

Groton Daily Independent

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“If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.”

-DR. WAYNE DYER



Chicken Soup
for the Soul

HEAT ADVISORY IN EFFECT FROM NOON TODAY TO 8 PM

- * WHAT...Heat index values up to 103 expected.
- * WHERE...Portions of central, north central and northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota.
- * WHEN...From noon CDT /11 AM MDT/ today to 8 PM CDT /7 PM MDT/ this evening.
- * IMPACTS...Hot temperatures and high humidity may cause heat illnesses to occur.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Drink plenty of fluids, stay in an air-conditioned room, stay out of the sun, and check up on relatives and neighbors. Young children and pets should never be left unattended in vehicles under any circumstances.

Take extra precautions if you work or spend time outside. When possible reschedule strenuous activities to early morning or evening. Know the signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Wear lightweight and loose fitting clothing when possible. To reduce risk during outdoor work, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration recommends scheduling frequent rest breaks in shaded or air conditioned environments. Anyone overcome by heat should be moved to a cool and shaded location.

Heat stroke is an emergency! Call 9 1 1.



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Children in Hot Cars Deaths Dropped by Half Last Year

As hot temperatures return, AAA South Dakota encourages parents/caregivers to 'Look Before You Lock'

SIOUX FALLS, SD. – June 10, 2021 – As COVID-related restrictions have been lifted across South Dakota, AAA is warning parents and caregivers that some pre-pandemic behaviors present an increased risk to children. Specifically, as temperatures soar, AAA South Dakota notes that half as many children died in hot cars last year as compared to the 'normal' years prior.

According to KidsandCars.org, 25 children nationwide died in hot cars last year, as compared to 53 who died in 2019 and a record 54 children who died in hot cars in 2018.

"We know that, historically, one of the greatest contributing factors to children being forgotten in cars is a change in routine. With schools out for summer, disruptions are common in work routines and childcare routines that many have become accustomed to as COVID restrictions ease," said Shawn Steward, AAA South Dakota spokesman. "It is critical that parents and caregivers be aware of the increased risk."

Heat stroke is the leading cause of non-crash, vehicle-related deaths for children under the age of 14, with an average of 38 fatalities per year nationwide since 1998.

Tragically, at least two children, a five-month-old girl in North Carolina and a three-year-old girl in California, have died from hyperthermia this year. Both victims were left in the car by their mothers.

"Even if it is not extremely hot outside, it can get extremely hot inside the vehicle – and deadly - in just a matter of minutes," AAA South Dakota's Steward added.

Look Before You Lock

AAA has joined with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to remind parents and caregivers to "look before you lock." The deaths of children in hot cars is often because they've been forgotten.

In the past two decades, nationwide, 781 children left in vehicles have died of heatstroke, hyperthermia, or other complications. In South Dakota, 3 children have died in hot cars from 2000-2020, the most recent occurring in 2010.

Studies have shown about 51% of child hot car deaths in vehicles were caused by adults forgetting the children and 29% of victims were playing in an unattended vehicle.

AAA Urges Motorists To ACT:

A—Avoid heatstroke by never leaving a child in the car alone, not even for a minute.

C—Create electronic reminders or put something in the backseat you need when exiting the car - for example, a cell phone, purse, wallet, briefcase or shoes. Always lock your car and never leave car keys or car remote where children can get to them.

T—Take action and immediately call 9-1-1- if you notice a child unattended in a car.

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Four RBI Day For Caden McInerney Leads Groton Jr. Teeners Past VFW 14U Clark Area

Caden McInerney was an RBI machine on Wednesday, driving in four on two hits to lead Groton Jr. Teeners past VFW 14U Clark Area 20-4 on Wednesday. McInerney drove in runs on a fielder's choice in the first and a single in the second.

VFW 14U Clark Area scored three runs in the second inning, but Groton Jr. Teeners still managed to pull out the victory.

Groton Jr. Teeners scored ten runs in the second inning. Groton Jr. Teeners offense in the inning was led by McInerney, Kellen Antonsen, Brevin Fliehs, Braxton Imrie, Teylor Diegel, and Nicholas Morris, all sending runners across the plate with RBIs in the inning.

Diegel earned the victory on the hill for Groton Jr. Teeners. The righty surrendered four runs on two hits over three innings, striking out five and walking one.

Mato Denoyer took the loss for VFW 14U Clark Area . The righty surrendered 15 runs on seven hits over one and two-thirds innings, striking out one.

Groton Jr. Teeners collected nine hits. McInerney, Fliehs, and Diegel each racked up multiple hits for Groton Jr. Teeners. Diegel, Fliehs, and McInerney each managed two hits to lead Groton Jr. Teeners. Groton Jr. Teeners stole six bases during the game as two players stole more than one. Imrie led the way with two.

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VFW 14U Clark Area Runs Away With Early Lead In Victory

Groton Jr. Teeners watched the game slip away early and couldn't recover in a 14-6 loss to VFW 14U Clark Area on Wednesday. VFW 14U Clark Area scored on an error during Conner Mudgett's at bat, a double by Michael Severson, a single by Alex Reil, and a single by Dawson Lantgen in the first inning.

Groton Jr. Teeners collected six hits and VFW 14U Clark Area had seven in the high-scoring affair.

In the first inning, VFW 14U Clark Area got their offense started when an error scored two runs for VFW 14U Clark Area .

Groton Jr. Teeners scored four runs in the fourth inning. Groton Jr. Teeners's offense in the inning came from a walk by Brevin Fliehs and a single by Braxton Imrie.

Will Hovde was the winning pitcher for VFW 14U Clark Area . The pitcher allowed five hits and five runs over three innings, striking out three. Conner Mudgett threw one inning in relief out of the bullpen.

Imrie took the loss for Groton Jr. Teeners. The pitcher allowed one hit and six runs.

Imrie led Groton Jr. Teeners with two hits in three at bats.

Dawson Lantgen went 2-for-2 at the plate to lead VFW 14U Clark Area in hits.

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Groton Legion Post #39 Claims Lead In Fifth Inning To Defeat Clark-Willow Lake Senators

Groton Legion Post #39 stole the lead late in the game in an 8-7 victory over Clark-Willow Lake Senators on Wednesday. The game was tied at six with Groton Legion Post #39 batting in the bottom of the fifth when Brodyn DeHoet singled on a 0-1 count, scoring two runs.

Groton Legion Post #39 earned the victory despite allowing Clark-Willow Lake Senators to score four runs in the second inning. Clark-Willow Lake Senators's big inning was driven by singles by Gunnar Kvistad and Lucas Kannegieter and a walk by Josh K.

Clark-Willow Lake Senators got things started in the second inning when Josh drew a walk, scoring one run.

Groton Legion Post #39 put up five runs in the third inning. Pierce Kettering, Alex Morris, and Chandler Larson each had RBIs in the frame.

Darien Shabazz led the Groton Legion Post #39 to victory on the pitcher's mound. The righthander lasted three and two-thirds innings, allowing five hits and two runs while striking out eight.

Shane Wicks took the loss for Clark-Willow Lake Senators. The pitcher surrendered eight runs on nine hits over five innings, striking out six.

Peyton Johnson started the game for Groton Legion Post #39. The lefthander surrendered five runs on six hits over three and a third innings, striking out seven.

Kettering led Groton Legion Post #39 with three hits in four at bats. Groton Legion Post #39 stole 14 bases during the game as four players stole more than one. Jayden Zak led the way with three. Groton Legion Post #39 didn't commit a single error in the field. Morris had 14 chances in the field, the most on the team.

Clark-Willow Lake Senators totaled 11 hits in the game. Jack Bratland, Gunnar Kvistad, Lucas Kannegieter, and Shane Wicks each racked up multiple hits for Clark-Willow Lake Senators. Clark-Willow Lake Senators was sure-handed in the field and didn't commit a single error. Zach Winter had the most chances in the field with seven.

The Life of Edward Gerald Burke



Edward Gerald Burke, 77, died Fri., June 4, 2021, at his home in Watertown, S.D., under the care of Prairie Lakes Hospice and surrounded by his family.

Cremation has taken place under the direction of Crawford-Othus Funeral Chapel, Watertown, and a memorial gathering will be held Thurs., June 17, from 4-7 p.m. at the chapel.

Edward was born Nov. 11, 1943, in Rapid City, S.D., to Gerald and Hazel (Seaton) Burke of Owanka, S.D. Since his dad was a section foreman for the Chicago & Northwestern Railway, his family moved several times as branch lines were abandoned. They lived in Owanka, Salem, Iroquois, Groton, Pierre and Carthage where Edward graduated from high school in 1961.

He studied electronics at the Dunwoodie College of Technology, Minneapolis, Minn., and television repair at Lake Area Technical College, Watertown. Over the years, he worked for Flying Tigers in Chicago, Ill., and Roller Blade, Inc. in Minnesota and ran the Avenue Arcade bar in Huron, S.D. In his later years, Edward provided daycare for his three grandchildren, two nieces and a nephew. He was an avid bowler, enjoyed attending auctions and was interested in genealogy.

Edward married Karen Buchheim, daughter of Harold and Irene Buchheim of Oldham, S.D., in 1972.

Survivors include his wife, Karen; daughters, Kellie (Jim) Christensen and Kelsie Burke, all of Watertown; son, Gerald, Mankato, Minn.; brother, Allan (Leah) Burke of Linton, N.D.; step-brother, Dale (Nancy) Peterson, Scotts Valley, Calif.; grandchildren, Maercedes, Lexus and Alex Christensen, all of Watertown; Karen's sisters and their spouses, Connie (Daniel) Stevens of Huron and Karla (Steve) Wess of Watertown, and his nieces and nephews.

