It took an average of 35 days to place children in a home at the end of May; Emely was reunited with her mother 10 days less than that.

Children are typically released with instructions to appear in immigration court, where a judge rules on their asylum claims. Decisions can take years — the court system has a backlog of 1.3 million cases.

While Emely awaits her court date, the girl has moved in with Valdez, her husband and their two daughters, who are excited to get to know this new sister they had only met virtually.

And to Valdez's immense satisfaction, she is reconnecting with the little girl she said goodbye to six years ago.

"Well, the plan is everything that God wants and to be with her here," Valdez said.

"To never be separated again. To ask God that we may never be separated again. To give her all of the love that I haven't been able to give her. Everything that she is missing. To give her everything I can and

to take her to school. That she has a better future, to remedy a little of what has happened.”

Pipeline exec to face Congress as US recovers most of ransom

By ERIC TUCKER and BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The chief executive of the massive fuel pipeline hit by ransomware last month is expected to detail his company’s response to the cyberattack and to explain his decision to authorize a multimillion-dollar payment when he testifies before Congress this week.

Colonial Pipeline CEO Joseph Blount will face the Senate Homeland Security Committee on Tuesday, one day after the Justice Department revealed it had recovered the majority of the \$4.4 million ransom payment the company made in hopes of getting its system back online. A second hearing is set for Wednesday before the House Homeland Security Committee.

Blount’s testimony marks his first appearance before Congress since the May 7 ransomware attack that led Georgia-based Colonial Pipeline, which supplies roughly half the fuel consumed on the East Coast, to temporarily halt operations. The attack has been attributed to a Russia-based gang of cybercriminals using the DarkSide ransomware variant, one of more than 100 variants the FBI is currently investigating.

The company decided soon after the attack to pay ransom of 75 bitcoin, then valued at roughly \$4.4 million. Though the FBI has historically discouraged ransomware payments for fear of encouraging cyberattacks, Colonial officials have said they saw the transaction as necessary to resume the vital fuel transport business as rapidly as possible.

The operation to seize cryptocurrency paid to the Russia-based hacker group is the first of its kind to be undertaken by a specialized ransomware task force created by the Biden administration Justice Department. It reflects a rare victory in the fight against ransomware as U.S. officials scramble to confront a rapidly accelerating threat targeting critical industries around the world.

“By going after the entire ecosystem that fuels ransomware and digital extortion attacks — including criminal proceeds in the form of digital currency — we will continue to use all of our resources to increase the cost and consequences of ransomware and other cyber-based attacks,” Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said at a news conference announcing the operation.

In a statement Monday, Blount said he was grateful for the FBI’s efforts and said holding hackers accountable and disrupting their activities “is the best way to deter and defend against future attacks of this nature.

“The private sector also has an equally important role to play and we must continue to take cyber threats seriously and invest accordingly to harden our defenses,” he added.

Cryptocurrency is favored by cybercriminals because it enables direct online payments regardless of geographical location, but in this case, the FBI was able to identify a virtual currency wallet used by the hackers and recovered the proceeds from there, Abbate said. The Justice Department did not provide details about how the FBI had obtained a “key” for the specific bitcoin address, but said law enforcement had been able to track multiple transfers of the cryptocurrency.

“For financially motivated cyber criminals, especially those presumably located overseas, cutting off access to revenue is one of the most impactful consequences we can impose,” Abbate said.

The Bitcoin amount seized — 63.7, currently valued at \$2.3 million after the price of Bitcoin tumbled— amounted to 85% of the total ransom paid, which is the exact amount that the cryptocurrency-tracking firm Elliptic says it believes was the take of the affiliate who carried out the attack. The ransomware software provider, DarkSide, would have gotten the other 15%.

“The extortionists will never see this money,” said Stephanie Hinds, the acting U.S. attorney for the Northern District of California, where a judge earlier Monday authorized the seizure warrant.

Ransomware attacks — in which hackers encrypt a victim organization’s data and demand a hefty sum for returning the information — have flourished across the globe. Last year was the costliest on record for such attacks. Hackers have targeted vital industries, as well as hospitals and police departments.

Weeks after the Colonial Pipeline attack, a ransomware attack attributed to REvil, a Russian-speaking

gang that has made some of the largest ransomware demands on record in recent months, disrupted production at Brazil's JBS SA, the world's largest meat processing company.

The ransomware business has evolved into a highly compartmentalized racket, with labor divided among the provider of the software that locks data, ransom negotiators, hackers who break into targeted networks, hackers skilled at moving undetected through those systems and exfiltrating sensitive data — and even call centers in India employed to threaten people whose data was stolen to pressure for extortion payments.

State media: Kim has plans to stabilize N. Korean economy

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un presented economic plans to senior ruling party officials before an upcoming meeting to review efforts to overcome hardships brought about by the pandemic, state media said Tuesday.

The Korean Central News Agency said Kim held his consultations Monday in preparation for a meeting of the Workers' Party's powerful Central Committee at which they will discuss state affairs for the first half of 2021. The meeting was set for early June and could take place as early as this week.

Kim's plans were not specified but were described as intending to bring "tangible change" to stabilizing the economy and people's living conditions.

The North Korean economy has been crippled by decades of mismanagement, U.S.-led sanctions over Kim's nuclear weapons program and the coronavirus pandemic. South Korean officials say there are no signs North Korea is easing the border controls it imposed at the start of the pandemic or importing more industrial and agricultural materials to boost production.

The Workers' Party last held a plenary meeting of Central Committee members in February, when Kim ripped into state economic agencies for their "passive and self-protecting tendencies" in setting their annual goals.

Earlier in the year, at the party's first congress since 2016, Kim urged his people to be resilient in the struggle for economic self-reliance and called for reasserting greater state control over the economy, boosting agricultural production and prioritizing the development of chemicals and metal industries. Those sectors have been critically depleted by sanctions and halted imports of factory materials amid the pandemic.

Kim has shown unusual candor in addressing the North's economic problems in recent political speeches, saying that the country was facing its "worst ever" situation due to COVID-19, sanctions and heavy flooding last summer that decimated crops. He even called for his people to brace for another "arduous march," a term that had been used to describe a 1990s famine that killed hundreds of thousands.

In a meeting of the Workers' Party's political bureau last week, Kim expressed appreciation that a lot of economic works were being sped up thanks to the "ideological enthusiasm and fighting spirit of self-reliance" demonstrated by the party and his people. But he also said there was a need to correct unspecified "deflective matters," which he said would be discussed at Central Committee's plenary meeting.

While North Korea monitoring groups have yet to detect signs of mass starvation or major instability, some analysts say conditions could be aligning for a perfect storm that undercuts food and exchange markets and triggers public panic.

The Geneva-based Assessment Capacities Project, a nonprofit that specializes in humanitarian needs assessment, said in May that it considers North Korea to be at high risk of a humanitarian crisis. It said poor economic governance, repressive political measures and an increasing dependence on internal production amid a cutback in imports have negatively impacted the country's population.

"Chronic food insecurity and limited access to basic services, such as health care and clean water, have left more than 10 million people in need of humanitarian assistance," the group said.

The economic setbacks have left Kim with nothing to show for his ambitious diplomacy with former President Donald Trump, which failed to bring the North sanctions relief, and the North has so far ignored the Biden administration's calls to resume dialogue.

Some experts say Kim could use the upcoming Central Committee meeting to address the stalled diplomatic efforts.

After Manchin move, Democrats' voting long shot grows longer

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

Democrats and voting rights groups scrambled Monday to figure out their next move after a key senator's opposition seemed to doom a sweeping election overhaul bill and raise the prospect that no voting legislation would pass Congress amid what experts say is the greatest attack on voting rights in generations.

Sen. Joe Manchin's op-ed in a newspaper in his native West Virginia on Sunday regarding HR1 effectively neutralized his party's main weapon against a wave of Republican-backed laws tightening access to the ballot in numerous states. It left Democrats and voting rights groups grasping for an alternative.

Some said they'd follow Manchin's suggestions and prioritize a narrower piece of legislation known as HR4 that updates the Voting Rights Act to once again require federal approval of new voting laws and legislative districts in certain states. Others said they wanted to increase the pressure on Manchin, who is scheduled to meet with civil rights leaders Tuesday. Still others insisted that Democrats needed to bring HR1 to the Senate floor later this month, as the chamber's leadership planned to do before Manchin's op-ed.

"It's going to get messy," said Fred Wertheimer, the president of the good-government organization Democracy 21 who helped draft HR1 in 2017. "What Manchin said is not the final word, as far as we're concerned. I don't believe he is prepared to go down in history as the senator that denied millions of eligible citizens, and in particular people of color, the opportunity to vote."

The Rev. Al Sharpton, National Urban League President Marc Morial and other civil rights leaders will be meeting with Manchin in Washington to discuss voting rights and other pieces of the legislative agenda. President Joe Biden, who met with many of the civil rights leaders last week in Tulsa, urged them to meet with Manchin and keep the tone convivial and constructive, and to not pressure the senator — at least not yet, according to a person familiar with the discussion who was not authorized to speak about private conversations and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

The Rev. William Barber II, a key liberal activist who leads the Poor People's Campaign, represented the breadth of liberal anger at Manchin, tweeting Monday that his group would lead a march in West Virginia to "challenge Manchin."

Manchin, a Democratic senator in a deeply red state, handed the GOP an effective veto on voting legislation, writing in the Charleston Gazette-Mail that he needed at least some Republicans on board to support any new election bill. He said he would not eliminate the 60-vote requirement to break a filibuster that would allow Democrats to pass the legislation without Republican votes.

"Voting and election reform that is done in a partisan manner will all but ensure partisan divisions continue to deepen," Manchin wrote.

Only one Republican senator, Alaska's Lisa Murkowski, has signed onto Manchin's preferred Voting Rights Act update, an indication of how politics on the issue have shifted since the Senate unanimously renewed the Voting Rights Act in 2006. And the newly aggressive constellation of conservative voting groups that mobilized against H.R. 1 say they will now campaign to keep the GOP united against HR4 as well.

"The end result of HR4 is the same — it's a federal takeover of the election system," Jessica Anderson, executive director of the conservative policy organization Heritage Action for America, said in an interview. "As long as you have consensus on the right, standing together in lockstep, you're not going to have a bipartisan break."

After former President Donald Trump's lies about how he lost the 2020 election because of widespread fraud, voting has become a polarized partisan issue much like abortion or taxes. That has almost guaranteed inaction in Congress, where the filibuster allows a unified minority party to block most major legislative initiatives.

"I think it's likely Congress doesn't do anything" on voting, said Rick Hasen, a University of California-Irvine law professor and election law specialist.

If there is one bill that could get any GOP support, it would be HR4, Hasen argued, noting the Republican Party did once support the Voting Rights Act. That was before a 2013 Supreme Court opinion written by the court's conservative majority that struck down the way the act was used to require 13 states to "pre-

clear" changes to voting laws with the Department of Justice. The new bill, named after late Democratic Rep. John Lewis, would reinstate those preclearance requirements.

In contrast, Hasen said, HR1 was a "Democratic wish list" that included provisions neutering voter ID laws and implementing federal financing of elections that would never draw GOP support. "It was a kind of cheap signaling device for Democrats," Hasen said.

But HR1's backers insist the bill remains the antidote to the recent wave of Republican legislation curtailing access to mail voting, cutting early voting hours and making it easier for partisan poll watchers to challenge voters' qualifications.

Wendy Weiser of the Brennan Center for Justice, a public policy group that advocates for voting access and backs HR1, noted that the Voting Rights Act update would address only future laws, not ones passed this year. It would only allow the federal government to weigh in to protect the rights of racial minorities rather than address other discrimination, like a new law in Montana that removes student IDs as an allowable form of identification for voting. And it is silent on provisions like the drawing of legislative district lines for partisan advantage, something barred in HR1.

"Those provisions in HR1 still need to be adopted, somehow, or we're not going to be able to stem this really scary attack on our democratic institutions," Weiser said.

Activists and lawmakers stressed that the voting rights update, HR4, is also crucial. It's been delayed by having to go through a complicated process of hearings and fact-gathering to comply with the Supreme Court's 2013 ruling. In the end, they say the fate of an election overhaul will be clearer once Manchin tries to round up the 10 Republicans needed to break a filibuster.

At that point, they hope the West Virginia Democrat will have to confront the realities of the partisan politics of voting.

"They are not showing a readiness to stand up and do what's right, so the notion you could get 10 of them to come along is far-fetched," said Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., a primary sponsor of HR1. "You are not going to get real change without filibuster reform."

Retailers shine a spotlight on Black-owned beauty brands

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — When Rose Ingleton launched her own namesake skincare line two years ago, she couldn't break into the big chains and was forced to use her own funds and get financial help from family and friends.

But things changed after the nationwide Black Lives Matter protests last year. Ingleton, a Manhattan-based Black dermatologist with more than 20 years of experience, reconnected with beauty chain Sephora and now her products can be found on the retailer's website as well as at Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue.

"There was this sudden awareness," Ingleton said. "I am now at the top food chain. I'm now getting ready to approach deeper pocket investors."

As corporations continue to face a racial reckoning, the beauty industry is trying to address the criticism that it centers too many of its products around whiteness by pushing more items onto store shelves that better represent the diverse women they serve.

Retailers from Sephora to Walmart and Target have focused on increasing their offerings of Black-owned brands across all categories as a key strategy to combat racial bias. They're also developing entrepreneurship programs and trying to create a pipeline of new talent.

More than 20 companies including Sephora and most recently Ulta Beauty have signed onto a nationwide campaign called 15 Percent Pledge, which aims to have companies from all industries commit to at least 15% of their products on their shelves to Black-owned businesses — in line with the U.S. Black population.

Plenty more have not yet signed it, but some are forging their own path. Target, for instance, said it will be launching 50 Black-owned and Black-founded beauty brands as part of its broader commitment to add more than 500 Black-owned brands by the end of 2025.

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Retailers can't afford to ignore this lucrative segment.