Edward was preceded in death by his parents; Karen's parents; step-father, Leonard Peterson; step-brothers, Laurel (Sharon Wolf) and Lane Peterson, and one brother-in-law, Merle Buchheim.

Johnson Applauds B-21 Official Announcement

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Representative Dusty Johnson (R-S.D.) issued a statement following the U.S. Air Force record of decision designating Ellsworth Air Force Base as the Main Operating Base 1 for the B-21 bomber.

“This has been a long journey,” said Johnson. “We’ve felt good about our progress over the last few years, but now we can say without any hedging or hesitation: our nation’s first B-21 bombers will call Ellsworth home.”

Rounds: Ellsworth AFB Officially Named First Home of the B-21 Raider Bomber

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) today announced that Ellsworth Air Force Base will officially be the Air Force’s first base to receive the new B-21 Raider bomber.

During a call Wednesday afternoon with Air Force Global Strike Commander General Timothy Ray, Sen. Rounds was informed that Ellsworth has been officially designated as the future home of the B-21.

“I am pleased that the U.S. Air Force has officially selected Ellsworth Air Force Base as the first home of the B-21 Raider bomber,” Rounds said. “This landmark decision makes certain that South Dakota will continue to play a critical role in our national defense. The selection of Ellsworth is a testament to the hard work of our Air Force personnel on the ground at Ellsworth and the communities of Box Elder and Rapid City that have worked hard to improve the long-term suitability of the base for this new state-of-the-art aircraft.

Background to Ellsworth AFB

In March 2019, the Air Force announced Ellsworth was the preferred location for the first home of the B-21 Raider bomber.

In January 2021, Rounds’ provision to address the Air Force’s bomber shortfall, which directly supports B-21 bomber program and Ellsworth Air Force Base, became law as part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2021.

In December 2019, Rounds secured full funding for the B-21 bomber program with the signing of the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2020.

As governor, Rounds successfully advocated for the removal of Ellsworth from the Department of Defense’s proposed closure list during a Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round in 2005. Following that effort, he led a legislative effort to establish the South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority (SDEDA). Now a permanent fixture, the SDEDA’s mission is to protect, strengthen and promote the base.

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 ***

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Day shift
and night
shift
assemblers!

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

**To apply:
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.

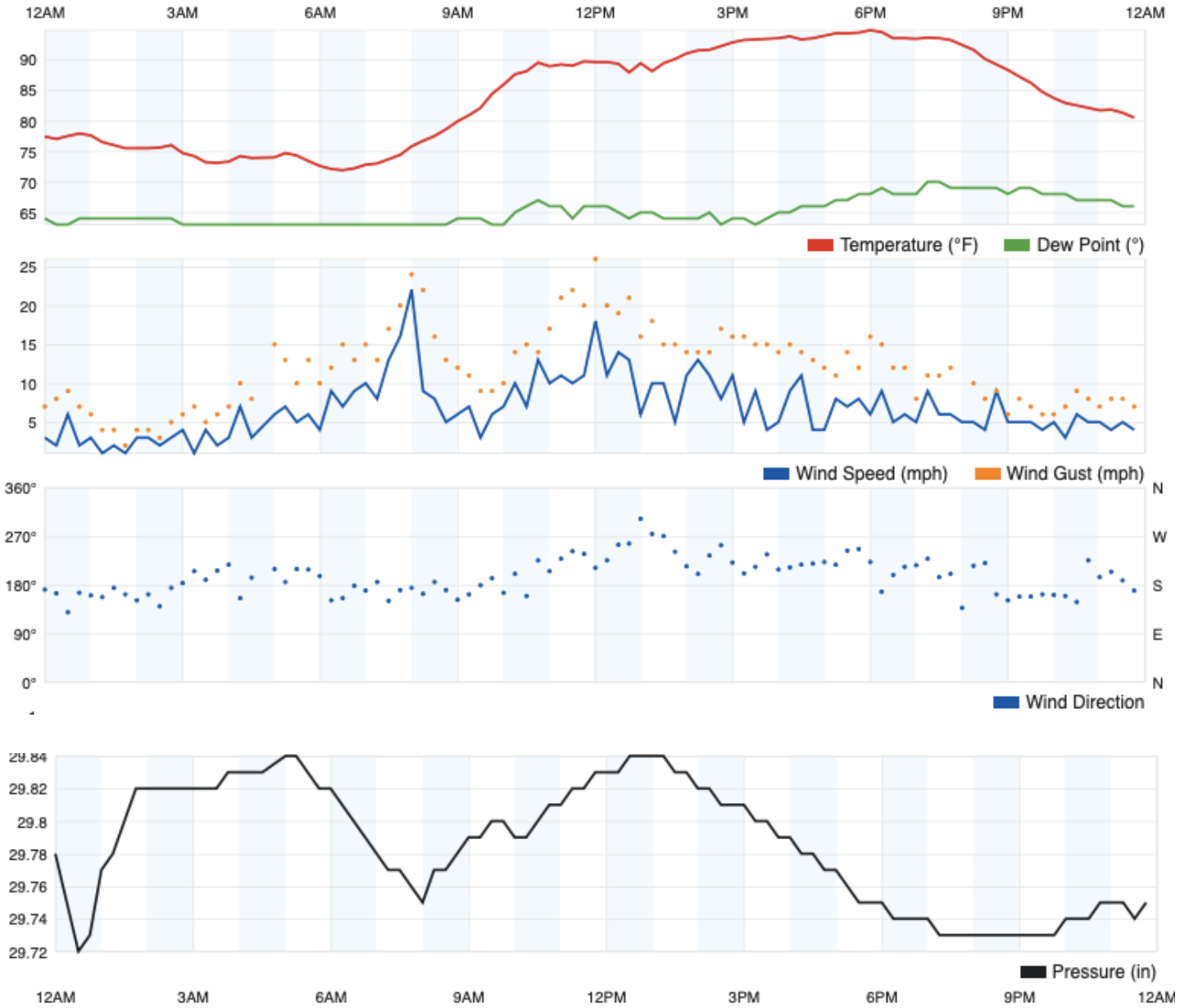
MS/HS Special Education Paraprofessional. The Groton Area School District is seeking applicants for the position of Special Education Paraprofessional. Starting salary is \$12.10/hour and position includes comprehensive benefits package. Criminal background check required. Interested parties should complete 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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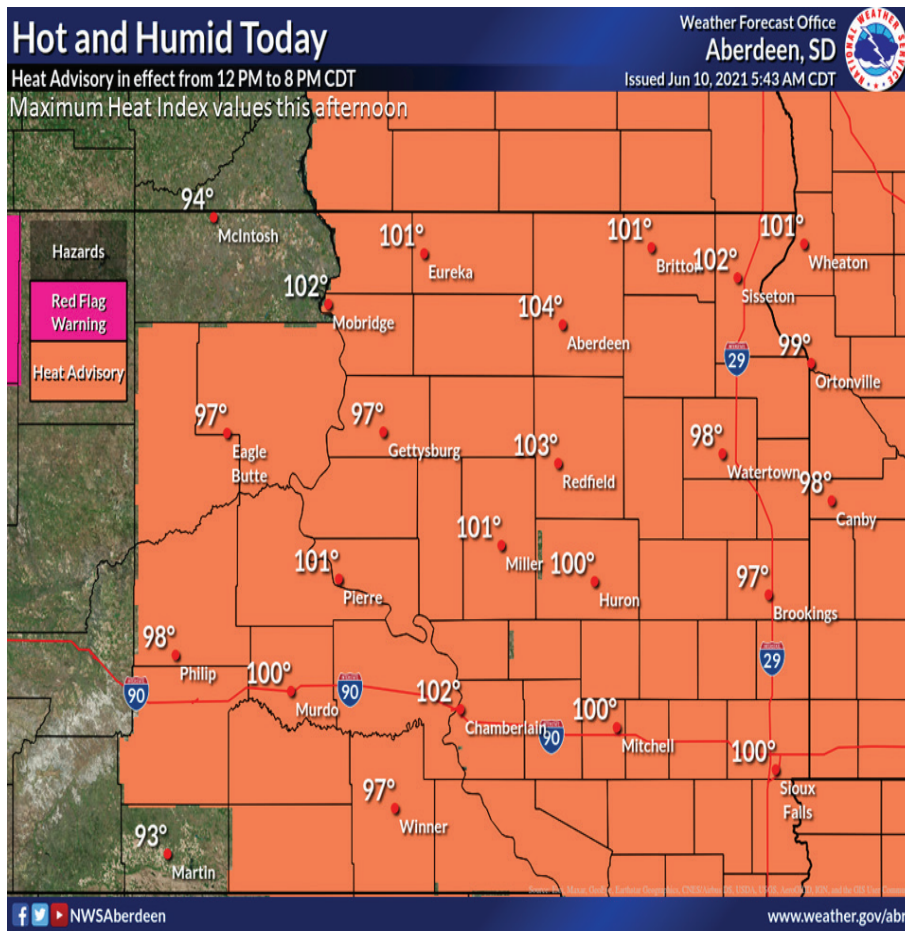
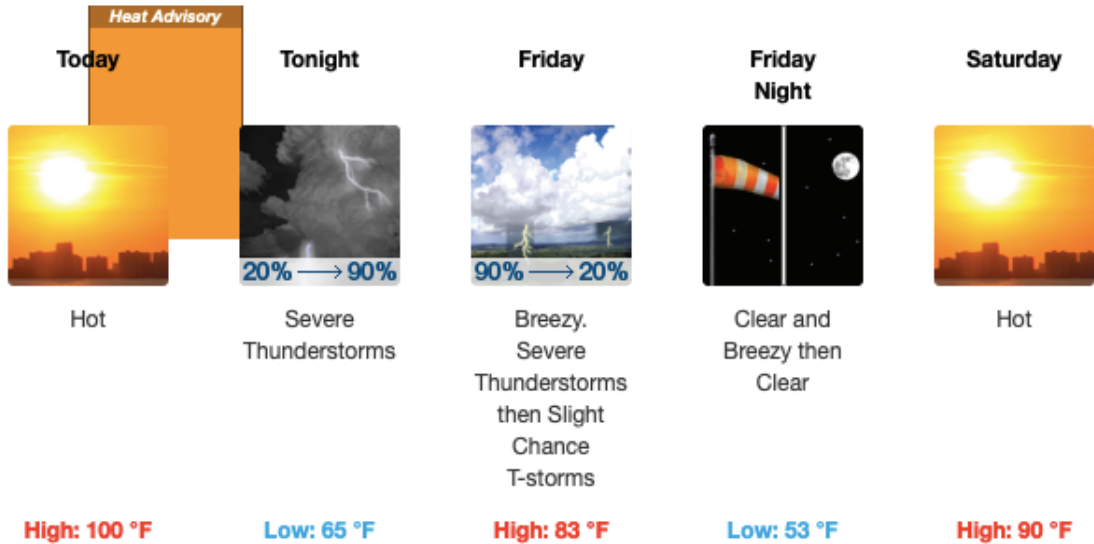
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Temps will once again soar into the 90s to around 100 degrees this afternoon. This combined with high humidity values will produce afternoon heat index values between 100 and 105. A heat advisory has been posted this afternoon through early evening due to this extreme heat. Relief will be on the way overnight in the form of a cold front. Unfortunately, this front will produce some pretty rough weather with severe storms expected.

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ENHANCED RISK of Severe T-Storms

This evening into early Friday
morning
Hazards

All severe weather types will initially be possible in western SD, with a transition to a wind threat as it moves into central/eastern SD.

Timing

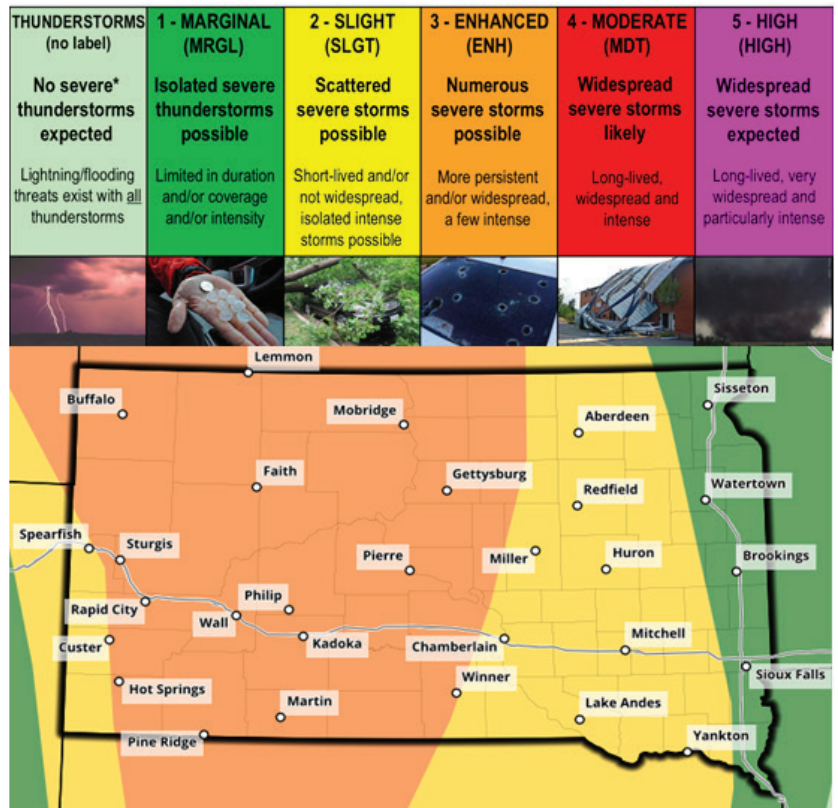
Tonight over central SD, and overnight for areas east of the Missouri River.

Some Towns at Risk

Mobridge, Gettysburg, Pierre, Murdo

Action

Monitor the changing weather forecast for later Sunday at www.weather.gov/abr



All severe weather types will initially be possible in western and central sections of SD this evening, with a transition to a wind threat as it moves into central/eastern SD. Expect storms over central SD late this evening to shift mainly east of the Missouri River late tonight into early Friday morning. Monitor the changing weather forecast at www.weather.gov/abr

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Today in Weather History

June 10, 1998: Torrential rains of two to three inches in a short period caused flash flooding on the Crow Creek, near Gann Valley. As a result, some dams and roads were washed out.

June 10, 2004: An F1 tornado damaged 3 barns and numerous other buildings on a farm located 22 miles west of Ft. Pierre. This tornado also downed power lines and broke windows out of a home. There were no injuries reported.

June 10, 2008: A strong low-level jet impinging on a frontal surface boundary extending across southern South Dakota brought many severe thunderstorms to central and northeast South Dakota. Large hail and high winds brought some tree damage, trees down, along with some structural damage. Eighty mph winds blew down a 46 by 100 foot Quonset with tin strewn over a quarter-mile. Several trees were also uprooted in Hosmer in Edmunds County. An EF1 tornado touched down briefly and downed a power pole, snapped off a road sign, and blew a metal shed 100 yards destroying it. The tornado also broke off several large tree branches. This tornado occurred eight miles east-northeast of Eden in Marshall County.

1752: It is believed that this was the day Benjamin Franklin narrowly missed electrocution while flying a kite during a thunderstorm to determine if lightning is related to electricity. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the History Channel.

1997: Flash Flooding occurred in many locations in Mississippi. Highway 80 and many other streets were flooded in and around Vicksburg. Water engulfed one person's car, but the person was rescued. This event caused \$300,000 in property damages. Over 6 inches of rain fell in Lexington in a little over 3 hours. The torrential rains caused Bear Creek to overflow and flood much of the town of Lexington. 45 businesses were affected by the flooding and 30 of these suffered major losses. As many as 300 homes had water damage. This event caused 10 million dollars in property damages. Portions of Jones County experienced flash flooding as 3 inches of rain fell in just 1.5 hours over saturated ground.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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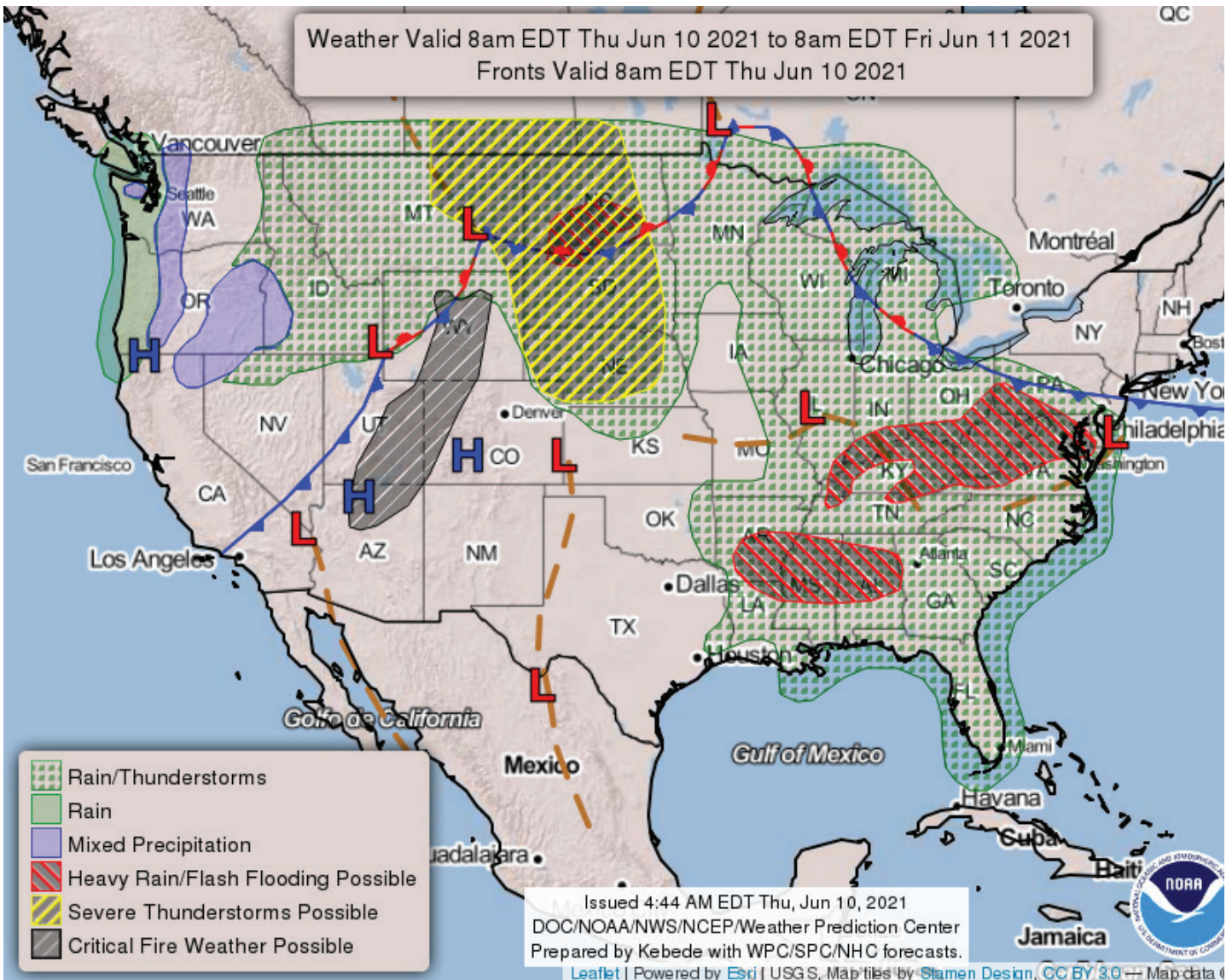
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 94.8 °F
Low Temp: 71.9 °F
Wind: 26 mph
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 100° in 1956, 1933
Record Low: 37° in 1936, 1964
Average High: 79°F
Average Low: 54°F
Average Precip in June.: 1.02
Precip to date in June.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 8.27
Precip Year to Date: 3.97
Sunset Tonight: 9:22 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:45 a.m.