Last year, Hispanic consumers spent 6.1% more on beauty and other items compared with 2019, while Blacks spent 5.4% more, according to NielsenIQ. That pace exceeded the 3.5% increase for the total U.S. population.

And while NPD Group Inc. found that Black-owned brands represent just 4% of sales in high-end makeup, they performed 1.5 to 4 times better in May, June and July 2020 — during the peak months of the Black Lives Matter movement — than the rest of the market, reversing their declines and reflecting a consumer appetite to support such businesses.

Still, overall progress has been slow. Ulta wants to double the number of Black-owned brands to 26 by year-end, but that will only get the penetration to 5%, says its chief merchandising officer Monica Arnaudo. Ulta and Sephora say they want to make sure the brands are financially successful.

Black entrepreneurs also argue they continue to be pigeon-holed by retailers and investors who think their products are only for women of color. And beauty brands catering to women of color continue in some cases to be locked up in stores — even after a number of stores including Walmart, CVS Health and Walgreens pledged last year they would end that practice.

Taydra Mitchell Jackson is the marketing director of The Lip Bar, a Black-owned brand based in Detroit, Michigan that's now in more than 1,200 stores including Target and Walmart. She says retailers have to be careful not to think of adding merchandise from Black owners as just a token gesture.

"Merchandising is critical, but messaging and how I feel when I walk in the store are just as important," Jackson said.

She noted some social media influencers complaining about Lip Bar items being locked up at Walmart, "creating a feeling of being inferior." The brand is following up with the company.

Walmart responded that it does "not tolerate discrimination of any kind at Walmart. We serve millions of customers weekly, crossing all demographics, and are focused on meeting their needs while providing the best shopping experience at each store."

The problems facing Black-owned brands are not new.

Beauty brands for Black women have been around for years, but they've struggled to get shelf space in stores, says Tiffany Gill, an associate professor of history at Rutgers University who wrote a book called "Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry."

"The fantasy of beauty has often been constructed around a celebration of white bodies," Gill said. "And to even have makeup for darker skinned women or to put them in campaigns in visible ways means to completely undermine the whole foundation of the industry."

Even when brands did create makeup for darker skin shades, those products would be sold online instead of stores.

"As a black consumer, you often do not have the opportunity to have the in-store retail experience," Gill said.

Things began to change in 2017, when pop superstar Rihanna launched her Fenty Beauty makeup line. In two years, it became one of the top 10 selling beauty brands, alongside decades-old brands such as Mary Kay and L'Oreal-owned Urban Decay, says market research firm Euromonitor. Other companies took notice, adding more shades for darker skin or promising to give more shelf space to Black-owned brands in stores.

Still, it wasn't until last summer's Black Lives Matter protests that Black-owned brands started to see more interest from investors and retailers.

As of mid-2020, a study by a resource called digitalundivided identified 183 Black and Hispanic women founders who had secured at least \$1 million in investor backing for their businesses, more than double the number in 2018, says Lauren Maillian, CEO of digitalundivided, which has a data base of more than 800 Black and Hispanic-women-founded companies.

But it also found that these women received less than half of 1% of venture capital investment. That's even as their failure rate in its data base is 27% — lower than the 40% national fail rate for startups

founded in 2017.

Black entrepreneur Monique Rodriguez, who co-founded natural hair care company Mielle Organics, saw her sales increase at a faster rate last year over previous years. And this year, she secured a big investment from Boston-based private equity firm Berkshire Partners.

"I don't think it will fade," she said of the efforts to diversify beauty. "It is here to stay, but we have to put forth an effort that our voices continue to be heard."

US pullout from Afghanistan half done, but questions remain

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and ROBERT BURNS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan is more than half done, and U.S. officials say that while it could be completed by July 4, the final exit of equipment and troops more likely will be later in the summer.

As early as this week, the top U.S. commander for the Middle East, Gen. Frank McKenzie, will give Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin a range of military options for securing the U.S. embassy in Afghanistan and providing counterterrorism support from outside the country once the withdrawal is complete, officials said. The number of American troops needed for the overall security missions inside Afghanistan will depend on a variety of requirements, and could range from roughly a couple hundred to a bit less than 1,000, officials said.

McKenzie's deliberations are a reminder that much about U.S. postwar support for Afghanistan remains uncertain, including how to protect Afghans who worked with the U.S. government from reprisals and how to avoid an intelligence void that could hamper U.S. early warning of extremist threats inside Afghanistan.

At stake is not just a political verdict on President Joe Biden's judgment about the risk posed by renewed instability in Afghanistan, but also the legacy of an American war that was launched 20 years ago in response to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and that imperceptibly morphed into what Biden calls "this forever war."

McKenzie is expected to provide options on the amount of aerial surveillance and drones needed to keep an eye on any potential resurgence of al-Qaida, Islamic State or other militant groups. Those options will involve U.S. aircraft from ships at sea and air bases in the Gulf region, such as Al Dhafra air base in the United Arab Emirates. And they could range from persistent U.S. overwatch to a more minimal presence.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss planning details, said there are no options yet for basing U.S. troops or aircraft in nations neighboring Afghanistan, because those possibilities require diplomatic negotiations. Any agreements with countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan or Uzbekistan would be difficult because there would be Russian opposition.

McKenzie told reporters Monday that the withdrawal from Afghanistan is on pace and "continuing very smoothly." He said it was "about halfway finished," but provided no details. Other officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the pullout was more than half completed but provided no specifics.

Officials acknowledge that the withdrawal so far has largely involved removing or otherwise disposing of the mountain of equipment, gadgetry, aircraft and other war materials that accumulated in Afghanistan over the years — not the departure of troops. Officials say the troops — who are needed to secure and execute the withdrawal — will be among the last to leave.

McKenzie will give Austin estimates on how many troops will be needed to secure the embassy and the airport. Turkish troops have provided security at part of the airport, and negotiations are underway to determine if that will continue. At least some American troops are likely to be needed — at least in the near term — to ensure that diplomats can come and go safely from the airport.

So far, the U.S. military has none of the Taliban interference that American officials had feared at the start. But there are widespread concerns about whether financial and diplomatic support alone will prevent the Kabul government's collapse after the international military support is gone.

In a statement released Tuesday, the Taliban said it would not attack Afghans who had worked with the U.S. military, calling on them to return to their homes and not flee the country.

The pullout officially began May 1, when the number of U.S. troops was between 2,500 and 3,500. When

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Biden announced the decision in April, he gave the military until Sept. 11 and promised there would be no "hasty rush to the exit" by the remaining U.S. and coalition troops.

Gathering, cataloguing and shipping out tons of equipment and weaponry, and turning over military posts to the Afghan government, is an unusually big logistical challenge. Adding to the difficulty is the need to coordinate the effort with the Biden administration's political, diplomatic and counterterrorism goals in a country whose government is fragile at best.

The Pentagon says it will do all it can to ensure that Afghanistan does not collapse as soon as its international military support is gone. But given the Taliban's interest in returning to power, and the lack of progress toward a political settlement between the Taliban and the U.S.-supported Kabul government, skeptics say the outlook appears dim.

"There is zero chance of a good outcome," says David Sedney, a deeply experienced Afghan policy hand who believes Washington is squandering American credibility by leaving before the country is capable of defending itself.

The al-Qaida extremist group led by Osama bin Laden was the immediate target of the U.S. invasion, and while bin Laden was killed 10 years ago and much of the group's capacity has withered, it remains a worry. A June 1 United Nations Security Council report said al-Qaida remains linked to the Taliban.

"Large numbers of al-Qaida fighters and other foreign extremist elements aligned with the Taliban are located in various parts of Afghanistan," it said in a review of the political and security situation between May 2020 and April 2021. "Al-Qaida continued to suffer attrition during the period under review, with a number of senior figures killed, often alongside Taliban associates while co-located with them."

Sedney, who spent much of the past two decades either in Afghanistan or at the Pentagon working on Afghanistan policy, said in an interview that a major flaw in the U.S. withdrawal plan is that it includes removing all U.S. civilian contractors, whose work is central to the proper functioning of Afghan military aircraft, radars, battlefield intelligence systems and other equipment.

"The whole thing is chaotic," he said.

John Sopko, the U.S. special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, whose organization monitors U.S. efforts to rebuild and stabilize Afghanistan, said in March that the loss of contractor support is likely to be as devastating to Afghanistan as the departure of foreign troops.

'A lot of anxiety' for Democrats as Biden agenda stalls

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hopes for a big infrastructure investment are teetering. An ambitious elections and voting bill is all but dead. Legislation on police brutality, gun control and immigration has stalled out.

Nearly six months of Democratic control in Washington, the party's progressive wing is growing increasingly restless as campaign promises go undone — blocked not only by Republican obstruction, but also by Democrats' own inability to unite fully around priorities.

The time ahead is pivotal for President Joe Biden and his allies in Congress to seize what some view as a transformative moment to rebuild the economy and reshape the country.

"There's a lot of anxiety," said Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., who had been a co-chair of Bernie Sanders' presidential bid. "It's a question really for President Biden: What kind of president does he want to be?"

The summer work period is traditionally among the busiest for Congress, but especially sharpened this year as Democrats strain to deliver on Biden's agenda. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer warned colleagues that June will "test our resolve." Infrastructure talks are dragging, though Biden is expected to talk again Tuesday with Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, the lead Republican negotiator. But the limits of bipartisanship in the 50-50 Senate are increasingly clear.

The party suffered a debilitating blow over the weekend when Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., announced his opposition to the voting bill, titled S.1 because it is a top party priority. Many Democrats view it as crucial to protecting democracy and a direct response to restrictive new voting laws being passed in Republican-led states egged on by Donald Trump, the former president.

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"Do I feel discouraged? Yes," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., chairwoman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, warning of a failure to deliver on the promises. "We will lose voters for a generation."

Schumer, in setting the agenda, is challenging senators to prepare to make tough choices. But he is also facing a test of his own ability to lead the big-tent party through a volatile period of shifting priorities and tactics in the aftermath of the Trump era and the Capitol insurrection.

While Democratic senators have been generating goodwill by considering bipartisan bills in the evenly split Senate, they face mounting pressure from voters who put them in office to fight harder for legislation that Republicans are determined to block with the filibuster. Democrats hold the edge in the Senate because Vice President Kamala Harris can break a voting tie.

Fed up by the delays, some senators are ready to change the rules to eliminate the filibuster, which they blame for the inaction. The long-running Senate filibuster rules require 60 votes to advance most legislation, meaning as many as 10 Republicans would need to cross party lines to help Democrats achieve their priorities. Some senators propose reducing the voting threshold to 51.

But Manchin, in announcing his opposition to the voting rights bill Sunday as the "wrong piece of legislation to bring our country together," also restated his refusal to end the filibuster — for now, denying his party a crucial vote needed to make the rules change that could help advance its agenda.

On Tuesday, leading civil rights figures including Rev. Al Sharpton and Marc Morial are scheduled to meet with Manchin in Washington. Biden urged them to visit the senator to discuss the voting bill and the legislative agenda. He encouraged them to keep the conversation constructive and not put pressure on the senator — at least not yet, according to a person familiar with the discussion but not authorized to speak about private conversations.

While Manchin has talked about supporting another voting bill, the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, advocates of S.1 say both pieces of legislation are needed. Biden agrees Congress should move forward with both, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday.

At the same time, Democratic groups supporting S.1 vowed to continue with a \$30 million campaign pressing Democratic senators to rewrite filibuster rules and pass the bill — including with TV ads in Manchin's West Virginia.

But it's not just Manchin who opposes changing the filibuster laws. Without support from him or other filibuster defenders, like Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., Democratic senators will be forced to confront the limits of their fragile majority. If Democrats decided to go it alone on the big infrastructure bill, as talks with Republican senators stall, they would need to be unified because they would have no votes to spare.

Failing to deliver on campaign promises that are popular with voters could exacerbate party divisions and expose Democrats to criticism from their own ranks as well as from Republicans eager to show that Biden's party cannot govern.

"We need to move the ball," said Yvette Simpson, CEO of Democracy for America, a liberal advocacy organization.

"We told everyone to come out against all odds in the pandemic and vote," she said about the 2020 election. The promise was that with Democrats in power, "we're going to have all these great things happen, their lives are going to be better. And what they're finding is that it looks like Washington as usual."

Schumer has been laying the groundwork for this moment since he became majority leader in January, trying to build the case that bipartisanship can work in some cases — with passage of an Asian hate crimes bill or a water public works package. But he also recognizes that it has limits, according to two Democratic aides granted anonymity to discuss the private strategy.

The Democrats' weekly closed-door policy caucus lunches have been intense, particularly during the two special sessions they have held to privately debate the path forward on the voting rights bill, one of the aides said.

Rather than force reluctant senators to fall in line, Schumer is trying to lead Democrats to their own conclusion — either bipartisan deals with Republicans are possible or they have no choice but to go it alone on infrastructure or other priorities, the aides said.

One aide suggested Schumer is no arm-twisting leader in the style of Lyndon Johnson, who before he became president was famous for his hardball cajoling as majority leader.

Khanna said the president, however, can have a big role. "This would be his LBJ moment — can he pick up the phone and work his magic to get his Democrats on board?"

Fed lawyers: Trump not liable for 'crude' remarks at accuser

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump cannot be held personally liable for "crude" and "disrespectful" remarks he made while president about a woman who accused him of rape, Justice Department lawyers said Monday in arguing for him to be replaced by the United States as defendant in a defamation lawsuit.

The lawyers told the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan that responding to allegations of misconduct falls within activities that form part of any president's office.

Trump was acting "within the scope of his office" in denying wrongdoing after White House reporters asked him about claims by columnist E. Jean Carroll in a June 2019 book that he attacked her in the mid-1990s at an upscale Manhattan department store, the lawyers from the Washington office of the Justice Department wrote.

"Elected public officials can — and often must — address allegations regarding personal wrongdoing that inspire doubt about their suitability for office," the lawyers said.