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SEEKERS – FINDERS

Nicolaus Copernicus was the first astrologer to say that the sun was at the center of the universe. He has received great acclaim for that observation. He also said that "if the first button of your coat is buttoned wrong, all the rest will be out of place." Same person, two dramatically different observations. However, few have ever heard of his observation about what happens when you button a coat improperly.

"O God," said David, "You are my God. Earnestly I seek You." Much like buttoning a coat, if we begin a day earnestly seeking God, everything will end up as it should.

Each day we live is a new gift from God and a new adventure to live. It leads us on paths that we have never walked before and brings sights to our eyes and sounds to our ears that we have never experienced before. For every day to be God-honoring and Christ-exalting, it is essential that we begin it with the Lord in prayer and in reading His Word. If we want Him to guide us and guard us and keep us from troubles and temptation, we must go to Him in faith, believing that He will protect us.

"Earnestly seeking Him" means that our faith is not a past-time, part-time, some-time "thing" in our life. Copernicus, you will recall, recognized that the sun was the center of the universe, and every planet revolved around it. If God is not at the center of our lives, our universe, we cannot expect to live in peace and harmony, balance and control.

God promised that "He will never leave us nor forsake us." Unfortunately, it is us who leave and forsake Him.

Prayer: Father, may we understand the importance of beginning each day with You and asking for Your guidance. May we rely on You, not ourselves. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. Psalm 63:1a

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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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

08-14-16-21-27

(eight, fourteen, sixteen, twenty-one, twenty-seven)

Estimated jackpot: \$45,000

Lotto America

04-39-46-48-52, Star Ball: 3, ASB: 2

(four, thirty-nine, forty-six, forty-eight, fifty-two; Star Ball: three; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$6.95 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$20 million

Powerball

19-28-46-50-54, Powerball: 9, Power Play: 2

(nineteen, twenty-eight, forty-six, fifty, fifty-four; Powerball: nine; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$20 million

South Dakota's Ellsworth base will be home to B-21 bomber

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota will be the home of the next-generation nuclear bomber, the B-21 Raider, the U.S. Air Force indicated Wednesday.

The Air Force plans to build and eventually operate over 100 of the stealth bombers, which are capable of launching nuclear strikes around the globe. U.S. Sens. John Thune and Mike Rounds said they heard from the Air Force Wednesday that it has officially designated Ellsworth the bomber's main operating base.

Thune said the planes will eventually be housed at several Air Force bases, including locations in Texas and Missouri. However, Ellsworth was selected by the Air Force to house the bomber's training program and first squadron, Thune said.

The announcement represents an economic boon for the western part of South Dakota, with the bomber expected to potentially double the size of the base's personnel by bringing 3,000 more service members, Thune said. Construction projects for bomber hangars and other facilities are also expected. It currently hosts two squadrons that operate B-1 bombers, which are expected to eventually be phased out of military use.

"It's a once in a generation, historic opportunity for South Dakota," Thune said, adding that it will ensure Ellsworth remains a vital part of the nation's military.

The base, located near Rapid City, is already one of the largest employers in the state. According to a 2017 estimate, it had an annual economic impact of over \$350 million.

Ellsworth faced the possibility of closure in 2005 when it was briefly put on the Pentagon's list of military bases that should be closed or relocated. But since then, South Dakota politicians have worked to keep it on the shortlist of sites for the B-21 bomber. The Air Force had announced in March 2019 that it was leaning towards the base as the location to develop its B-21 Raider program.

Rounds credited West River communities for rallying to make sure the base stayed open. He added the development would create a ripple effect of construction for schools, infrastructure, and housing.

The Republican senators emphasized that it will be an important piece of the United State's military rivalry with both Russia and China. The bomber is expected to have a range long enough to attack targets on other continents.

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"It will let (China) know that we can reach out and touch them should they misbehave," Rounds said. However, the bomber is not expected to be flying over the Black Hills until 2027, and many of the details of the aircraft, currently being developed by Virginia-based Northrop Grumman, remain unknown or classified. Rounds was briefed several weeks ago on the project and said that so far it was "on time and on budget."

Keystone XL pipeline nixed after Biden stands firm on permit

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — The sponsor of the Keystone XL crude oil pipeline pulled the plug on the contentious project Wednesday after Canadian officials failed to persuade President Joe Biden to reverse his cancellation of its permit on the day he took office.

Calgary-based TC Energy said it would work with government agencies "to ensure a safe termination of and exit" from the partially built line, which was to transport crude from the oil sand fields of western Canada to Steele City, Nebraska.

Construction on the 1,200-mile (1,930-kilometer) pipeline began last year when former President Donald Trump revived the long-delayed project after it had stalled under the Obama administration. It would have moved up to 830,000 barrels (35 million gallons) of crude daily, connecting in Nebraska to other pipelines that feed oil refineries on the U.S. Gulf Coast.

Biden canceled the pipeline's border crossing permit in January over longstanding concerns that burning oil sands crude could make climate change worse and harder to reverse.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had objected to the move, raising tensions between the U.S. and Canada. Officials in Alberta, where the line originated, expressed frustration in recent weeks that Trudeau wasn't pushing Biden harder to reinstate the pipeline's permit.

Alberta invested more than \$1 billion in the project last year, kick-starting construction that had stalled amid determined opposition to the line from environmentalists and Native American tribes along its route.

Alberta officials said Wednesday they reached an agreement with TC Energy, formerly known as Trans-Canada, to exit that partnership. The company and province plan to try to recoup the government's investment, although neither offered any immediate details on how that would happen.

"We remain disappointed and frustrated with the circumstances surrounding the Keystone XL project, including the cancellation of the presidential permit for the pipeline's border crossing," Alberta Premier Jason Kenney said in a statement.

The province had hoped the pipeline would spur increased development in the oil sands and bring tens of billions of dollars in royalties over decades.

Climate change activists viewed the expansion of oil sands development as an environmental disaster that could speed up global warming as the fuel is burned. That turned Keystone into a flashpoint in the climate debate, and it became the focus of rallies and protests in Washington, D.C., and other cities.

Environmentalists who had fought the project since it was first announced in 2008 said its cancellation marks a "landmark moment" in the effort to curb the use of fossil fuels.

"Good riddance to Keystone XL," said Jared Margolis with the Center for Biological Diversity, one of many environmental groups that sued to stop it.

On Montana's Fort Belknap Reservation, tribal president Andy Werk Jr. described the end of Keystone as a relief to Native Americans who stood against it out of concerns a line break could foul the Missouri River or other waterways.

Attorneys general from 21 states had sued to overturn Biden's cancellation of the pipeline, which would have created thousands of construction jobs. Republicans in Congress have made the cancellation a frequent talking point in their criticism of the administration, and even some moderate Senate Democrats including Montana's Jon Tester and West Virginia's Joe Manchin had urged Biden to reconsider.

Tester said in a statement Wednesday that he was disappointed in the project's demise, but made no mention of Biden.

Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, the top Republican on the Senate energy committee, was more direct:

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"President Biden killed the Keystone XL Pipeline and with it, thousands of good-paying American jobs."

A White House spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment on TC Energy's announcement. In his Jan. 20 cancellation order, Biden said allowing the line to proceed "would not be consistent with my administration's economic and climate imperatives."

TC Energy said in canceling the pipeline that the company is focused on meeting "evolving energy demands" as the world transitions to different power sources. It said it has \$7 billion in other projects under development.

Keystone XL's price tag had ballooned as the project languished, increasing from \$5.4 billion to \$9 billion. Meanwhile, oil prices fell significantly — from more than \$100 a barrel in 2008 to under \$70 in recent months — slowing development of Canada's oil sands and threatening to eat into any profits from moving the fuel to refineries.

A second TC Energy pipeline network, known simply as Keystone, has been delivering crude from Canada's oil sands region since 2010. The company says on its website that Keystone has moved more than 3 billion barrels of crude from Alberta and an oil loading site in Cushing, Oklahoma.

Sioux Falls board won't investigate third-party paid travel

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Sioux Falls Board of Ethics decided Wednesday not to investigate the level of city officials' travel covered by third parties.

The board voted unanimously to deny a request from former mayoral candidate David Zokaites to launch an investigation, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported.

Zokaites made the request after a complaint about City Council member Greg Neitzert and Mayor Paul TenHaken's trip to a conference of Republican municipal and county officials. The host, Community Leaders of America, paid for Neitzert's travel expenses.

John Cunningham alleged that violated an ordinance prohibiting city officials from accepting gifts. The Ethics Board didn't recommend any sanctions against Neitzert, saying in an August report that third parties commonly pay for city officials' trips.

Zokaites accused the City Council of encouraging bribery. Board of Ethics Chair Jack Marsh pushed back, saying the board found probable cause that an ethical violation may have occurred and recommended the city both increase transparency around travel and revise the ordinance to clarify the city's rules. Marsh acknowledged that the City Council hasn't done that, however.