"Such wrongdoing can include not only the serious charges of criminal behavior leveled here, but a range of activities including fraud and malfeasance. Officials do not step outside the bounds of their office simply because they are addressing questions regarding allegations about their personal lives," they said.

"Even reprehensible conduct ... can fall within the scope of employment," the lawyers said.

Trump's statements about Carroll included that she was "totally lying" to sell a memoir and that "she's not my type." Federal lawyers have said he had to respond to her claims because they essentially questioned his fitness to hold public office. In Monday's papers, they wrote that Trump used "crude and disrespectful" language in questioning Carroll's credibility.

The lawyers conceded that comments attacking her appearance, impugning her motives and implying she had made false accusations against others "were without question unnecessary and inappropriate." But they said they "all pertained to the denial of wrongdoing."

The papers were filed after the Justice Department appealed a decision by Judge Lewis A. Kaplan, who ruled in October that Trump cannot use a law protecting federal employees from being sued individually for things they do within the scope of their employment.

Arguments supporting the Justice Department's position were also filed Monday by a personal lawyer for Trump.

Roberta Kaplan, Carroll's attorney, said in a statement that it was horrific that Trump raped her client but it was "truly shocking that the current Department of Justice would allow Donald Trump to get away with lying about it, thereby depriving our client of her day in court."

"The DOJ's position is not only legally wrong, it is morally wrong since it would give federal officials free license to cover up private sexual misconduct by publicly brutalizing any woman who has the courage to come forward," she said. "Calling a woman you sexually assaulted a 'liar,' a 'slut,' or 'not my type,' as Donald Trump did here, is not the official act of an American president."

In a statement, Carroll said: "As women across the country are standing up and holding men accountable for assault — the DOJ is trying to stop me from having that same right. I am angry! I am offended!"

'A lot of anxiety' for Democrats as Biden agenda stalls

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

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After six months of Democratic control in Washington, the party's progressive wing is growing increas-

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Journalists who fled Myanmar find third-country refuge

BANGKOK (AP) — Three journalists from military-ruled Myanmar who were convicted of illegal entry after they fled to Thailand have been sent to a third country where they are safe, their employer said Monday.

The three staff members of the Democratic Voice of Burma, better known as DVB, were arrested on May 9 in the northern Thai province of Chiang Mai along with two other people from Myanmar described as activists. On May 28, they were each sentenced to a 4,000 baht (\$128) fine and seven months' imprisonment, suspended for a year.

Rights groups and journalists' associations had urged Thai authorities not to send them back to Myanmar, where it was feared that their safety would be at risk from the authorities. Thailand's government has relatively cordial relations with Myanmar's military regime.

Myanmar's junta seized power in February by ousting the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, and has attempted to crush widespread opposition to its takeover with a brutal crackdown that has left hundreds dead. It has tried to silence independent news media by withdrawing their licenses and by arresting journalists.

All five people convicted in Chiang Mai of illegal entry left Thailand recently for the third country, Aye Chan Naing, DVB's executive director and chief editor, said in an emailed statement. He said, without elaborating, that he could not mention where they had been sent "as the entire case remains very sensitive."

He expressed gratitude to "everyone in Thailand and around the world that helped to make their safe passage possible and for campaigning for a positive outcome," and said the employees would resume their duties in the near future after "recovering from their ordeal."

At least two other DVB journalists have been sentenced to prison for their reporting. DVB, an independent broadcast and online news agency, was among five local media outlets that were banned in March from broadcasting or publishing after their licenses were canceled. Like other banned media outlets, it continued operating.

According to Myanmar's Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, about 90 journalists have been arrested since the takeover, with more than half still in detention, and 33 in hiding. Those still being held include two U.S. citizens, Danny Fenster and Nathan Maung, who worked for Myanmar media.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the U.S. has had contact with Maung in detention but has not yet had consular access to Fenster. "We are pressing this in every way that we can," Blinken said in congress-

sional testimony Monday in Washington.

He reiterated the U.S. was working on trying to bring the detained journalists home.

Fenster, the managing editor of the news and business magazine Frontier Myanmar, was detained at the Yangon airport while trying to head to the Detroit area to see his family.

Maung is editor in chief of the Myanmar news website Kamayut Media. New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, citing accounts in Myanmar media, said he was arrested in March.

'Do not come': Harris seeks 'hope at home' for Guatemalans

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris offered an optimistic outlook for improved cooperation with Guatemala on addressing the spike in migration to the U.S. after her meeting with Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei on Monday. She also delivered a direct warning to migrants considering making the trek: "Do not come. Do not come."

Her comments, during a press conference after she met privately with Giammattei, underscored the challenge that remains even as Harris engages in substantive talks with the Guatemalan and Mexican presidents during a three-day visit to the region this week, her first foreign trip as vice president.

"I want to emphasize that the goal of our work is to help Guatemalans find hope at home," Harris said. "At the same time, I want to be clear to folks in this region who are thinking about making that dangerous trek to the United States-Mexico border: Do not come, do not come."

In conjunction with Harris' trip, the Biden administration announced that the Justice Department would create an anti-corruption task force and an additional task force to combat human trafficking and drug smuggling in the region. Harris also promised a new program focused on creating education and economic opportunities for girls there, among other new initiatives. And she told Giammattei that her goal in the region was to restore "hope" to residents so they no longer felt the need to flee their homeland for better opportunities in the U.S.

But for all the talk about new ways to cooperate, reining in corruption and improving living conditions in the region have been long-running challenges that previous administrations have been unable to achieve in their efforts to stem the tide of migration to the United States.

Part of the challenge remains that, despite the best efforts of U.S. officials, corruption underpins many of the region's governments. Indeed, Giammattei himself has faced criticism over his handling of the issue.

Last month, two lawyers who are outspoken critics of Giammattei's administration were arrested on what they say were trumped-up charges aimed at silencing them.

And the selection of judges for Guatemala's Constitutional Court, its highest, was mired in influence peddling and allegations of corruption. Giammattei picked his chief of staff to fill one of the five vacancies. When Gloria Porras, a respected force against corruption, was elected to a second term, the congress controlled by Giammattei's party refused to seat her.

On Monday, Giammattei seemed less than eager to address those issues.

Asked by The Associated Press about criticism of his record on corruption, Giammattei initially ignored the question. When pressed by another journalist to answer for the complaints against him, Giammattei seemed to bristle at the allegation that he was at fault, insisting there were "zero" allegations of corruption against him and labeling drug traffickers the biggest corruption issue in his nation.

Still, Harris expressed optimism about their ability to work together, telling reporters that the two had a "very frank and very candid" conversation that included "the importance of anti-corruption and the importance of an independent judiciary."

Harris said the Justice, Treasury and State departments would work together on anti-corruption investigations and train local law enforcement to conduct their own.

"We are creating this task force to address corruption. We are working on a task force that is about human smuggling. We are doing the work of requiring certain progress be made if we are going to attract U.S. investment, private investment, to this region," Harris said.

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Giammattei said that the U.S. and Guatemala also agreed to collaborate on a "very simple process" through visas to allow for regular migration to the U.S., and that the two countries would work to prioritize family reunifications.

The White House also announced a \$7.5 million commitment through USAID to support entrepreneurs and innovators in Guatemala, as well as millions more in investments in affordable housing, agribusinesses and loans to small businesses in the country.

Besides her meeting with Giammattei, Harris participated in a roundtable with Guatemalan community and civil society leaders and met with young female engineers and entrepreneurs.

In addressing the root causes of migration, Harris has laid out an approach centered on creating better opportunities and living conditions in the region through humanitarian and economic aid.

Harris had previously announced plans to send \$310 million to provide support for refugees and address food shortages, and she recently secured commitments from a dozen companies and organizations to invest in the Northern Triangle countries to promote economic opportunity and job training.

Washington won some goodwill through its vaccine diplomacy this past week. Giammattei and Mexican President Andres Manuel López Obrador both received calls from Harris on Thursday telling them the U.S. would be sending 500,000 doses and 1 million doses, respectively, of COVID-19 vaccine.

While in Latin America, Harris is also navigating the politics of immigration. Congressional Republicans have criticized both President Joe Biden and Harris for not visiting the U.S.-Mexico border and contend the administration is ignoring what they say is a crisis there. April was the second-busiest month on record for unaccompanied children encountered at the border, following March's all-time high. The Border Patrol's total encounters in April were up 3% from March, marking the highest level since April 2000.

On Monday, Harris defended her decision not to visit the border, telling reporters she was focused on addressing the root causes of migration in a way that delivers "tangible" results "as opposed to grand gestures."

But even as Harris made the case for reforms in the nation's capital, those very migrants she hoped to help were still streaming to the nation's borders.

On Monday, Henry Armando Rodríguez, 27, from El Paraiso in south-central Honduras, rested outside the migrant shelter in Tecun Uman at the Guatemala-Mexico border on his journey toward the United States. He didn't know about Harris' visit but described reasons for leaving that touched on the hopelessness the vice president wants to address.

"Life is very bad in Honduras right now," he said.

It was his first time attempting to migrate, he said. He decided to make the journey because it was impossible to find any agricultural work because of droughts at home.

When he was able to find work, he couldn't make enough money to pay for a decent home. He said that, because of poverty in Honduras, "we have to flee from there to be able to look for new opportunities." And he wasn't impressed with the politicians who he says only claim to want to help when they're fishing for votes around election season.

"They promise you the sun and the moon, and then in the end they forgot all of that," he said. "What interests them is only themselves, how they live, and the life of the poor is of little importance to them."

Automakers face a threat to EV sales: Slow charging times

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — If the auto industry is to succeed in its bet that electric vehicles will soon dominate the roads, it will need to overcome a big reason why many people are still avoiding them: fear of running out of juice between Point A and Point B.

Automakers have sought to quell those concerns by developing EVs that go farther per charge and fill up faster. Problem is, most public charging stations now fill cars much too slowly, requiring hours — not minutes — to provide enough electricity for an extended trip.

Concerned that such prolonged waits could turn away potential EV buyers and keep them stuck on gas-

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burning vehicles, automakers are trying to cut charging times to something close to the five or 10 minutes of a conventional gasoline fill-up.

"It's absolutely the target to get faster and faster," said Brett Smith, technology director at the Center for Automotive Research, an industry think tank. "It's not there yet, but it's one of those things that moves the needle more toward a competitive vehicle for a lot of people, this ability to fast charge."

The latest generation of EVs, many with ranges around 300 miles (480 kilometers) per charge, can accept electricity at a much faster rate than previous models could. So fast, in fact, that most charging stations cannot yet accommodate the vehicles' advanced technology.

It can now require hours to fully charge an electric vehicle because most stations operate on a home-like alternating current. Direct-current fast-charging stations, by contrast, are hours faster. But they can cost tens of thousands of dollars more.

The high cost is something the Biden administration will have to consider as it develops incentives to encourage companies and governments to build 500,000 charging stations nationwide by 2030. Among the possibilities being discussed are grants, with \$15 billion in spending over five years to build the network, including fast chargers along highways and in communities. Details are being worked out as the administration negotiates its infrastructure plan with key members of Congress.

Of the roughly 42,000 public charging stations in the United States, only about 5,000 are considered direct-current fast chargers, according to the Department of Energy. The rest are like home chargers; they require roughly eight hours to fully charge longer-range batteries, longer than anyone wants to wait to charge a vehicle on a road trip.

And most fast chargers can pump out only about 50 kilowatts per hour — requiring roughly an hour to charge an average EV to 80% — even though newer EVs are capable of being charged much faster than that.

"It's one of the big barriers for someone who is not living with a battery-electric vehicle yet," said Alex Tripi, who heads Volvo's electric vehicle marketing. "It will continue to be for a while."

Limited by technology, early electric vehicles charged at ridiculously low speeds when compared with recent models. When Nissan's Leaf first went on sale more than a decade ago, for example, it could take in only 50 kilowatts per hour from a fast charger. That meant it took a half hour to charge it to 80% of its small battery, with a range of just 58 miles (93 kilometers).

A new long-range version released in 2019 nearly tripled the range per charge. Because it can take 100 kilowatts at a fast charger, it can get to 80% — 181 miles (291 kilometers) — in 45 minutes.

Newer EVs can be charged even faster. But they far exceed the capacity of most fast chargers. Ford's Mustang Mach-E and F-150 Lightning can take in 150 kilowatts per hour. Hyundai's Ioniq 5 and Porsche's Taycan are over 200 kilowatts.

The Hyundai, with 300 miles (480 kilometers) of range, can go from a 10% charge to 80% in just 18 minutes, much closer to gasoline fill-up times. (Automakers tend to quote charging times to 80% of battery capacity because it takes much longer to go from 80% to 100%; the final 20% is often slowed down to prolong battery life.) Hyundai knows there aren't many chargers now that can fill the Ioniq that fast. But it says it's ready for a future when more quick chargers are more widely available.

"Hopefully the infrastructure will improve across the U.S. for this to be a whole lot more viable," said John Shon, senior group manager of product planning.

Tesla, which has its own private charging network of 25,000 plugs worldwide, leads just about every automaker. Its newer chargers can crank out up to 250 kilowatts and 175 miles (282 kilometers) of range in about 15 minutes.

Electrify America, a charging network funded with money paid by Volkswagen as punishment for its emissions cheating scandal, says it's ready for the newer EVs. Having installed fast chargers since 2018, it runs more than 600 stations with 2,600 plugs nationwide. All can pump out 150 kilowatts. That means they can charge a typical EV with 300 miles (480 kilometers) of range to 80 percent of battery capacity (240 miles (386 kilometers)) in roughly 45 minutes. Over half of Electrify America's stations can pump out 350 kilowatts, which charge twice as fast.

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A fast-charge fill-up to 80% of battery capacity varies by state but typically costs around \$16.

Even Tesla owners, who can access the nation's biggest fast-charging network, risk running out of juice on road trips, especially in rural areas. On Monday, one such driver, Dan Nelson, said he had to stop at a Tesla station near Ann Arbor, Michigan, for more than 20 minutes to make sure his Model 3 had enough charge to reach his rural home 25 miles (40 kilometers) away.