Other board members noted not all travel paid for by a third party was necessarily illegal or unethical, as Zokaites claimed, and the City Council had determined by a 5-2 vote that Neitzert didn't commit an ethical violation.

A motion to decline Zokaites' request passed unanimously during a meeting Wednesday.

Nominee to oversee Indigenous affairs has widespread support

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — President Joe Biden's nominee to oversee Indigenous affairs at the Interior Department said Wednesday he won't impede tribes as they seek to improve infrastructure, public safety and the economy on their lands.

Bryan Newland appeared before the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, where he received widespread support to become assistant secretary for Indian Affairs. Tribes, too, have endorsed him as someone who is well-versed in the issues they face and as a tribal advocate.

Newland said the work will require collaboration across federal agencies, driven by tribes. He recounted how federal policies and laws impacted his childhood and his path to becoming chief judge in the Bay Mills Indian Community in Michigan and being elected tribal president.

"I know the first-hand connection between public service and the lives of others," he said. "When you live with the people you serve, you can't escape that connection."

If confirmed by the full Senate, Newland would be responsible for maintaining the political relationship

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that 574 federally recognized tribes have with the federal government. Leaders of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Office of Indian Gaming and the U.S. Bureau of Indian Education would report to him.

Newland currently serves as principal deputy assistant secretary at the Interior Department and served in the agency during the Obama administration. In the new role, he would advise Secretary Deb Haaland broadly on tribes.

Senators asked Newland to ensure the Interior Department would respond with urgency to an epidemic of missing and slain Native Americans, preserve tribes' rights to develop oil and gas, expand broadband, help seek funding for tribal water settlements and keep in mind that not all Indigenous groups are similar in structure, culture and economics, including Native Hawaiians.

"The job is not an easy one," said Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, the vice-chair of the committee.

Some tribes have been frustrated over the years at the lack of funding for tribal police and the dozens of Bureau of Indian Education schools that are among the worst-performing in the nation, along with the bureaucracy in getting a home or road improvements on reservations.

Newland said the Interior Department is starting to look at what could be the root of the police shortage, whether it be the challenges of the job or the pay.

Tribes and tribal organizations overwhelmingly supported Newland's nomination, citing his experience, diplomacy and expertise in federal law regarding Native Americans. They called on the Senate to swiftly confirm him.

"At a time when America is reckoning with its past, Mr. Newland is the right person to meet this moment and deliver meaningful change for Indian Country," one letter read.

Jury acquits Rapid City man in fatal shooting

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City man is free after prosecutors dropped a murder charge against him and a jury acquitted him of gun crimes in connection with a fatal shooting in Pine Ridge last year.

Phillip Pond, 39, was accused of shooting Justin Little Hawk during an argument in November 2020. Little Hawk died that December in a hospital.

Pond turned himself in in February and was indicted on second-degree murder. The Rapid City Journal reported Tuesday that prosecutors filed a new indictment in May charging Pond with illegally possessing a gun but dropped the homicide count.

Pond represented himself at trial. Proceedings lasted two days before the jury acquitted him May 27. Pond had argued that a number of people who told police he killed Little Hawk were lying.

Asia welcomes US vaccine donations amid cold storage worries

By KIM TONG-HYUNG and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Health officials and experts in Asia have welcomed U.S. plans to share 500 million more doses of the Pfizer vaccine with the developing world, but some say it would take more than donations alone to address huge vaccination gaps that threaten to prolong the pandemic.

President Joe Biden was set to make the announcement Thursday in a speech before the start of the Group of Seven summit in Britain. Two hundred million doses — enough to fully protect 100 million people — will be provided this year, with the balance donated in the first half of 2022, according to the White House.

Jaehun Jung, a professor of preventive medicine at South Korea's Gachon University College of Medicine, said the U.S. donations may prove to be a "huge turning point" in the global fight against COVID-19, but also lamented that the help didn't come earlier.

He said the extremely cold storage temperatures required for Pfizer shots would also present challenges for countries with poor health systems and infrastructure and called on U.S. officials and the drugmaker to help those nations overcome these challenges. Partially because of these concerns, many of the vaccines currently being used in the developing world are shots that have simpler storage requirements, such as AstraZeneca's.

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As richer countries have rushed to vaccinate wide swath of their populations, inequities in vaccine supplies around the world have become more pronounced — with some poorer nations yet to administer a single dose. At the same time, there's increasing concern over newer virus variants emerging from areas with consistently high COVID-19 circulation.

The U.S. and some other developed countries have faced increasing pressure to do more. Jung said the delay in U.S. help was "understandable ... but for now, it's critical to move up the timing of the vaccine provisions to the earliest possible point."

The Biden administration plans to provide the 500 million shots it purchases from Pfizer to 92 lower income countries and the African Union over the next year through the U.N.-backed COVAX program — which was designed to get doses to poorer countries but has struggled to do so. The drugmaker said the doses are part of a previous pledge, with its partner BioNTech, to provide 2 billion doses to developing countries over the next 18 months.

The White House had earlier announced plans to share 80 million doses globally by the end of June, most through COVAX.

The additional donation of the Pfizer shots is crucial because the global disparity in vaccination has become a multidimensional threat: a human catastrophe, a \$5 trillion economic loss for advanced economies, and a contributor to the generation of mutant viruses, said Jerome Kim, the head of the International Vaccine Institute, a nonprofit dedicated to making vaccines available to developing countries.

Jeong Eun-kyeong, director of South Korea's Disease Control and Prevention Agency, said the success of Biden's vaccine-sharing plan would depend mainly on how fast the shots could be manufactured and sent to countries in need amid global shortages. The White House has said all the doses will be manufactured in the U.S.

Jeong also echoed concerns about Pfizer's cold-chain requirements and said the U.S. donations should be accompanied by efforts to improve infrastructure and educate health workers in receiving countries.

"It's very important to manage international cooperation so that the whole world can be vaccinated quickly," she said during a briefing.

In Asia, Jung said that India and Southeast Asia are in desperate need of donations. Vaccinating isolated North Korea could also prove to be a difficult challenge.

Perhaps reflecting that many of the details of the donation plan are not yet clear, Indonesia's spokesperson for its COVID-19 vaccination program said the country would take a wait-and-see approach.

"We will wait from COVAX. If there are new vaccines, COVAX will offer and distribute to the countries," Siti Nadia Tarmizi said.

Some experts said donations alone wouldn't be enough to close the huge gaps in supplies and called for allowing qualified companies around the world to manufacture vaccines without intellectual property constraints.

The U.S. and some other world leaders have backed suspending IP protections on vaccines — but Jung noted that many developing countries don't have the capacity to manufacture advanced vaccines like Pfizer's mRNA shots and so wouldn't be able to take advantage of such measures.

As countries around the world struggled to access vaccines, unable to secure bilateral deals with companies like Pfizer, many have turned to China. China has exported 350 million doses of its vaccines to dozens of countries, according to its Foreign Ministry.

China has pledged 10 million doses to COVAX, and the Chinese drug maker Sinopharm said last week it had just finished a batch of vaccines for sharing with COVAX. The World Health Organization had approved the vaccine for emergency use last month.

While Chinese vaccines have faced scrutiny because of a lack of transparency in sharing clinical trial data, many countries were desperate to take what was available and found the shots easier to use as they could be stored in normal refrigerators.

The Latest: Germany still opposed to easing vaccine patents

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PLYMOUTH, England (AP) — The Latest on the Group of Seven nations meeting being held in England and the meetings between British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and President Joe Biden.

BERLIN — Germany is sticking to its opposition to easing patent protection on COVID-19 vaccines as it goes into the Group of Seven summit.

While many developed countries with strong pharmaceutical industries hesitated or were outright opposed to the idea, the debate received a jolt last month when the Biden administration announced support for granting waivers for vaccines.

But a senior German official, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity in line with department rules, said Thursday: "We don't think a waiver is helpful or is actually the problem, and nothing has changed about that."

The official noted that talks are ongoing at the World Trade Organization in Geneva and said they may achieve "improvements within the system."

Asked whether Germany plans to announce to give more vaccine to poorer countries after the U.S. unveils plans to donate 500 million doses around the globe, the official said Germany has done "a great deal" on three tracks: sharing doses, financing purchases via the COVAX program, and exports.

Chancellor Angela Merkel said last month that Germany is prepared to donate 30 million doses by the year's end to poorer countries "assuming, of course, that the vaccines we have ordered actually arrive." That would be part of a broader donation of 100 million doses by the European Union.

Germany hasn't said when the donations will start.

BERLIN — Germany sees one big message from this year's Group of Seven summit: multilateralism is back.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is attending her last G-7 summit after nearly 16 years in power, has been a leading advocate of taking a multilateral approach to world affairs — in contrast to the administration of former U.S. President Donald Trump.

Asked what message Merkel wants to send at the summit, a senior German official replied: "The message of the summit overall — and that stands for what the chancellor has stood for over recent years — is that multilateralism, and the G-7, is back."

The official, who said that there has been much common ground in pre-summit negotiations, stressed that issues such as climate change, the pandemic and many others can only be solved together.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity in line with department rules.

U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson is being criticized for flying to the Group of Seven summit meeting in Cornwall, rather than taking the train, as he presses world leaders to do more to fight global warming.

Environmental activists bombarded Johnson's Twitter feed with suggestions that the prime minister should practice what he preaches after he posted a photo of himself climbing off the plane accompanied by a call to make the world "better, fairer and greener."

"This is how serious Boris Johnson is about combating the climate emergency: He flew to Cornwall," Zarah Sultana, a lawmaker from the opposition Labour Party, tweeted in response.

According to figures posted on the U.K. government website, domestic flights generate about six times more greenhouse gases than rail travel. A train journey to Cornwall takes about five hours, compared with less than 90 minutes for a flight.

Johnson is hosting leaders from the world's seven richest democracies during this weekend's summit at the Carbis Bay resort in Cornwall. The agenda includes talks on climate change, the global response to COVID-19 and the taxation of multinational corporations.

LONDON — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says the nations of the world must set aside the "beggar my neighbor" attitude that led to squabbling over medicines and treatments for COVID-19.

Johnson said Thursday that Group of Seven leaders meeting this weekend in Carbis Bay, southwest England, will commit to vaccinating the world by the end of 2022.

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The British leader wrote in The Times of London that it was time for wealthy countries should "shoulder their responsibilities and to vaccinate the world."

But he faces criticism because the U.K. has yet to send any doses abroad and has cut its international aid budget, citing the economic blow of the pandemic.

Johnson said Thursday that Britain would donate "millions" of doses from surplus stocks -- though he didn't say when.

Johnson also noted that the British government helped fund the development at Oxford University of the AstraZeneca vaccine, which accounts for 1 in 3 vaccine doses around the world.

President Joe Biden is announcing Thursday that the U.S. will buy 500 million more doses of the Pfizer vaccine to share with poorer countries over the next year.

BRUSSELS — Top European Union officials are joining calls to investigate the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, ramping up the pressure on China to be more open about the virus, ahead of the Group of Seven summit.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Thursday that "we have to know where it did come from in order to draw the right lessons and to develop the right tools to make sure that this will never happen again."

Von der Leyen says "the investigators need complete access to whatever is necessary to really find the source of this pandemic." She said Europe had responded reasonably well to the heavy economic impact of virus restrictions because it had drawn the right lessons from the 2008 financial crisis.

European Council President Charles Michel says "the world has the right to know exactly what happened."

Last month, President Joe Biden ordered U.S. intelligence officials to "redouble" their efforts to investigate the origins of the coronavirus, including any possibility the trail might lead to a Chinese laboratory.

Pope rejects German cardinal's resignation, urges reform

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis refused Thursday to accept the resignation offered by German Cardinal Reinhard Marx over the sex abuse scandal in the church, but said a process of reform was necessary and that every bishop must take responsibility for the "catastrophe" of the crisis.

Francis wrote a letter to Marx in response to the German's bombshell announcement last week that he had offered to resign as archbishop of Munich and Freising over the church's mishandling of abuse cases.

Francis refused to accept the resignation and told Marx in the letter he must continue as archbishop.

Francis said what was necessary instead was a process of reform "that doesn't consist in words but attitudes that have the courage of putting oneself in crisis, of assuming reality regardless of the consequences."

Francis' letter, written originally in Spanish and using an informal, brotherly tone, appeared to give Marx papal backing to proceed with the German Church's controversial reform process that was launched as a response to the abuse crisis and reports into the German hierarchy's mishandling of abuse cases over decades.

The so-called "Synodal Path" reform process has sparked fierce resistance inside Germany and beyond, primarily from conservatives opposed to opening any debate on issues such as priestly celibacy, women's role in the church and homosexuality.

Resistance has also come from the Vatican and bishops outside Germany, including culture warriors in the United States who have broken with church protocol to pen essays critical of the German reform process.

Biden to lay out vax donations, urge world leaders to join

By ZEKE MILLER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

MAWGAN PORTH, England (AP) — One year ago, the U.S. was the deadliest hotspot of the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing the cancellation of the Group of Seven summit it was due to host. Now, the U.S. is emerging as a model for how to successfully recover from more than 15 months of global crisis.

For President Joe Biden, who is meeting with leaders of the wealthy G-7 democracies on his first overseas

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trip since taking office, it's a personal vindication of his pledge to turn around the U.S. virus, but also a call to action to enlist other countries in the global fight.

In a speech on the eve of the summit, Biden on Thursday will unveil plans for the U.S. to donate 500 million vaccine doses around the globe over the next year, on top of 80 million he has already pledged by the end of the month. U.S. officials say Biden will also include a direct request to his fellow G-7 leaders to do the same.

"We have to end COVID-19, not just at home — which we're doing — but everywhere," Biden told American servicemembers Wednesday on the first stop of his three-country, eight-day trip, adding that the effort "requires coordinated, multilateral action."

"There's no wall high enough to keep us safe from this pandemic or the next biological threat we face — and there will be others," he added.

The U.S. has faced mounting pressure to outline its global vaccine sharing plan, especially as inequities in supply around the world have become more pronounced, and the demand for shots in the U.S. has dropped precipitously in recent weeks.

The new U.S. commitment is to purchase and donate 500 million Pfizer doses for distribution through the global COVAX alliance to 92 lower-income countries and the African Union, bringing the first steady supply of mRNA vaccine to the countries that need it most. The U.S. is now set to be COVAX's largest vaccine donor in addition to its single largest funder with a \$4 billion commitment.

The global alliance has thus far distributed just 81 million doses, and parts of the world, particularly in Africa, remain vaccine deserts.

After leading the world in new cases and deaths over much of the last year, the rapid vaccination program in the U.S. now positions the country among the leaders of the global recovery. Nearly 64% of adults in the U.S. have received at least one vaccine dose and the average numbers of new positive cases and deaths in the U.S. are lower now than at any point since the earliest days of the pandemic.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development last week projected that the U.S. economy would grow at a rate of 6.9% this year, making it one of the few nations for which forecasts are rosier now than before the pandemic.

U.S. officials are hopeful the summit will conclude with a communique showing a commitment from the G-7 countries and other invited nations to do more to help vaccinate the world and support public health globally.

"I don't anticipate contention on the issue of vaccines. I anticipate convergence," national security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters Wednesday. "Because we're all converging around the idea that we need to boost vaccine supply in a number of ways: sharing more of our own doses — and we'll have more to say on that; helping get more manufacturing capacity around the world — we'll have more to say on that; and, of course, doing what's necessary across the chain of custody from when the vaccine is produced to when it gets in someone's arms in the rural developing world, and we'll have more to say on that."

Last week, the White House unveiled plans to donate an initial allotment of 25 million doses of surplus vaccine overseas, mostly through the United Nations-backed COVAX program, promising infusions for South and Central America, Asia, Africa and others.

Officials say a quarter of that excess will be kept in reserve for emergencies and for the U.S. to share directly with allies and partners, including South Korea, Taiwan and Ukraine.

Sullivan noted that Biden has previously committed to turning the U.S. into a modern day "arsenal of democracies" for vaccines, but that the country also has health reasons for spreading vaccinations — preventing the rise of potentially dangerous variants — and geostrategic ones as well.

China and Russia have shared, with varying success, their domestically produced vaccines with some needy countries, often with hidden strings attached. Sullivan said Biden "does want to show — rallying the rest of the world's democracies — that democracies are the countries that can best deliver solutions for people everywhere."

The U.S.-produced mRNA vaccines have also proven to be more effective against both the original strain and more dangerous variants of COVID-19 than the more conventional vaccines produced by China and

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Russia. Some countries that have had success in deploying those conventional vaccines have nonetheless seen cases spike.

Biden's decision to purchase the doses, officials said, was meant to keep them from getting locked up by richer nations that have the means to enter into purchasing agreements directly with manufacturers. Just last month, the European Commission signed an agreement to purchase as many as 1.8 billion Pfizer doses in the next two years, a significant share of the company's upcoming production — though the bloc reserved the right to donate some of its doses to COVAX.

Global public health groups have been aiming to use this week's G-7 meetings to press the nation's wealthiest democracies to do more to share vaccines with the world, and Biden's plans drew immediate praise toward that end.

Tom Hart, acting CEO at The ONE Campaign, a nonprofit that seeks to end poverty, said Biden's announcement was "the kind of bold leadership that is needed to end this global pandemic."

"We urge other G-7 countries to follow the U.S.' example and donate more doses to COVAX," he added. "If there was ever a time for global ambition and action to end the pandemic, it's now."

But others have called on the U.S. to do even more.

"Charity is not going to win the war against the coronavirus," said Niko Lusiani, Oxfam America's vaccine lead. "At the current rate of vaccinations, it would take low-income countries 57 years to reach the same level of protection as those in G-7 countries. That's not only morally wrong, it's self-defeating given the risk posed by coronavirus mutations."

Biden last month broke with European allies to endorse waiving intellectual property rules at the World Trade Organization to promote vaccine production and equity. But many in his own administration acknowledge that the restrictions were not the driving cause of the global vaccine shortage, which has more to do with limited manufacturing capacity and shortages of delicate raw materials.

Allies hope to bond, look beyond virus at G-7 summit in UK

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — There will be roundtable meetings, one-on-one chats and a group photo against a picturesque backdrop. When leaders of some of the world's richest nations meet Friday at the English seaside for a three-day Group of Seven summit, much of the choreography will be familiar.

But the world has changed dramatically.

Since the G-7 last met two years ago, the coronavirus pandemic has killed more than 3.7 million people and decimated economies with lockdowns and layoffs.

So when British Prime Minister Boris Johnson welcomes U.S. President Joe Biden and the leaders of France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Canada to the cliff-ringed Carbis Bay beach resort in southwest England, pandemic recovery — "building back better," in a phrase both Biden and Johnson like — will top the agenda.

Johnson said the meeting would help move on from "a miserable period of competition and squabbling" that marked the early response to the pandemic.

"This is the moment for the world's greatest and most technologically advanced democracies to shoulder their responsibilities and to vaccinate the world, because no one can be properly protected until everyone has been protected," he said in an article published Thursday, a day before the summit's official start.