"There's definitely improvements that can be made," said Nelson, who charges at home most of the time.

Bruce Westlake, president of the East Michigan Electric Auto Association, suggested that such anxiety tends to ease as people gain more experience with EVs. He said he is now comfortable running his two Teslas as low as 5% of battery capacity to go farther between charges on trips.

Research by J.D. Power shows that most people think charging stations are needed at locations where gas stations are now. But in fact, according to the Energy Department, most EV owners charge at home more than 80% of the time.

That means super-fast chargers, which can cost close to \$100,000, should be built mainly along highways where people are traveling long distances and need to charge quickly, experts say. They also may be needed in urban areas where people live in apartments with no access to a home charger.

It's far from clear that the automakers can depend on a proliferation of fast chargers across the country to build customer confidence and propel EV sales in the years ahead. The high cost and heavy load on utility grids likely will limit the number of fast chargers to areas where they're needed for quick fill-ups, said Jessika Trancik, an associate professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who studies EV charging.

"As we're approaching this transition," she said, "it's important to be more strategic than just putting them everywhere."

Charging companies have time to figure out where to build fast chargers, because it would take more than 17 years to convert the entire U.S. fleet of 279 million passenger vehicles from petroleum to electricity — even if every motorist were willing to make the switch, said Pasquale Romano, CEO of ChargePoint, a charging station company. But the chargers can't come fast enough for automakers, who want more people to buy their EVs to spread development costs over more vehicles.

Romano says fast chargers will be needed about every 75 miles (120 kilometers) on roads that connect metro areas, and that the United States should get there in about two years. As more EVs are sold, he said, more stations will be built.

"You don't want to put all the infrastructure in for 20 years starting with vehicle zero," Romano said. "This is about the natural organic growth."

FDA approves much-debated Alzheimer's drug panned by experts

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Government health officials on Monday approved the first new drug for Alzheimer's disease in nearly 20 years, disregarding warnings from independent advisers that the much-debated treatment hasn't been shown to help slow the brain-destroying disease.

The Food and Drug Administration approved the drug from Biogen based on study results showing it seemed "reasonably likely" to benefit Alzheimer's patients. It's the only therapy that U.S. regulators have said can likely treat the underlying disease, rather than manage symptoms like anxiety and insomnia.

The decision, which could impact millions of Americans and their families, is certain to spark disagreements among physicians, medical researchers and patient groups. It also has far-reaching implications for the standards used to evaluate experimental therapies, including those that show only incremental benefits.

The new drug, which Biogen developed with Japan's Eisai Co., did not reverse mental decline, only slowing it in one study. The medication, aducanumab, will be marketed as Aduhelm and is to be given as an infusion every four weeks.

Dr. Caleb Alexander, an FDA adviser who recommended against the drug's approval, said he was "surprised and disappointed" by the decision.

"The FDA gets the respect that it does because it has regulatory standards that are based on firm evi-

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dence. In this case, I think they gave the product a pass," said Alexander, a medical researcher at Johns Hopkins University.

The FDA's top drug regulator acknowledged that "residual uncertainties" surround the drug, but said Aduhelm's ability to reduce harmful clumps of plaque in the brain is expected to help slow dementia.

"The data supports patients and caregivers having the choice to use this drug," Dr. Patrizia Cavazzoni told reporters. She said the FDA carefully weighed the input of people living with the "devastating, debilitating and deadly disease."

Under terms of the so-called accelerated approval, the FDA is requiring Biogen to conduct a follow-up study to confirm benefits for patients. If the study fails to show effectiveness, the FDA could pull the drug from the market, though the agency rarely does so.

Biogen said the drug would cost approximately \$56,000 for a typical year's worth of treatment, and said the price would not be raised for four years. Most patients won't pay anywhere near that thanks to insurance coverage and other discounts. The company said it aims to complete the FDA-mandated follow-up trial by 2030.

Biogen shares jumped 38% in trading Monday on the news, with analysts forecasting billions in future sales. The Cambridge, Massachusetts-based company plans to begin shipping millions of doses within two weeks.

The non-profit Institute for Clinical and Economic Review, which studies drug value, said Biogen's drug would have to halt dementia entirely to justify its \$56,000 per-year price tag.

Some 6 million people in the U.S. and many more worldwide have Alzheimer's, which gradually attacks areas of the brain needed for memory, reasoning, communication and basic daily tasks. In the final stages of the disease, those afflicted lose the ability to swallow. The global burden of the disease, the most common cause of dementia, is only expected to grow as millions more baby boomers progress further into their 60s and 70s.

Aducanumab (pronounced "add-yoo-CAN-yoo-mab") helps clear a protein called beta-amyloid from the brain. Other experimental drugs have done that but they made no difference in patients' ability to think, care for themselves or live independently.

The pharmaceutical industry's drug pipeline has been littered for years with failed Alzheimer's treatments. The FDA's greenlight Monday is likely to revive investments in therapies previously shelved by drugmakers.

The new medicine is manufactured from living cells and will be given via infusion at a doctor's office or hospital.

Researchers don't fully understand what causes Alzheimer's but there's broad agreement the brain plaque targeted by aducanumab is just one contributor. Evidence suggests family history, education and chronic conditions like diabetes and heart disease may all play a role.

"This is a sign of hope but not the final answer," said Dr. Richard Hodes, director of the National Institute on Aging, which wasn't involved in the Biogen studies but funds research into how Alzheimer's forms. "Amyloid is important but not the only contributing factor."

Patients taking aducanumab saw their thinking skills decline 22% more slowly than patients taking a placebo.

But that meant a difference of just 0.39 on an 18-point score of cognitive and functional ability. And it's unclear how such metrics translate into practical benefits, like greater independence or ability to recall important details.

The FDA's review of the drug has become a flashpoint in longstanding debates over standards used to evaluate therapies for hard-to-treat conditions. On one side, groups representing Alzheimer's patients and their families say any new therapy — even one of small benefit — warrants approval. But many experts warn that greenlighting the drug could set a dangerous precedent, opening the door to treatments of questionable benefit.

The approval came despite a scathing assessment in November by the FDA's outside panel of neurological experts. The group voted "no" to a series of questions on whether reanalyzed data from a single study

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submitted by Biogen showed the drug was effective.

Biogen halted two studies in 2019 after disappointing results suggested aducanumab would not meet its goal of slowing mental and functional decline in Alzheimer's patients.

Several months later, the company reversed course, announcing that a new analysis of one study showed the drug was effective at higher doses and the FDA had advised that it warranted review. Company scientists said the drug's initial failure was due to some patients not receiving high enough doses to slow the disease.

But the changes to dosing and the company's after-the-fact analysis made the results hard to interpret, raising skepticism among many experts, including those on the FDA panel.

The FDA isn't required to follow the advice of its outside panelists and has previously disregarded their input when making similarly high-profile drug decisions.

About 900 U.S. medical facilities are ready to begin prescribing the drug, according to Biogen, with many more expected in coming months. But key practical questions remain: How long do patients benefit? How do physicians determine when to discontinue the drug? Does the drug have any benefit in patients with more advanced dementia?

With FDA approval, aducanumab is almost certain to be covered by most insurers, including Medicare, the government plan for seniors that covers more than 60 million people.

Insurers could try to manage the drug's costs by requiring strict conditions, including brain scans to confirm plaque, before agreeing to cover it.

Additional scans will be needed to monitor potential side effects. The drug carries a warning about temporary brain swelling that can sometimes cause headaches, confusion and dizziness. Other side effects included allergic reactions, diarrhea and disorientation.

Although Biogen studied the drug in people with mild dementia or early-stage Alzheimer's, the FDA label approved the drug for anyone with Alzheimer's, a sweeping population given doctors have broad leeway in diagnosing the condition.

"The FDA is empowering the physician to make the decision on diagnosis," Biogen CEO Michel Vounatsos said in an interview.

For patients already enrolled in Biogen's trials, Monday's announcement means they can continue taking a drug many believe has helped.

Phillip Lynn, 63, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in the spring of 2017 after having trouble with conversation and memory, including forgetting a recent vacation to Hawaii.

His husband Kurt Rehwinkel says Lynn's cognitive ability has stabilized since starting on Biogen's drug more than three years ago. And his performance on short-term memory tests has actually improved, though the couple acknowledges most patients are unlikely to see similar results.

"But even for those who it has little or no effect, I think hope is a good thing," said Rehwinkel. "I don't think there's such a thing as false hope."

Full volume: White House briefing room back to crammed again

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House briefing room on Monday might have been a fire marshal's nightmare.

For the first time in 449 days, reporters could cram into every seat for the daily briefing. Coronavirus restrictions had kept one of the most recognized rooms in the U.S. government almost empty. But mass vaccinations allowed reporters to first doff their masks on May 13 and then nearly a month later to gather in a pack of raised hands, shouting, hard-eyed stares and the occasional grimace.

"Hope everyone's cozy," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said at she stepped to the lectern.

Forty-nine journalists sat elbow-to-elbow in blue seats, while others stood on the edges. The loudspeaker before the briefing told reporters not to block the aisle, but no one budged.

The briefing marked something of a surreal return to business as usual for Joe Biden's presidency. The

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president had vowed to overcome the pandemic, and one of the consequences of any success on that front inevitably was going to be more questions from more reporters. Monday was proof of that as the hourlong briefing ran to roughly 58 sets of questions.

The questions covered a wide range — a sign that there are still plenty of tensions, emergencies and unknowns to consume any administration's time. The topics included Russia, China, Afghanistan, cyberattacks, infrastructure, voting rights, vaccinations and Supreme Court decisions. Presidents might campaign on policies and promises, but most administrations must deal with a daily degree of chaos, sometimes of their own making.

National security adviser Jake Sullivan also took the podium at Monday's briefing to preview the president's first foreign trip, which will begin this week with a Group of Seven summit meeting in the United Kingdom. Psaki then faced a barrage of questions that was different from past briefings because so many hands were raised and time for follow-ups was limited.

How did Biden know he could trust Russian President Vladimir Putin at their upcoming meeting? How would Biden work with West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin on voting rights? What was the status of infrastructure talks? How could ransomware attacks be prevented? How would the United States prevent terrorist attacks after U.S. troops withdraw from Afghanistan? Would infrastructure aid be going to Brazil? Why had Biden not done more to commemorate the anniversary of the D-Day landing?

Not every reporter got to ask a question. Not every joke from Psaki got the response she expected. Upon noting that Biden had gotten together with former President Barack Obama to discuss enrollment in "Obamacare," Psaki referenced the 1978 Peaches & Herb song "Reunited" and got only a few chuckles. "Even in a full room, no laughs," Psaki said.

Jeff Bezos will blast into space on rocket's 1st crew flight

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Outdoing his fellow billionaires in daredevilry, Jeff Bezos will blast into space next month when his Blue Origin company makes its first flight with a crew.

The 57-year-old Amazon founder and richest person in the world by Forbes' estimate will become the first person to ride his own rocket to space.

Bezos announced his intentions Monday and, in an even bolder show of confidence, said he will share the adventure with his younger brother and best friend, Mark, an investor and volunteer firefighter. He said that will make it more meaningful.

Blue Origin's debut flight with people aboard — after 15 successful test flights of its reusable New Shepard rockets — will take place on July 20, a date selected because it is the 52nd anniversary of the first moon landing by Apollo 11's Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin.

The Bezos brothers will launch from remote West Texas alongside the winner of an online charity auction. There's no word yet on who else might fill the six-person capsule during the 10-minute flight that will take its passengers to an altitude of about 65 miles (105 kilometers), just beyond the edge of space, and then return to Earth without going into orbit.

Bezos said he has dreamed of traveling to space since he was 5.

"To see the Earth from space, it changes you. It changes your relationship with this planet, with humanity. It's one Earth," Bezos said in an Instagram post. "I want to go on this flight because it's a thing I've wanted to do all my life. It's an adventure. It's a big deal for me."

Added his brother: "I wasn't even expecting him to say that he was going to be on the first flight, and then when he asked me to go along, I was just awestruck."

Bezos will step down as Amazon's CEO 15 days before liftoff. He announced months ago that he wants to spend more time on his rocket company as well as his newspaper, The Washington Post.

His stake in Amazon stands at \$164 billion, which will make him by far the wealthiest person to fly to space.

Until now, thrill-seeking billionaires have had to buy capsule seats from the Russian space program or,

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more recently, Elon Musk's SpaceX, which plans its first private flight in September. These orbital trips, generally lasting several days, with visits to the International Space Station, have cost tens of millions of dollars per person.

The flight by Blue Origin's New Shepard capsule, named for Alan Shepard, the first American in space, will last five minutes less than Shepard's history-marking suborbital ride aboard a Mercury capsule in 1961.

But Blue Origin's capsule is 10 times roomier with a huge window at every seat — the biggest windows ever built for a spacecraft, in fact.

The company, based in Kent, Washington, is working to develop an orbital rocket named after John Glenn, the first American to circle the Earth.

The Bezos flight will officially kick off the company's space tourism business. The company has yet to start selling seats to the public or even to announce a ticket price for the short trips, which provide about three minutes of weightlessness.

Blue Origin's launch and landing site is 120 miles southeast of El Paso, close to the Mexican border. After the capsule separates, the rocket returns to Earth and lands upright, to be used again. The capsule, also reusable, descends under parachutes.

Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson — a "tie-loathing," mountain-climbing, hot-air-ballooning daredevil — also plans to ride into space aboard his own airplane-launched rocketship later this year after one more test flight over New Mexico. Virgin Galactic completed its third test flight into space with a crew two weeks ago; the company doesn't want him climbing aboard until the craft is thoroughly proven.

The 70-year-old Branson on Monday offered congratulations to Bezos, a tame, bookish Wall Streeter by comparison. Branson tweeted that their two companies "are opening up access to space — how extraordinary!"

Like Blue Origin, Branson's company will send paying customers to the lower reaches of space on up-and-down flights, not Earth-orbiting rides.