Before the pandemic, Johnson planned this to be a climate-dominated summit. He had wanted to make it a major staging post to November's international COP26 meeting on climate change in Glasgow, eliciting ambitious targets for slashing carbon emissions and expanding green industries.

That's still on the agenda, but the meeting will be dominated by COVID-19, with discussions focusing on physical and economic recovery and building resilience against future pandemics. Lest anyone forget that the virus is still raging, there will be daily coronavirus tests for attending politicians, diplomats, staff and journalists.

Biden made a vaccine pledge before the meeting got underway, announcing that the U.S. will buy 500

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million more doses of the Pfizer vaccine to share with poorer countries over the next year.

That upped the pressure on Johnson, who has not yet sent any of Britain's vaccine doses abroad. Almost four-fifths of adults in the U.K. have had the first of two shots.

Johnson said Thursday that Britain would donate "millions" of doses from surplus stocks — though he didn't say when.

Johnson also noted that the British government helped fund development at Oxford University of the AstraZeneca vaccine, which accounts for one in three doses around the world.

France said President Emmanuel Macron wanted to see "results and not just announcements" on vaccines. "We need a specific calendar -- how many people worldwide and especially in Africa will be vaccinated" before a meeting of the G-20 in Rome in October, an official in the president's office said, noting that Africa has received under 2% of the world's coronavirus vaccine doses.

Even without the pandemic, this would be a moment of flux for the rich countries' club. It's a first G-7 summit for Biden and Japan's Yoshihide Suga, who took office in September. Italy's Mario Draghi is a veteran of senior international roles but has been prime minister only since February. And it's the swan song for German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who will leave office in the coming months after 16 years in power.

The summit is seen as a major test for Johnson, a divisive leader at home and abroad whose two years in office have been dominated by the consecutive crises of Brexit and the pandemic.

Johnson's eve-of-summit meeting with Biden on Thursday will be a chance to underscore the trans-Atlantic alliance and to set out his vision of a post-Brexit "Global Britain" as a mid-sized country with an outsized role in international problem-solving.

That may be a challenge, given the distrust in European capitals and Washington surrounding the U.K.'s decision to leave the EU and the messy process of separation.

Biden has called the blustering Johnson a "clone" of former President Donald Trump and has expressed concern about the destabilizing effect of Brexit on Northern Ireland, the only part of the U.K. that borders the bloc.

He is likely to press Johnson to soothe tensions. Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, told reporters aboard Air Force One that the president's commitment to Northern Ireland's Good Friday peace accord was "rock solid."

Like many prime ministers before him, Johnson plans to summon the spirit of wartime leader Winston Churchill as he tries to charm the president. The two leaders are set to sign a new Atlantic Charter — a 21st century version of the 1941 agreement between Churchill and President Franklin D. Roosevelt that helped lay the foundations for the United Nations and NATO. The British government says Biden and Johnson will pledge to work together for goals including more democracy, greater security and freer trade, and will set up a task force aimed at re-starting travel between the two nations, disrupted by pandemic restrictions.

Britain may be the host, but Renata Dwan, deputy director of the Chatham House international affairs think-tank, said it's striking how much the summit agenda is U.S.-driven.

A proposal for a minimum 15% tax on multinational companies, agreed by G-7 finance minister last week, came from the U.S. Biden took allies by surprise when he announced a patent waiver on coronavirus vaccines last month — a move no other G-7 country has yet followed.

Biden will reassure allies at the G-7 — and NATO, when he attends a meeting of the military alliance in Brussels next week — that the U.S. is back as a reliable ally after the Trump years.

But this is a nervous global moment, with Russia increasingly destabilizing its neighbors and Biden continuing Trump's strong stance against economic and political rival China. Many in Europe feel that American attention is increasingly focused eastward.

Dwan said the G-7 summit is "a chance to say 'multilateralism is back,'" but big differences lurk beneath the surface.

"You have no real fundamental agreement on whether the focus of the G-7 is on the future — build back better, which is what the U.K. wants to do — or immediate issues: crisis response now in terms of vaccine supply, manufacturing, distribution," she said.

"Everyone's going to try to play really nice," she said. But "in terms of real deals, there's some real

problems.”

Lawyers urge ICC to probe alleged crimes against Uyghurs

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A group of lawyers presented a dossier of evidence Thursday to prosecutors at the International Criminal Court that they say establishes jurisdiction for the global tribunal to investigate allegations Chinese authorities are involved in grave crimes targeting Uyghurs, a largely Muslim ethnic group.

The move is the latest attempt by international human rights lawyers to get an investigation started at the Hague-based court into allegations of atrocities against Uyghurs by China, which is not a member of the court.

In a statement, the lawyers said their dossier establishes “that Uyghurs have been targeted, rounded up, forcibly disappeared and deported from Tajikistan” back into China’s western Xinjiang region “by Chinese operatives.”

They argue that “Chinese authorities have directly intervened in Tajikistan. The ICC therefore has jurisdiction over these actions which start in Tajikistan and continue into China” and urge ICC prosecutors to open an investigation “without delay.”

The filing seeks to use the legal precedent of an investigation opened by the ICC into allegations of mass deportations and persecution of Rohingya people by Myanmar forces that forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya across the border into neighboring Bangladesh. Myanmar is not a member of the court, but Bangladesh is.

In the Rohingya case, a panel of ICC judges ruled in 2019 that the court “may exercise jurisdiction over crimes when part of the criminal conduct takes place on the territory of a State Party.”

In July last year, lawyers representing exiled Uyghur activists asked the ICC to investigate the forced repatriation of thousands of Uighurs from Cambodia and Tajikistan and alleged genocide in Xinjiang.

In a report issued in December, ICC prosecutors said that “there was no basis to proceed at this time” with an investigation into the allegations.

The lawyers who submitted the dossier Thursday say their findings are based on witness testimonies and investigations in countries including ICC member Tajikistan.

Based on their findings, the lawyers said, “it is clear that the ICC does have jurisdiction to open an investigation.”

An estimated 1 million people or more — most of them Uyghurs — have been confined in re-education camps in China’s western Xinjiang region in recent years, according to researchers. Chinese authorities have been accused of imposing forced labor, systematic forced birth control, torture and separating children from incarcerated parents.

Beijing rejects allegations that it is committing crimes. Officials have characterized the camps, which they say are now closed, as vocational training centers to teach the Chinese language, job skills and the law to support economic development and combat extremism. China saw a wave of Xinjiang-related terror attacks through 2016.

The Chinese Embassy in The Hague did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment on the lawyers’ dossier.

Last week, a “people’s tribunal” set up to assess whether China’s alleged rights abuses against the Uyghur people constitute genocide opened in London, with witnesses alleging that inmates at detention camps for Uyghurs were routinely humiliated, tortured and abused.

The tribunal, made up of lawyers, academics and business people, does not have U.K. government backing or any powers to sanction or punish China. Organizers hope the process of publicly laying out evidence will compel international action to tackle alleged abuses against the Uyghurs.

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Biden, Johnson to stress close ties, manage differences

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, AAMER MADHANI and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

PLYMOUTH, England (AP) — Their nations may have a famed “special relationship,” but President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will meet for the first time Thursday against a backdrop of differences both political and personal.

Biden hopes to use his first overseas trip as president to reassure European allies that the United States had shed the transactional tendencies of Donald Trump’s term and is a reliable partner again. But tensions may simmer beneath the surface of Biden’s meeting with Johnson.

The president staunchly opposed the Brexit movement, the British exodus from the European Union that Johnson championed, and has expressed great concern with the future of Northern Ireland. And Biden once called the British leader a “physical and emotional clone” of Trump.

The British government has worked hard to overcome that impression, stressing Johnson’s common ground with Biden on issues such as climate change and his support for international institutions. But Johnson, the host for the Group of Seven summit that will follow his sit-down with Biden, has been frustrated by the lack of a new trade deal with the United States.

The two men had planned to visit the spectacular island of St. Michael’s Mount but that had to be scrapped because of the weather. But when they do meet, they were expected to announce the creation of a U.S.-U.K. task force that will move toward resuming travel between the two nations, according to a White House official. Most travel has been banned between the two nations since March 2020.

Both sides have stressed that, publicly, the Biden-Johnson meeting would be about reaffirming ties between longtime allies in a week in which Biden will look to rally the West to rebuff Russian meddling and publicly demonstrate it can compete economically with China.

National security adviser Jake Sullivan described Biden’s initial calls with Johnson as “warm” and “constructive” and played down any differences between the two nations’ goals.

“They’ve been very much down to business,” Sullivan said at the White House this week. “And I expect that their meeting together will just cover the waterfront. I mean, really, a wide range of issues where the two of them and the U.S and United Kingdom do see eye to eye.”

Biden, who is fiercely proud of his Irish roots, has warned that nothing should undermine Northern Ireland’s 1998 Good Friday peace accord. Some on the British side have viewed Biden warily because of his heritage.

After Brexit, a new arrangement was needed for the border between Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, and Ireland, because the European Union requires certain goods to be inspected and others not to be admitted at all. Ahead of a June 30 deadline, ongoing negotiations over goods — including sausages — have been contentious and have attracted the attention of the White House.

“President Biden has been crystal clear about his rock-solid belief in the Good Friday Agreement as the foundation for peaceful coexistence in Northern Ireland,” Sullivan told reporters aboard Air Force One as Biden flew to England on Wednesday. “Any steps that imperil or undermine it will not be welcomed by the United States.”

The two leaders also were expected to discuss climate change, the coronavirus pandemic, creating an infrastructure financing program for developing countries, Afghanistan and a refresher of the 80-year-old Atlantic Charter between the two nations, Sullivan said.

The new charter — which will include the efforts to resume travel — will be modeled on the historic joint statement made by Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941 setting out goals for the postwar world.