Musk's SpaceX already has transported 10 astronauts to the space station for NASA and sold several seats on private flights. Musk himself has yet to commit to going into space, though he has repeatedly said he wants to die on Mars, just not on impact.

Until recently, Blue Origin had been criticized by some for proceeding too slowly, especially when compared with SpaceX. Bezos adopted as the company's motto "Gradatim ferociter," Latin for "Step by step, ferociously," and had it emblazoned on the so-called lucky cowboy boots he wears to his company's space launches.

"Blue Origin, admirably, has gone about it carefully and has built a reliable and less ambitious vehicle and is likely to succeed," the director of Vanderbilt University's aerospace design lab, Amrutur Anilkumar, said in an email Monday. "It is noteworthy that Bezos feels comfortable taking his brother for a ride; that is probably the best exclamation for safety and reliability."

While Blue Origin's and SpaceX's capsules are fully automated, Virgin Galactic has two pilots in the cockpit for every spaceflight. A 2014 accident left one pilot dead and the other seriously injured.

As for the seat that is being auctioned off, Blue Origin opened online bidding on May 5, the 60th anniversary of Shepard's flight. It's up to \$2.8 million.

The auction will conclude Saturday, with the winning amount donated to Club for the Future, Blue Origin's education foundation, which encourages youngsters to pursue careers in science. Nearly 6,000 people from 143 countries have taken part in the auction.

In an Instagram video posted by Bezos, Mark Bezos' reaction when his brother invited him on the flight was: "Are you serious? ... Seriously? My God!"

"What a remarkable opportunity not only to have this adventure, but to be able to do it with my best friend," the younger brother said.

Mexico president appears to hold key majority in elections

By MARK STEVENSON and MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

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MEXICO CITY (AP) — President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's party and its allies on Monday appeared poised to maintain their majority in Mexico's lower chamber of the congress, but fell short of a two-thirds majority as some voters boosted the struggling opposition, according to initial election results.

López Obrador's Morena party will have to rely on votes from its allies in the Workers Party and Green Party, but together they were expected to capture between 265 and 292 seats in the 500-seat lower house. Morena alone was expected to win 190 to 203 seats, according to preliminary vote counts.

That would signal a significant decline for the president's party. In the current congress, Morena has a simple majority, holding 253 seats on its own. It would also deprive the president of a qualified majority of two-thirds required to approve constitutional reforms.

López Obrador appeared to acknowledge that new reality Monday. He praised the election as "free, clean" and said Mexicans had shown a degree of political maturity "never seen."

"You voted for two different and opposed plans, above all in the federal election," he said. "Those of the transformation plan are going to have the majority in the Chamber of Deputies and this means guaranteeing the sufficient budget for the most in need."

The results give the president sufficient budgetary control to continue his train and refinery-building plans and cash handout programs. But they may deny him congressional backing to escalate his ongoing spats with the courts and regulatory agencies, which have blocked some of his tougher proposals to empower state-owned industries and boost fossil fuels.

Opponents have said López Obrador is trying to dismantle checks and balances created during Mexico's decades-long transition to full democracy.

"The voters have given a mandate that says 'I am not writing a blank check for any of the movements in Mexico,'" said Luis Miguel Pérez Juárez, a political science expert at the Monterrey Technological university.

The opposition alliance made up of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, National Action Party and Party of the Democratic Revolution were estimated to win between 181 and 213 seats. Those would be gains for those parties, which have often appeared rudderless in the face of López Obrador's popularity and which still face the challenge of coming up with a platform based on something other than just opposition to the president.

Even without López Obrador on the ballot, the mid-term elections were seen by many as a referendum on his administration and his ability to continue what he calls the "Fourth Transformation" of Mexico. Turnout was high for mid-term elections, edging above 51% of eligible voters.

López Obrador's party did better than expected in state governors' races, and appeared headed for wins in at least ten of the 15 states up for grabs. One of those wins was for the daughter of a Morena candidate who was accused of rape; she replaced her father on the ballot after he was eliminated for failing to report campaign spending.

"It's an enormous achievement on the part of the president and his party's coalition to have ratified their absolute majority, and to have won the election in spite of the Mexican economy going down as it has over the last three years ... and the pandemic," said Carlos Heredia of Mexico's Center for Economic Research and Training.

At the same time, the votes means López Obrador will have to listen more to the opposition, which he has traditionally dismissed as conservatives defending the vested interests and corruption of the past.

But the president's party was battered in Mexico City, long considered his stronghold and where he once served as mayor. The capital suffered more than many other areas during the coronavirus pandemic.

While voting was disrupted at only a handful of polling places on Sunday, violence marked the campaign and the days leading up to the vote.

On Saturday, an employee of the state prosecutors' office in Chiapas who was not authorized to be quoted said five people who were carrying voting material to polling places were ambushed and killed on a rural highway. And on Sunday, prosecutors said another four people were shot to death in another remote Chiapas mountain town in what appeared to be a politically motivated attack.

Nationwide, three dozen candidates were killed during the campaigns; almost all of the victims were running for one of the 20,000 local posts including mayors and town council up for grabs in 30 states. In

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Guanajuato state, Mexico's most violent, a woman who stepped in as mayoral candidate after her mother was murdered won an overwhelming victory in the town of Moroleón.

López Obrador praised the largely peaceful voting on election day, and even sent a message of recognition to the drug cartels that fuel much of the country's violence.

"People who belong to organized crime behaved very well, in general, there were few acts of violence by these groups," the president said. "I think the white-collar criminals acted worse."

López Obrador has raised minimum wages and strengthened government aid programs like supplementary payments to the elderly, students and training programs for youths. He has also created a quasi-military National Guard and given the army a huge role in building his pet projects, which include trains, an oil refinery and airports.

But he has not hewed to a traditional leftist line, and has championed austerity in government spending. He has maintained friendly if sometimes tension-fraught relations with the United States and has willingly helped keep tens of thousands of Central American migrants from reaching the U.S. border, an issue that will be the focus of a visit Monday and Tuesday by U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris.

Opponents depict López Obrador as intolerant of criticism and obsessed with a nostalgic 1960s vision of Mexico, when oil was king and state-owned companies dominated many sectors of the economy. Socially conservative and a professed Christian "in the broadest sense," he has angered feminists with his policies, but has pleased many Mexicans by living austere.

The elections represent the first mass public events since the coronavirus pandemic hit the country over a year ago, though case numbers have fallen and Mexico has vaccinated about a quarter of adults. The estimated 350,000 fatalities in the pandemic — about 230,000 of them test-confirmed — do not appear to have played a major role in the campaigns, but weighed on voters' minds.

Carbon dioxide levels hit 50% higher than preindustrial time

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

The annual peak of global heat-trapping carbon dioxide in the air has reached another dangerous milestone: 50% higher than when the industrial age began.

And the average rate of increase is faster than ever, scientists reported Monday.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said the average carbon dioxide level for May was 419.13 parts per million. That's 1.82 parts per million higher than May 2020 and 50% higher than the stable pre-industrial levels of 280 parts per million, said NOAA climate scientist Pieter Tans.

Carbon dioxide levels peak every May just before plant life in the Northern Hemisphere blossoms, sucking some of that carbon out of the atmosphere and into flowers, leaves, seeds and stems. The reprieve is temporary, though, because emissions of carbon dioxide from burning coal, oil and natural gas for transportation and electricity far exceed what plants can take in, pushing greenhouse gas levels to new records every year.

"Reaching 50% higher carbon dioxide than preindustrial is really setting a new benchmark and not in a good way," said Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald, who wasn't part of the research. "If we want to avoid the worst consequences of climate change, we need to work much harder to cut carbon dioxide emissions and right away."

Climate change does more than increase temperatures. It makes extreme weather — storms, wildfires, floods and droughts — worse and more frequent and causes oceans to rise and get more acidic, studies show. There are also health effects, including heat deaths and increased pollen. In 2015, countries signed the Paris agreement to try to keep climate change to below what's considered dangerous levels.

The one-year jump in carbon dioxide was not a record, mainly because of a La Nina weather pattern, when parts of the Pacific temporarily cool, said Scripps Institution of Oceanography geochemist Ralph Keeling. Keeling's father started the monitoring of carbon dioxide on top of the Hawaiian mountain Mauna Loa in 1958, and he has continued the work of charting the now famous Keeling Curve.

Scripps, which calculates the numbers slightly differently based on time and averaging, said the peak

in May was 418.9.

Also, pandemic lockdowns slowed transportation, travel and other activity by about 7%, earlier studies show. But that was too small to make a significant difference. Carbon dioxide can stay in the air for 1,000 years or more, so year-to-year changes in emissions don't register much.

The 10-year average rate of increase also set a record, now up to 2.4 parts per million per year.

"Carbon dioxide going up in a few decades like that is extremely unusual," Tans said. "For example, when the Earth climbed out of the last ice age, carbon dioxide increased by about 80 parts per million and it took the Earth system, the natural system, 6,000 years. We have a much larger increase in the last few decades."

By comparison, it has taken only 42 years, from 1979 to 2021, to increase carbon dioxide by that same amount.

"The world is approaching the point where exceeding the Paris targets and entering a climate danger zone becomes almost inevitable," said Princeton University climate scientist Michael Oppenheimer, who wasn't part of the research.

Supreme Court rules against immigrants with temporary status

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A unanimous Supreme Court ruled Monday that thousands of people living in the U.S. for humanitarian reasons are ineligible to apply to become permanent residents.

Justice Elena Kagan wrote for the court that federal immigration law prohibits people who entered the country illegally and now have Temporary Protected Status from seeking "green cards" to remain in the country permanently.

The designation applies to people who come from countries ravaged by war or disaster. It protects them from deportation and allows them to work legally. There are 400,000 people from 12 countries with TPS status.

The outcome in a case involving a couple from El Salvador who have been in the U.S. since the 1990s turned on whether people who entered the country illegally and were given humanitarian protections were ever "admitted" into the United States under immigration law.

Kagan wrote that they were not. "The TPS program gives foreign nationals nonimmigrant status, but it does not admit them. So the conferral of TPS does not make an unlawful entrant...eligible" for a green card, she wrote.

The House of Representatives already has passed legislation that would make it possible for TPS recipients to become permanent residents, Kagan noted. The bill faces uncertain prospects in the Senate.

President Joe Biden has said he supports the change in the law. But his administration, like the Trump administration, argued that current immigration law doesn't permit people who entered the country illegally to apply for permanent residency.

On the other side were immigrant groups that argued many people who came to the U.S. for humanitarian reasons have lived in the country for many years, given birth to American citizens and put down roots in the U.S.

Federal courts around the country had come to conflicting decisions about whether the grant of TPS status was, by itself, enough to enable an immigrant to try to obtain permanent residency.

Former President Donald Trump tried to cancel the program for many immigrants, stoking fear they could be sent back to their homelands where they haven't lived in many years.

"All of these families that are established in the United States and have lived in our communities for decades faced a very real threat," said Lisa Koop, a lawyer with the National Immigrant Justice Center who also teaches at Notre Dame's law school.

In 2001, the U.S. gave Salvadoran migrants legal protection to remain in the U.S. after a series of earthquakes in their home country.

People from 11 other countries are similarly protected. They are: Haiti, Honduras, Myanmar, Nepal, Ni-

caragua, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen.

Monday's decision does not affect immigrants with TPS who initially entered the U.S. legally and then, say, overstayed their visa, Kagan noted. Because those people were legally admitted to the country and later were given humanitarian protections, they can seek to become permanent residents.

Also on Monday, the court:

- Declined to hear a challenge to the requirement that only men register for the draft when they turn 18.
- Agreed to hear a case in which the Biden administration wants to halt a lawsuit over FBI surveillance of Muslims in California because it could reveal "state secrets."
- Turned away an appeal questioning the federal Food and Drug Administration's authority to regulate electronic cigarettes.

Bruce Springsteen plans Broadway return of his one-man show

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Boss just can't quit Broadway.

Bruce Springsteen will return to Broadway this summer for a limited run of his one-man show "Springsteen on Broadway." Performances at the St. James Theatre begin June 26 with an end date set — at least for now — for Sept. 4.

"I loved doing 'Springsteen on Broadway' and I'm thrilled to have been asked to reprise the show as part of the reopening of Broadway," the rocker said in a statement.

"Springsteen on Broadway" debuted in 2017 and was extended three times, finally closing in late 2018. Columbia Records put out a two-disc soundtrack of "Springsteen on Broadway" and a filmed version of the show is on Netflix.

In the show, Springsteen performs 15 songs — including "My Hometown," "Thunder Road," and "Born in the USA" — and tells stories about growing up in New Jersey. Some of the stories will be familiar to readers of his autobiography, and he even reads from it. His wife, Patti Scialfa, accompanies him for "Brilliant Disguise."

Audience members will be required to provide proof of full COVID-19 vaccination in order to enter the theater.

To the beach! Spain opens borders to tourists, cruise ships

By FRANCISCO UBILLA and ALICIA LEÓN Associated Press

PALMA DE MALLORCA, Spain (AP) — Spain jump-started its summer tourism season on Monday by welcoming vaccinated visitors from most countries as well as European tourists who can prove they are not infected with coronavirus. It also reopened its ports to cruise ships.

The move opened borders for the first tourists from the United States and other countries outside of the European Union since those travelers were banned in March last year, when the pandemic hit global travel.

Matthew Eisenberg, a 22-year-old student, excitedly stepped out of Madrid airport, ready to enjoy the Spanish capital along with two more American friends.

"We came to Spain the first day we could, because we are very excited to travel here," Eisenberg said, showing a certificate for the two Moderna vaccine jabs he received in February and March.

But Spain is still banning nonessential travelers from Brazil, India and South Africa, where virus variants have been a major source of concern.

Visitors need proof they were fully vaccinated at least 14 days before the trip or that they overcame a COVID-19 infection in the past six months. The certificates can be in Spanish, English, French or German — or their equivalent translations in Spanish, the government order said.

The vaccines accepted are those approved by Europe's drug regulator — Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson — as well as two Chinese vaccines authorized by the World Health Organization, Sinopharm and Sinovac.

The same documents will be valid for visitors from the European Union until the bloc fully rolls out its

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"Digital Green Certificate" as expected on July 1. Spain on Monday joined seven other EU countries already implementing the scheme.

Alfredo González, an official in charge of digital health and innovation at Spain's Health Ministry, said the certificate is not a passport but a document that eases mobility across Europe.

"Without the certificate, travel will be possible, but the entry in every country will be slower and controls such as quarantines could apply," said González, adding that all airports had established fast-track channels with technology able to confirm the digital certificates issued by other EU countries.

Beginning Monday, non-vaccinated travelers from the EU's 27 countries could also enter Spain with the negative results of recent coronavirus antigen tests, which are cheaper and faster than PCR tests.

The Spanish government hopes to welcome 14.5 million to 15.5 million visitors between July and September. That's about 40% of the tourists in the same period of 2019 but twice as many as last summer, when only EU visitors could enter Spain.

Tourism is a major industry that in 2019 accounted for over 12% of Spain's GDP.

In a setback, many British tourists who love Southern Europe's beaches aren't expected in large numbers yet because they must quarantine upon their return to the U.K.

Still, Manchester resident Randolph Sweeting said his holiday on the Spanish island of Mallorca was worth the mandatory self-isolation when he gets home.

"I was here twice last year and when I went home I had to quarantine on my own for two weeks. So it's not a problem for me, I've done it before," the 68-year-old said at the Palma de Mallorca airport.

Belén Sanmartín, director of the Melià Calvià Beach Hotel in Mallorca, said that the U.K. government's decision to keep Spain in its list of higher-risk territories was hard to understand in the Balearic Islands, where the infection rate is lower than in Britain.

"It has been a big disappointment, because we were ready to receive visitors from the British market," Sanmartín said, adding that bookings in her hotel were slowly picking up, thanks to Spanish mainlanders and German and French tourists.

In another move to boost tourism, Spanish ports opened to cruise ships on Monday, nearly 15 months after they were banned.

After peaking in late January at nearly 900 new cases per 100,000 residents in 14 days, Spain's coronavirus contagion indicator has dropped to 115 per 100,000. Still, its descent has slowed down in the past days as new infections spread among unvaccinated groups.

Spain has counted over 80,000 COVID-19 deaths in the pandemic.

France fines Google for abusing 'dominant' ads position

PARIS (AP) — Google is being fined 220 million euros (\$268 million) by France's antitrust watchdog for abusing its 'dominant' position in online advertising.

The search engine giant is also promising to overhaul the way its platform is used for buying and selling digital ads, at least in France, which could have repercussions on its ongoing legal fights with regulators elsewhere in Europe, the U.S. and around the world.

Google's advertising practices have harmed its competitors along with publishers of mobile websites and applications, the French Competition Authority said Monday. The authority said it is the responsibility of a company with a dominant market position to avoid unfairly undermining its competition.

Google, based in Mountain View, California, did not dispute the facts and opted to settle after proposing some changes, according to a prepared statement from the Competition Authority.

The settlement might serve as a roadmap for other governments that are scrutinizing Google's market power, said Douglas Melamed, a Stanford University law professor.

"I imagine that Google's decision to settle reflected a judgment that it could live with those terms even if it were forced upon it by other jurisdictions," he said.

The head of the authority, Isabelle de Silva, said the decision was unprecedented in the way that it delved into the complex algorithmic auctions that power Google's business selling online display ads.

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The fine, along with Google's commitment to changing its practices, "will make it possible to re-establish a level playing field for all players, and the ability for publishers to make the most of their advertising space," de Silva said.

Google France's legal director, Maria Gomri, said in a blog post Monday that Google has been collaborating for the past two years with the French watchdog on issues related to ad technology, notably the platform known as Google Ad Manager. She wrote that commitments made during negotiations would "make it easier for publishers to make use of data and use our tools with other ad technologies."

After tests in the months ahead, changes will be deployed more broadly, some of them globally, Gomri said. She didn't specify which changes would apply outside of France.

The French authority's investigation was prompted by complaints from Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., French newspaper group Le Figaro and Belgium-based Rossel La Voix. Le Figaro later withdrew its complaint.

U.S. tech giants have been facing intensifying scrutiny in Europe and elsewhere over their business practices. Germany became the latest country to launch an investigation of Google, using stepped up powers to scrutinize digital giants.

The German competition watchdog said Friday that it was examining whether contracts for news publishers using Google's News Showcase, a licensing platform launched last fall, include "unreasonable conditions."

Google has been facing pressure from authorities to pay for news and signed a deal earlier this year with a group of French publishers that paves the way for it to make digital copyright payments.

European Union regulators have also charged Apple with stifling competition in music streaming and accused Amazon of using data from independent merchants to unfairly compete against them with its own products. They are investigating Google's data practices for advertising purposes and recently opened a formal antitrust investigation into Facebook's advertising practices.

In the U.S., the Justice Department and dozens of states brought antitrust lawsuits against Google last year. They are seeking to prove that Google has been methodically abusing its power as the internet's main gateway in a way that hurts consumers and advertisers.

Auditor: EU's Frontex border agency can't fulfill its duties

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union's border and coast guard agency is being given additional tasks, like playing a greater role in the deportation of migrants, at a time when it is incapable even of fulfilling the duties it was ordered to carry out five years ago, the European Court of Auditors warned Monday.

The 27-nation bloc began bolstering Frontex, and desperately testing new migration policy, after well over 1 million migrants entered Europe in 2015, overwhelming reception centers and sparking a major political crisis about who should take responsibility for them. That dispute continues today.

Frontex is set to become the biggest and most heavily funded EU agency with some 10,000 officers and an annual budget around 900 million euros (\$1.1 billion). The agency had 45 staff in 2005.

Presenting a report on the agency's work helping EU countries manage Europe's external borders, lead auditor Leo Brincat told reporters that "Frontex is presently not discharging their duty effectively, and we found that this is even more worrying at a time when Frontex is being given added responsibility."

The auditors said Frontex's support to EU member countries is "not adequate to combat illegal immigration and cross-border crime."

A year after hundreds of thousands of people fleeing conflict in Syria sought refuge in Europe, EU countries and the European Commission agreed in 2016 on a new mandate to formally establish Frontex as the European Border and Coast Guard agency.

Its main duties were to manage the unauthorized entry of migrants through the EU's external borders and to help reduce cross-border crime while respecting fundamental rights and ensuring that people could continue to move freely once inside Europe's ID-check free zone.

An updated 2019 mandate established the standing corps that it is due to grow to 10,000 officers by 2027. Frontex can now deploy border guards to countries outside the EU and, as the focus grows on deportation, help send people refused entry back to countries they left or transited to get to Europe.

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Brincat said the auditors found that even before being set these additional tasks "Frontex was biting (off) more than it could chew."

"They went through too many changes too fast, and now I think they are paying the price for this," he said. "They have increased their mandate without really analyzing their performance or the impact of their work."

Brincat also said some EU countries fear that their best border guards and customs officers might be drawn to jobs at Frontex, depleting national reserves and forcing them into costly recruitment drives.

"Member states feel that, not only are they not being given sufficient backup by Frontex, but that Frontex is draining their resources," he said.

Frontex spokesman Chris Borowski acknowledged that the agency has "undergone a massive transformation that would have challenged any organization, especially in the times of the COVID pandemic," but that it remains committed to its mission despite the difficulties.

"Frontex is aware that improvements are needed and has been working hard to make the agency stronger and even more effective. Unfortunately, many of the raised issues are related to external factors outside of the agency's control," Borowski said.

He said that putting the auditors' recommendations into effect "calls for a combined effort of Frontex, the European Commission and national authorities."

Frontex has been accused of links to migrant "pushbacks," or preventing people from entering a country to use their right to apply for asylum. The agency denies any involvement. An inquiry found no evidence that it had, but did expose "monitoring and reporting failures" at Frontex.

AP Interview: State AG pushes accountability in opioid cases

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey has been a leader in the legal push to hold companies and individuals accountable for the U.S. opioid addiction and overdose epidemic, which has been linked to nearly 500,000 deaths over the last two decades.

Healey was the first of many state attorneys general to sue individual members of the Sackler family who own Connecticut-based Purdue Pharma, maker of OxyContin. She's joined with about half the state attorneys general in opposing the company's settlement proposal in bankruptcy court. It calls for dissolving Purdue and turning it into a new company that would use the proceeds of OxyContin sales to combat the crisis. Healey and others say it doesn't go far enough.

Purdue and the Sacklers defend the plan by saying it would take the company out of the family's hands and provide billions of dollars to deal with the opioid crisis. A U.S. Bankruptcy Court judge in New York this month gave the company permission to start asking creditors to vote on whether to approve the plan, which the company says would be worth more than \$10 billion. A hearing is scheduled for August.

On Tuesday, Healey is scheduled to appear before a congressional committee to testify in support of a bill that would clarify bankruptcy laws so company owners and executives would not be able to use a corporate bankruptcy case to shield themselves from personal liability. The legislation was inspired by the Purdue case.

Also this year, Healey became the first attorney general to sue a marketing company, Publicis Health, claiming it also had a role in the opioid epidemic through its work for Purdue. The company says it acted lawfully and that the lawsuit is baseless.

The Purdue bankruptcy is the highest-profile case in a complicated universe of opioid-related lawsuits across the U.S. that has drawn comparisons to the multistate litigation against tobacco companies in the 1990s. The interview with Healey, held June 3, has been condensed.

AP: Purdue's bankruptcy plan calls for members of the Sackler family to give up control of the company, with future profits used to abate the opioid crisis, and also pay nearly \$4.3 billion dollars over time. That's on top of the more than \$200 million they're paying in a federal settlement. Why do you feel that offer is not sufficient to hold the company and its owners accountable?

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HEALEY: The Sacklers are not offering to pay anything near what they should for the harm and devastation caused to families and communities around this country.

What it would do is pay a measly total of less than \$1.3 billion over the next five years to states, cities, counties. This is way too little and way too late while they continue to sit on a fortune of at least \$11 billion -- a fortune built through the sales of OxyContin and a fortune built at the expense of so many victims across this country and devastation.

And what's worse is they've also gone back to bankruptcy court with this proposal to essentially buy immunity with a fraction of those investment returns. So, hey, that's their plan. They want to continue to be rich and they will likely be richer after paying the settlement than they are today. That doesn't sit right with me and it shouldn't sit right with anyone.

AP: The proposed settlement would give (Sackler family members) some immunity from civil lawsuits, but not from criminal charges. On what grounds, if any, could family members face criminal charges?

HEALEY: Nothing about the civil resolution will in any way negate or eliminate the opportunity for criminal investigation or prosecution. I can tell you as a prosecutor that government has to make its case, and each and every individual is entitled to a defense. But here is a situation where we have pursued Purdue and the Sacklers to recover money desperately needed to help our states and our cities and our families.

AP: State attorneys general are split nearly evenly on whether this is an acceptable deal. Why can't you all agree on that?

HEALEY: My job as a matter of law enforcement is to hold people accountable when they break the law, whether they're rich and powerful corporations or rich and powerful individuals who seem to be able to buy whatever legal defense and team of lawyers they need to continue to delay and fight this in court.

But for me, accountability is so important. It's important to the victims and survivors and the families we serve and are elected to represent in our state. Accountability is important for fairness, for justice, for keeping people safe, and as a matter of deterrence to make sure that bad things like this don't happen again.

Purdue's plan should require a public repository of every document in this case. We did that in tobacco; we should do it here. I believe in that strongly. The country deserves to know how Purdue and the Sacklers caused this opioid epidemic. We can't continue to let them keep this secret.

The Sackler plan wants the government to take over the drug business, to put us in charge of selling OxyContin. Putting governments in a position of profiting off the sale of OxyContin is just perverse and totally inappropriate. We want no part of it. Instead, we want a prompt and orderly wind down of this disgraced business.

AP: Earlier this year, you filed claims against Publicis. It's a marketing consultant for Purdue. Why did you do that, and do you expect lawsuits against other companies that work for the drug industry?

HEALEY: During our investigation of Purdue and the Sacklers, we learned that Publicis was actively involved in consulting and providing marketing guidance to Purdue and the Sacklers to help them drive up OxyContin's sales. In doing so, they created a huge public nuisance. They engaged in unfair and deceptive violation of our consumer protection law.

There were any number of entities and perpetrators involved in this deadly and devastating opioid epidemic. And we're going to continue to hold each and every one of them accountable -- or at least try to. We owe that to our families and we owe that in the name of justice.

AP: There are currently trials involving claims against drug makers in California and distribution companies in West Virginia. I'm wondering what the outcomes of those cases will mean for the bigger picture of opioid litigation across the US.

HEALEY: They benefit the public and the press because facts get exposed. People have to actually testify in public under oath. This is the way that accountability can be achieved.

Jails emptied in the pandemic. Should they stay that way?

By WEIHUA LI and BETH SCHWARTZAPFEL of The Marshall Project and MICHAEL R. SISAK of The As-

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It wasn't long after Matthew Reed shoplifted a \$63 set of sheets from a Target in upstate New York that the coronavirus pandemic brought the world to a standstill.

Instead of serving a jail sentence, he stayed at home, his case deferred more than a year, as courts closed and jails nationwide dramatically reduced their populations to stop the spread of COVID-19.

But the numbers have begun creeping up again as courts are back in session and the world begins returning to a modified version of normal. It's worrying criminal justice reformers who argue that the past year proved there is no need to keep so many people locked up in the U.S.

By the middle of last year, the number of people in jails nationwide was at its lowest point in more than two decades, according to a new report published Monday by the Vera Institute of Justice, whose researchers collected population numbers from about half of the nation's 3,300 jails to make national estimates.

According to the report, shared with The Marshall Project and The Associated Press, the number of people incarcerated in county jails across the country declined by roughly one-quarter, or 185,000, as counties aggressively worked to release people held on low-level charges, dramatically reduced arrest rates and suspended court operations.

But in most places, the decrease didn't last long: From mid-2020 to March 2021, the number of people in jails awaiting trial or serving short sentences for minor offenses climbed back up again by more than 70,000, reaching nearly 650,000.

"Reducing the incarcerated population across the country is possible," said Jacob Kang-Brown, a senior research associate at the Vera Institute of Justice and author of the new report. "We saw decreases in big cities, small cities, rural counties and the suburbs, but the increase we see is troubling."

In the Genesee County Jail in New York, where Reed recently began a six-month sentence for petit larceny, there were, for a time, only 35 people jailed, down from 90 before the pandemic, according to data compiled by the Vera Institute. Defendants had court dates pushed off, and judges went to extra lengths to allow people to wait at home rather than in jail. (New York's bail reform law also went into effect in early 2020 and reduced jail populations even further.) By March, there were 54 people jailed in the county lockup.

For Reed, who said he has struggled with an addiction to crack cocaine, going to jail has meant losing his disability checks, his only source of income. Without income, he has no way to pay rent, and he fears that unless a family member can take him in, he will be homeless when he is released in September.

Reed doesn't understand the point of sending him to jail now, only further destabilizing his life. "They could have at least offered me drug court or some type of rehab or something," he said in an interview from the Genesee County Jail last week.

This story is a collaboration between The Associated Press and The Marshall Project exploring the state of the prison system in the coronavirus pandemic. Camille Fassett of The Associated Press also contributed to this report.

No sooner had social distancing become the new normal than it became clear that such a thing was impossible in jails. Overcrowding, poor sanitation and subpar medical care amplified the threat. And unlike in prison, where people serve sentences of one year or more, the jail population is in constant churn as people are arrested, released on bond or take plea deals and leave.

More than 40 people have died of COVID-19 in jails since the start of the pandemic, according to a Bureau of Justice Statistics survey of nearly 1,000 jails. That is likely an undercount; the virus has killed more than 2,600 prisoners and 207 staff in U.S. prisons, where deaths are easier to track.

Raymonde Haney's grandson Lee had been jailed on a domestic violence charge in Tarrant County, Texas, when he died of COVID-19 at 34 in December. While others were released as part of safety precautions, he didn't qualify because of his domestic violence charge.

"They kept them in the jail like fish in a barrel," Haney said.

But many officials across the country, from small towns to suburbs and big cities, realized the danger

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and worked to get people out of jail. Public defenders and prosecutors — typically on opposing sides — collaborated with judges, sheriffs and local police departments to identify those in jail who could safely be released, and to make plans to send fewer people to jail, according to interviews with officials in more than a dozen counties.

“In the first few months, really almost all we did was releases,” said Florida Circuit Criminal Court Judge Nushin Sayfie in Miami-Dade County.

Bryan County, Georgia, reduced its jail population from 37 to 11, according to the Vera Institute. Sheriff Mark Crowe told police in the surrounding towns that he would only jail people charged with serious crimes like domestic violence. It was a challenge to persuade local law enforcement “to back off on some of the minor offenses you’d normally send to jail,” said jail administrator Larry Jacobs. “With traffic offenses, we told them, ‘Write them a ticket, give them a court date and wave goodbye.’”

In Wilbarger County, Texas, the sheriff made a similar decision. Paired with the local district attorney’s aggressive efforts to free anyone who wasn’t a safety risk, the move cut that jail’s population in half, to fewer than 20. Throughout the early days of the pandemic, the local district attorney’s office reviewed the felony arrests each day and made sure anyone accused of a nonviolent crime — and even some with violent crimes, on a case-by-case basis — was released to await trial at home rather than in the jail, said Staley Heatly, the district attorney there. “I’ve been DA here for almost 15 years. That is about the lowest jail population number we have ever had,” Heatly said.

For Patrick Fagan, it seemed at first like getting probation for his marijuana possession charge in Flowood, Mississippi, was a good deal. But as a server in a restaurant with late-night hours, he sometimes missed check-ins with his probation officer, which resulted in his probation getting extended. He landed in jail after being stopped for speeding, when the police looked up his license and discovered unpaid court fees. Finally, after he and his partner weighed the risks of COVID-19 with the toll probation was taking on their lives, they decided he should take a deal that would have him serve a weekend in jail in order to end his probation.

But when he got to the Lowndes County Jail to serve his time last August, he said, they turned him away. As a precaution against the virus, they were only accepting people charged with violent crimes. “I don’t know how to quantify how good it feels to not have to go to jail,” Fagan said.

The realities of the pandemic also kept jail populations down. Police officers tried to keep their distance from people on the street. Stores, bars and restaurants were closed, reducing calls for shoplifting, fights and related crimes. Roadways were quiet, which led to fewer traffic stops and the arrests that stem from them, like when police find drugs in a car or discover an outstanding warrant on the driver. Probation and parole departments across the country conducted far fewer check-ins, and most were by phone, which provided fewer opportunities to discover violations.

As courthouses closed, many defense attorneys, with none of the hearings and motions that usually fill their calendars, focused exclusively on getting clients out of jail. In Palm Beach County, Florida, the public defenders’ office set up a team “to keep reviewing and reviewing people in custody and coming up with creative arguments,” said Dan Eisinger, the county’s chief assistant public defender. If the judge denied bond the first time, the team went out to look for more information — additional evidence of preexisting conditions, new medical records or information from family — and tried again, three and even four times, Eisinger said.

And it worked. By June of last year, the Palm Beach County Jail had gone from about 1,750 people before the pandemic to 1,500, according to the data compiled by the Vera Institute.

“There was a real fear that people were going to get sick and die. Most judges did really factor that in,” Eisinger said.

The pandemic underscored what reform advocates have been saying for years: Cramped and filthy jails are the wrong place for most people who have been arrested. The pandemic forced a rapid departure

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from the status quo and became something of a proof of concept for alternatives to incarceration. "The pandemic has given prosecutors the chance to implement practices that have been discussed and floated for years now," said Alissa Heydari, a former Manhattan prosecutor who is deputy director of the Institute for Innovation in Prosecution at John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

The moment comes as the nation is already reassessing the criminal justice system, decriminalizing some lower-level crimes and reforming bail laws. The killing of George Floyd accelerated the discussion around policing and the need for reform. Reformers are asking: Nothing catastrophic happened while people were not jailed, so why bother now? Why can't the system work to keep defendants out, instead of in?

In many places, though, the push to clear out jails and rethink incarceration has been short-lived. Momentum for long-lasting change is wavering in the face of a rise in crime — including shootings and other violence — after several years at or near historic lows. Police leaders and union officials in places like New York City and Philadelphia have blamed policies freeing people from jail, though there is little evidence that people on release are behind the surge of new crimes. Some lockups were back at pre-pandemic levels even before vaccines were ready last winter.

While some violent crimes have been increasing, the number of people accused of shootings and homicides makes up a sliver of the jail population. The most common crimes, such as theft and drug crimes, decreased during the pandemic.

But for some officials, the push to clear the jails was simply a temporary precaution, nothing more.

"The wrong conclusion to draw is, somehow before the pandemic we were putting people in jail that didn't need to be there, and we stopped the optional people," said Jeff Langley, district attorney in Lumpkin County, Georgia.

In Philadelphia, District Attorney Larry Krasner, elected as part of a wave of high-profile, progressive prosecutors, said the precautions brought on by the pandemic cannot solve the problems of the criminal justice system.

"I don't think that there's any way to take a completely anomalous moment — the most anomalous moment in criminal justice of the century — and say that this is the new model," said Krasner, a Democrat. "But ... if the question is whether the most incarcerated country in the world should be less incarcerated, the answer is: Hell yes."

Overall, jail populations are still lower than they were before the pandemic, which several sheriffs and judges attribute to making some of the changes permanent. "The ease of just writing them a citation and giving them a day in court," rather than arresting people and bringing them to jail, "has become the preferred way of doing business," said Sheriff Trace Hendricks of Bosque County, Texas.

Judges in multiple counties said they are now more likely to release people to await the resolution of their cases at home than in jail, and they are talking with others in the system to bolster electronic monitoring and other programs to keep an eye on people pretrial.

But it's not clear if these changes will stick.

"It's a slow progression back into what people know," said Broward County, Florida, public defender Gordon Weekes. He's watched his county's jail numbers rise from below 3,000 at the start of the pandemic to over 3,400 at the end of March. "You can try to break those habits, but this system knows a particular approach, a particular way of doing business."

German state vote triumph boosts Merkel's center-right bloc

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Chancellor Angela Merkel's center-right bloc claimed momentum Monday for the September election that will choose Germany's next leader after a larger-than-expected win in the last regional ballot before the nation votes. But the victory in a sparsely populated eastern state where it faced a challenge from the far right was mostly a triumph for the popular state governor.

Merkel's Christian Democratic Union won Sunday's election in Saxony-Anhalt with 37.1% of the vote, far ahead of the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, with 20.8%. Pre-election polls had pointed to a

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much narrower outcome.

Elections in Germany's 16 states are often influenced by local issues yet are also seen as important bellwethers for the national mood. The success in Saxony-Anhalt, which has 2.2 million people, gives CDU leader Armin Laschet — the party's candidate to succeed four-term chancellor Merkel in the national vote — a reason to celebrate after a bumpy start that included two defeats in state votes in March.

"Of course this gives the federal party tailwind," Laschet told reporters after a meeting of CDU leaders. "It shows that it isn't moods and polls that decide elections, but voters."

Sunday's results were disappointing for the other two parties competing for the chancellorship in the Sept. 26 national election. The center-left Social Democrats took 8.4% of the vote, dropping into single digits for the first time in Saxony-Anhalt. The environmentalist Greens scored 5.9%, making only minimal gains despite their current strong showing in national polls.

Both pointed to the role played by Saxony-Anhalt's popular governor, Reiner Haseloff, who appeared to have won over centrist voters worried about a possible AfD win. Laschet acknowledged that Haseloff "and no one else" won the election.

Haseloff and Laschet have both insisted there can be no coalition or cooperation with the far-right party, which has fed in recent years on anger over Merkel's welcome for large number of migrants in 2015 and in recent months has championed opposition to coronavirus restrictions.

"The CDU is the bulwark against extremism," Laschet declared Monday. "The election shows that our clear line against AfD is not just right but people support it, and we will pursue this centrist course."

His comments reflect the fact that while AfD is strong in Germany's formerly communist east, Laschet's bigger challenge nationwide is keeping at bay the Greens and holding onto centrist voters. Recent national polls have shown the environmentalist party roughly level with the Union bloc, which Laschet's CDU dominates.

Some conservatives celebrated what they saw as the Greens being cut down to size in Saxony-Anhalt.

"Since yesterday, it is definitely not the case that the Greens will carry on rising without any problems," said Markus Soeder, who in April challenged Laschet for the candidacy to succeed Merkel. "Now we can see that the Greens' high flight has clearly been stopped."

Green leaders acknowledged that they'd have liked to do better in Saxony-Anhalt, although they aren't traditionally strong there. The party's base is mainly in western Germany and urban areas.

"We must really work on making clear that we are a party which is at home in cities and in the countryside" in Germany's east, parliamentary group leader Katrin Goering-Eckardt told RBB Inforadio.

'Get used to me': Postmaster evokes Trump style in Biden era

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Louis DeJoy is uninterested in the niceties of Washington. The wealthy longtime businessman with an outer borough New York accent prides himself as a problem solver ready to disrupt an unwieldy bureaucracy. And he's facing potential legal troubles.

In other words, the postmaster general may be the closest thing to former President Donald Trump left in the nation's capital. But there's little President Joe Biden can do about it.

"Get used to me," DeJoy told critics in Congress during a hearing earlier this year.

As he approaches his first anniversary at the U.S. Postal Service's helm, DeJoy is under mounting pressure to resign. He's been criticized by lawmakers from both parties for changes to the agency that have resulted in service slowdowns. Democrats are particularly worried that he's purposefully undermining the post office, which is critical to the conduct of elections and is one of the few federal agencies a vast majority of Americans like.

The scrutiny of DeJoy, 63, has intensified as the Justice Department investigates him over political fundraising at the North Carolina-based company he ran prior to his work at the post office.

"Postmaster General DeJoy would not be in his job if he worked for any other company," said Rep. Carolyn Maloney, a New York Democrat who chairs the House oversight committee.

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DeJoy spokesman Mark Corallo said the postmaster general "never knowingly violated" campaign finance laws.

DeJoy was born in Brooklyn and still retains its distinct accent, despite long living in Greensboro, North Carolina. After growing up in New York, he took over his father's small, declining trucking business in the 1980s, transforming it into New Breed Logistics, which he sold in 2014. His firm offered logistical services nationwide, which critics are quick to note sometimes competed with the post office.

DeJoy became postmaster general shortly after Trump declared the post office "a joke." DeJoy implemented cost-cutting mechanisms he said would help make the agency — which has lost \$9.2 billion in the 2020 budget year — more fiscally solvent. Those included reducing employee overtime and removing mail-sorting machines from postal facilities around the country.

"I am direct and decisive," DeJoy said in a video message to employees last summer. "And I don't mince words."

After the changes, mail slowed enough that Democrats worried about an electoral crisis. The coronavirus pandemic prompted a voting-by-mail surge in last year's presidential election, and widespread delays sparked concerns that millions of ballots wouldn't arrive on time.

A federal judge wrote in September that "the Postal Service's actions are not the result of any legitimate business concerns" but instead consistent with the Trump administration's goals "to disrupt and challenge the legitimacy" of elections.

Ultimately, while there were complaints about mail delays affecting some balloting and counting, fears of widespread electoral disruptions from DeJoy's larger changes mostly proved unfounded. The Postal Service says it delivered at least 135 million ballots to or from voters — and delivered 99.89% of those mailed after Sept. 4, ahead of Election Day on Nov. 4, within seven days, as promised.

"Some people may have breathed a sigh of relief," Mark Dimondstein, president of the American Postal Workers Union, which represents more than 200,000 post office employees, said of passing the election test. "But as important as mail ballots are ... all mail is important."

DeJoy nonetheless apologized to customers affected by service delays that occurred during last year's holiday season rush, and said his whole agency would "strive to do better" amid bipartisan criticism at a House hearing in February.

Such frustrations were new. A Pew Research Center poll released before DeJoy took over found that 91% of Americans had a favorable view of the post office.

"I think the postmaster general's intentions were good but the implementation was far less so," said John McHugh, a former New York Republican congressman who now heads the Package Coalition, an advocacy group of businesses that rely on package delivery. "I'd like to think he's learned his lesson."

The Postal Service lost \$87 billion over the past 14 budget years, according to the Government Accountability Office. While much of the budgetary concerns stem from a 2006 law requiring the agency to fully fund costly retiree health benefits for the next 75 years, the post office has also been hurt by an inevitable, internet-fueled decline in mail volume. That was exacerbated by the pandemic.

In March, DeJoy announced a 10-year plan he says can help the post office avoid \$160 billion in further projected losses over the next decade by cutting post office hours, relaxing delivery standards so some mail takes longer, and other austerity measures.

The Postal Service is also seeking to increase the cost of a first-class stamp to 58 cents in late August.

DeJoy's proposed overhaul could help the post office operate more like a business than a public service. But he's bristled at suggestions he's a Trump holdover with an ideology that now conflicts with a Democratic administration.

"I'm not a political appointee," DeJoy told the House hearing. "I was selected by a bipartisan board of governors and I'd really appreciate if you'd get that straight." When pressed on how long he'd remain in his post, DeJoy responded, "A long time. Get used to me."

Wisconsin Rep. Mark Pocan, who organized a letter signed by 90 House Democrats in August calling for DeJoy's removal, said the postmaster general "is a guy who obviously has a lot of confidence in himself."

"He doesn't seem to understand that one of the few services that the federal government does that's in the Constitution is the Postal Service," Pocan said "and we have a higher obligation to do the job correctly."

DeJoy can only be removed by a vote of the Postal Service's governing board, which has nine members in addition to DeJoy and the deputy postmaster general. The Senate recently approved three new, Biden-appointed members. By law, though, no more than five of the nine voting board members can be from the same party and two existing, Democratic members have publicly supported DeJoy and his 10-year plan.

Biden could dismiss existing board members and replace them with his own appointees who might support replacing DeJoy — but he'd have to show cause for doing so.

Meantime, Congress may forge ahead with post office changes with DeJoy still in charge. A bipartisan plan to scrap requirements that the Postal Service pre-fund retiree health benefits, potentially saving the agency billions of dollars, is advancing. That's surprising because lawmakers have fought over that issue for years.

Republican supporters say the move would complement DeJoy's 10-year plan rather than supplant it. A Democratic proposal that could defy the postmaster general's overhaul remains stalled.

When Pocan pressed him during another House hearing about what grade he would give himself as postmaster general, DeJoy resisted answering, then finally replied, "An 'A' for bringing strategy and the planning and effort."

Recalling the exchange, Pocan joked that almost no one would give DeJoy's performance an 'A,' "Unless it was followed by a derogatory name."

Polio: When vaccines and re-emergence were just as daunting

By DAN SEWELL Associated Press

CINCINNATI (AP) — The COVID-19 pandemic and the distribution of the vaccines that will prevent it have surfaced haunting memories for Americans who lived through an earlier time when the country was swept by a virus that, for so long, appeared to have no cure or way to prevent it.

They were children then. They had friends or classmates who became wheelchair-bound or dragged legs with braces. Some went to hospitals to use iron lungs they needed to breathe. Some never came home.

Now they are older adults. Again, they find themselves in what has been one of the hardest-hit age groups, just as they were as children in the polio era. They are sharing their memories with today's younger people as a lesson of hope for the emergence from COVID-19.

Clyde Wigness, a retired University of Vermont professor active in a mentoring program, recently told 13-year-old Ferris Giroux about the history of polio during their weekly Zoom call. Families and schools saved coins to contribute to the "March of Dimes" to fund anti-polio efforts, he recalled, and the nation celebrated successful vaccine tests.

"As soon as the vaccine came out, everybody jumped on it and got it right away," recounts Wigness, 84, a native of Harlan, Iowa. "Everybody got on the bandwagon, and basically it was eradicated in the United States."

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, before vaccines were available, polio outbreaks caused more than 15,000 cases of paralysis each year, with U.S. deaths peaking at 3,145 in 1952. Outbreaks led to quarantines and travel restrictions. Soon after vaccines became widely available, American cases and death tolls plummeted to hundreds a year, then dozens in the 1960s. In 1979, polio was eradicated in the United States.

"So really, what I would love for people to be reassured about is that there have been lots of times in history when things haven't gone the way we've expected them to," says Joaniko Kochi, director of Adelphi University's Institute for Parenting. "We adapt, and our children will have skills and strengths and resiliencies that we didn't have."

While today's children learned to stay at home and attend school remotely, wear masks when they went anywhere and frequently use hand sanitizer, many of their grandparents remember childhood summers dominated by concern about the airborne virus, which was also spread through feces. Some parents banned their kids from public swimming pools and neighborhood playgrounds and avoided large gatherings.

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"Polio was something my parents were very scared of," says Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, now 74. "My dad was a big baseball fan, but very careful not to take me into big crowds ... my Dad's friend thought his son caught it at a Cardinals game."

A 1955 newspaper photo surfaced recently showing DeWine becoming one of the first second-graders in Yellow Springs, Ohio, to get a vaccination shot. His future wife, Fran Struewing, was a classmate who got hers that day, too. Sixty-six years later, they got the COVID-19 vaccination shots together.

DeWine, a Republican, has drawn criticism within the state and his own party for his aggressive response to the COVID-19 outbreak. But he and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican who overcame a childhood case of polio, and others of that time remember the importance of developing vaccines and of widespread inoculations.

Martha Wilson, now 88 and a student nurse at Indiana University in the early 1950s, remembers the nationwide relief when a polio vaccine was developed after years of work. She thinks some people today don't appreciate "how rapidly they got a vaccine for COVID." She doesn't take for granted returning to the kind of safer life that allows for planning a big family reunion around Labor Day.

Kochi had a different experience than most children of the 1950s. Her mother, a believer in natural medicine such as herbal treatments, didn't have her vaccinated (Kochi got vaccinated as an adult). While her mother was an outlier then, she would fit in with today's vaccine skeptics.

DeWine thinks a key contrast between the 1960s and today, with its reluctance of so many Americans to get vaccinated, is that polio tended to afflict children and had become many parents' worst nightmare.

"I know our parents were relieved when we were finally going to get a shot," Fran DeWine recalls.

Her husband recently initiated a series of \$1 million lotteries to pump up sluggish COVID-19 vaccination participation among Ohioans. President Joe Biden last week announced a "month of action" with incentives such as free beer and sports tickets to drive U.S. vaccinations.

Wigness blames today's divisive politics and anti-science messages spread over talk shows and social media. Ferris, the teen he mentors, says he sees criticism of mask-wearing and other precaution among some of his peers. Ferris says the polio eradication success "certainly means it's possible we can beat COVID, but it entirely depends on people."

Martha Wilson, now living in Hot Springs Village, Arkansas, talked about polio and COVID-19 in a recent Zoom call with her granddaughter, Hanna Wilson, 28, of suburban New York. She reflected on treating patients iron lungs, a kind of ventilator used to treat polio.

"They were very confining. ... It was not a very nice life," says Wilson.

"I remember a book I read when I was a little kid, 'Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio,' by Peg Kehret. And it stuck with me," Hanna says. "And I remember the iron lungs and things like that. But when I asked people about it — 'Hey, do you remember what polio was?' — no one knew."

Hanna, an athletics administrator for the Big East Conference, happened to be in Iran in December 2019 when she heard the first reports of a new virus in China. She was visiting a grandfather, Aboulfath Rohani, who would die there a few months later at age 97.

Back home, her job was quickly transformed. Games, then tournaments, then entire seasons were canceled.

"It's been eye-opening," she says. "So many people denied that it was real, they hadn't seen anything like this."

Both she and her grandmother point out that the nation endured not only polio but a deadly flu pandemic in 1918 whose estimated toll remains higher than COVID-19's both in the United States and globally.

"I'm hopeful we will come out of this and it will be just another chapter in history," Hanna Wilson says.

Martha Wilson says her mother-in-law survived illness from the 1918 flu pandemic and lived a long life.

"So that was one generation, polio was another generation, COVID's another," she says. "I think they happened so far apart that we'd forgotten that these things do happen. I think COVID caught us by surprise."

"And now Hanna and her generation will be maybe more aware when something else comes along."

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Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, June 8, the 159th day of 2021. There are 206 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 8, 1968, authorities announced the capture in London of James Earl Ray, the suspected assassin of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

On this date:

In 1864, Abraham Lincoln was nominated for another term as president during the National Union (Republican) Party's convention in Baltimore.

In 1915, U.S. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan resigned over what he viewed as President Woodrow Wilson's overly bellicose attitude toward Germany following the sinking of the RMS Lusitania.

In 1953, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that restaurants in the District of Columbia could not refuse to serve Blacks. Eight tornadoes struck Michigan's Lower Peninsula, killing 126 people.

In 1962, 20th Century Fox fired Marilyn Monroe from its production "Something's Got to Give," saying she was unreliable. (Fox later changed its mind, but Monroe died before filming could resume, and the movie was abandoned.)

In 1966, a merger was announced between the National and American Football Leagues, to take effect in 1970.

In 1967, during the six-day Middle East war, 34 American servicemen were killed when Israel attacked the USS Liberty, a Navy intelligence-gathering ship in the Mediterranean Sea. (Israel later said the Liberty had been mistaken for an Egyptian vessel.)

In 1972, during the Vietnam War, an Associated Press photographer took a picture of a screaming 9-year-old girl, Phan Thi Kim Phuc (fahn thee kihm fook), as she ran naked and severely burned from the scene of a South Vietnamese napalm attack.

In 1978, a jury in Clark County, Nevada, ruled the so-called "Mormon will," purportedly written by the late billionaire Howard Hughes, was a forgery.

In 1995, U.S. Marines rescued Capt. Scott O'Grady, whose F-16C fighter jet had been shot down by Bosnian Serbs on June 2. Mickey Mantle received a liver transplant at a Dallas hospital; however, the baseball great died two months later.

In 1998, the National Rifle Association elected actor Charlton Heston to be its president.

In 2009, North Korea's highest court sentenced American journalists Laura Ling and Euna Lee to 12 years' hard labor for trespassing and "hostile acts." (The women were pardoned in early August 2009 after a trip to Pyongyang by former President Bill Clinton.)

In 2015, siding with the White House in a foreign-policy power struggle with Congress, the Supreme Court ruled 6-3 that Americans born in the disputed city of Jerusalem could not list Israel as their birthplace on passports.

Ten years ago: Rep. Allyson Schwartz of Pennsylvania became the first Democratic House colleague to call for Rep. Anthony Weiner of New York to resign after he admitted sending a lewd photo of himself to a woman via Twitter and lying about it. OPEC unexpectedly left its production levels unchanged, causing oil prices to jump as senior officials reported their meeting in Vienna had ended in disarray.

Five years ago: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (nah-REN'-drah MOH'-dee) told the U.S. Congress that the world's two largest democracies could anchor stability and prosperity from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific in an aspirational speech that glossed over continuing divisions in the relationship. Maria Sharapova (shah-rah-POH'-vah) was suspended for two years by the International Tennis Federation for testing positive for meldonium at the Australian Open. (The ban, which was backdated to Jan. 26, 2016, was later reduced to 15 months.)

One year ago: Thousands of mourners gathered at a church in Houston for a service for George Floyd, as his death during an arrest in Minneapolis continued to stoke protests in America and beyond over racial

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injustice. France's top security official said police would no longer permit chokeholds that had been blamed for multiple cases of asphyxiation and had come under renewed criticism after George Floyd's death. The police chief in Portland, Oregon, resigned, just six months into her job, amid criticism of her department's handling of protests. New York City slowly began reopening for business; stores that were previously deemed nonessential during the coronavirus shutdown were cleared to reopen for delivery and curbside pickup. New Zealand appeared to have completely eradicated the coronavirus for the time being; health officials aid the last person known to have been infected in the country had recovered.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Millicent Martin is 87. Actor James Darren is 85. Singer Nancy Sinatra is 81. Singer Chuck Negron is 79. Musician Boz Scaggs is 77. Author Sara Paretsky is 74. Actor Sonia Braga is 71. Actor Kathy Baker is 71. Country musician Tony Rice is 70. Rock singer Bonnie Tyler is 70. Actor Griffin Dunne is 66. "Dilbert" creator Scott Adams is 64. Actor-director Keenen Ivory Wayans is 63. Singer Mick Hucknall (Simply Red) is 61. Musician Nick Rhodes (Duran Duran) is 59. R&B singer Doris Pearson (Five Star) is 55. Actor Julianna Margulies is 54. Actor Dan Futterman is 54. Actor David Sutcliffe is 52. Actor Kent Faulcon is 51. R&B singer Nicci Gilbert is 51. Actor Kelli Williams is 51. Former U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, D-Ariz., is 51. Actor Mark Feuerstein is 50. Contemporary Christian musician Mike Scheuchzer (MercyMe) is 46. Actor Eion Bailey is 45. Former tennis player Lindsay Davenport is 45. Rapper Kanye (KAHN'-yay) West is 44. TV personality-actress Maria Menounos is 43. Country singer-songwriter Sturgill Simpson is 43. Blues-rock musician Derek Trucks (The Derek Trucks Band) is 42. Rock singer Alex Band (The Calling) is 40. Folk-bluegrass singer-musician Sara Watkins (Nickel Creek) is 40. Former tennis player Kim Clijsters is 38. Actor Torrey DeVitto is 37. Tennis player Jelena Ostapenko is 24.