But Trump’s presence was still likely to be felt on Thursday. Johnson and Trump, for a time, appeared to be kindred spirits, both riding a wave of populism that in 2016 delivered Brexit and upended the American political landscape.

Biden, for his part, has expressed a mistrust of Johnson, who once unspooled a Trump-like insult of President Barack Obama, saying that Biden’s former boss was “half-Kenyan” and had an ancestral dislike

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of Britain.

“Did Donald Trump irrevocably damage relations with Europe? I think the answer to that is no,” said Thomas Gift, director of the Centre on U.S. Politics at University College London. “But I do think that it created some challenges that Biden is going to have to overcome.”

Since World War II, the trans-Atlantic “special relationship” has been sustained by a common language, shared interests, military cooperation and cultural affection. Sometimes that has been bolstered by close personal bonds, such as the friendship between Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, or between Tony Blair and Bill Clinton in the 1990s.

It has endured even when leaders’ relations were less cordial, as when British Prime Minister Harold Wilson refused to join the Vietnam War in the 1960s.

“There is far more that unites the government of this country and government in Washington any time, any stage, than divides us,” Johnson told The Associated Press in a recent interview.

Brexit may test those bonds. The U.S. still values Britain’s role as a European economic and military power and a member of the intelligence-sharing “Five Eyes” alliance. But Biden has made clear that he intends to rebuild bridges with the EU, a frequent target of Trump’s ire. That suggests Berlin, Brussels and Paris, rather than London, will be uppermost in his thoughts.

Britain had been hoping to secure a quick trade agreement with the U.S. after its official departure from the EU in January. The change in administration in Washington leaves prospects of a deal uncertain.

And there may be one more, though admittedly small, obstacle to nurturing the “special relationship” — the very phrase itself.

Johnson has said he did not appreciate “special relationship,” used by the U.S. president, because to the prime minister it seemed needy and weak. Johnson’s spokesperson said this week: “The prime minister is on the record previously saying he prefers not to use the phrase, but that in no way detracts from the importance with which we regard our relationship with the U.S., our closest ally.”

Europe tells tourists: Welcome back! Now work out the rules

By The Associated Press undefined

PARIS (AP) — Europe is opening up to Americans and other visitors after more than a year of COVID-induced restrictions, in hope of luring back tourists — and their dollars — to the continent’s trattorias, vistas and cultural treasures. But travelers will need patience to figure out who’s allowed into which country, how and when.

As the European Union’s doors reopen one by one to the outside world for the first time since March 2020, tourists will discover a patchwork of systems instead of a single border-free leisure zone, because national governments have resisted surrendering control over their frontiers amid the pandemic. And post-Brexit Britain is going its own way altogether.

Meanwhile, the welcoming mood isn’t always mutual. U.S. borders, for example, remain largely closed to non-Americans.

Here’s a look at current entry rules in some popular European tourist destinations. One caveat: While these are the regulations as written by governments, travelers may meet hiccups as airlines or railway officials try to make sense of them.

FRANCE

If you’re vaccinated, come to France. But only if you got one of the four EU-approved vaccines: Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson. That works for Americans — as long as they can produce official proof of vaccination — but not for large swaths of the world like China and Russia where other vaccines are used.

France’s borders officially reopened Wednesday. Vaccinated visitors from outside Europe and a few “green” countries will still be asked for a negative PCR test no older than 72 hours, or a negative antigen test of no more than 48 hours. Unvaccinated children will be allowed in with vaccinated adults, but will have to show a negative test from age 11.

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Tourists are banned from 16 countries wrestling with virus surges and worrisome variants that are on a red list that includes India, South Africa and Brazil.

Non-vaccinated visitors from "orange list" countries — including the U.S. and Britain — can't come for tourism either, only for specific, imperative reasons.

ITALY

Americans — the second-biggest group of foreign tourists to Italy — have been welcome since mid-May. However, they need to self-isolate upon arrival for 10 days unless they arrive on so-called "COVID-tested flights." That means passengers are tested before and after the flight and must fill out documents about their whereabouts to facilitate contact tracing if required.

"COVID-tested" flights from the U.S. started in December and have also been operating since May from Canada, Japan and the United Arab Emirates.

Italy also started allowing tourists from Britain and Israel last month, meaning they no longer need an "essential" reason to visit and don't have to self-isolate, providing they present proof of a negative COVID test taken no more than 48 hours prior to arrival.

The same rules apply to travelers from EU countries and those on "COVID-tested" flights from the U.S., Canada, Japan and the United Arab Emirates.

GREECE

Tourism-reliant Greece started opening to American travelers back in April, and now visitors from China, Britain and 20 other countries are also allowed to visit for nonessential travel.

All must provide a vaccination certificate or a negative PCR test and fill in a passenger locator form on their plans in Greece. This directive expires on June 14, but could be extended.

Athens long pressed for a common EU approach, but didn't wait for one to materialize. On June 1, Greece, Germany and five other bloc members introduced a COVID certificate system for travelers, weeks ahead of the July 1 rollout of the program across the 27-nation bloc.

SPAIN

Spain kicked off its summer tourism season Monday by welcoming vaccinated visitors from the U.S. and most countries, as well as European visitors who can prove they are not infected.

Americans and most other non-Europeans need an official vaccine certificate by a health authority. Spain accepts those who were inoculated with the four EU-approved vaccines as well two Chinese vaccines authorized by the World Health Organization — as long as visitors are fully vaccinated at least two weeks before the trip.

Arrivals from Brazil, South Africa and India are banned at the moment because of high infection rates there, and non-vaccinated Americans and many other non-EU nationalities cannot come to Spain for tourism for now.

But there are exemptions for countries considered at low risk, such as citizens from Britain, who can arrive without any health documents at all. EU citizens need to provide proof of vaccination, a certificate showing they recently recovered from COVID-19, or a negative antigen or PCR test taken within 48 hours of arrival.

BRITAIN

There are few, if any, American tourists in the U.K. at present. Britain has a traffic-light system for assessing countries by risk, and the U.S. along with most European nations is on the "amber" list, meaning everyone arriving has to self-isolate at home or in the place they are staying for 10 days.

U.K. and U.S. airlines and airport operators are pushing for a travel corridor to allow tourism to resume, and Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to raise the issue when he meets President Joe Biden at a G-7 summit in England this week.

Meanwhile, anyone traveling between Britain and continental Europe, be warned: In addition to the isolation requirement for those arriving or returning to U.K. shores, rising concern about the delta variant of the virus has prompted some other countries to introduce special restrictions for those arriving from Britain.

EUROPEAN UNION

The 27-nation EU has no unified COVID tourism or border policy, but has been working for months on

a joint digital travel certificate for those vaccinated, freshly tested, or recently recovered from the virus. EU lawmakers endorsed the plan Wednesday.

The free certificates, which will contain a QR code with advanced security features, will allow people to move between European countries without having to quarantine or undergo extra coronavirus tests upon arrival.

Several EU countries have already begun using the system, including Spain, Germany, Greece, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark and Poland. The rest are expected to start using it July 1.

It's mainly meant for EU citizens but Americans and others can obtain the certificate too — if they can convince authorities in an EU country they're entering that they qualify for one. And the lack of an official U.S. vaccination certification system may complicate matters.

Why do some people get side effects after COVID-19 vaccines?

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Why do some people get side effects after COVID-19 vaccines?

Temporary side effects including headache, fatigue and fever are signs the immune system is revving up -- a normal response to vaccines. And they're common.

"The day after getting these vaccines, I wouldn't plan anything that was strenuous physical activity," said Dr. Peter Marks, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's vaccine chief, who experienced fatigue after his first dose.

Here's what's happening: The immune system has two main arms, and the first kicks in as soon as the body detects a foreign intruder. White blood cells swarm to the site, prompting inflammation that's responsible for chills, soreness, fatigue and other side effects.

This rapid-response step of your immune system tends to wane with age, one reason younger people report side effects more often than older adults. Also, some vaccines simply elicit more reactions than others.

That said, everyone reacts differently. If you didn't feel anything a day or two after either dose, that doesn't mean the vaccine isn't working.

Behind the scenes, the shots also set in motion the second part of your immune system, which will provide the real protection from the virus by producing antibodies.

Another nuisance side effect: As the immune system activates, it also sometimes causes temporary swelling in lymph nodes, such as those under the arm. Women are encouraged to schedule routine mammograms ahead of COVID-19 vaccination to avoid a swollen node being mistaken for cancer.

Not all side effects are routine. But after hundreds of millions of vaccine doses administered around the world — and intense safety monitoring — few serious risks have been identified. A tiny percentage of people who got vaccines made by AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson reported an unusual type of blood clot. Some countries reserved those shots for older adults but regulatory authorities say the benefits of offering them still outweigh the risks.

People also occasionally have serious allergic reactions. That's why you're asked to stick around for about 15 minutes after getting any type of COVID-19 vaccine — to ensure any reaction can be promptly treated.

Finally, authorities are trying to determine whether temporary heart inflammation that can occur with many types of infections also might be a rare side effect after the mRNA vaccines, the kind made by Pfizer and Moderna. U.S. health officials can't yet tell if there's a link but say they're monitoring a small number of reports, mostly male teens or young adults.

Building collapse kills 11 after monsoon flooding in Mumbai

NEW DELHI (AP) — A dilapidated building collapsed following heavy rains in the western Indian city of Mumbai, killing at least 11 people and injuring seven others, police said Thursday.

Heavy monsoon rains during the day Wednesday had flooded several parts of the city that is India's

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financial and entertainment capital.

The three-story building collapsed late Wednesday night, and police officer Ravindra Kadam said dozens of rescuers were clearing the debris to find any residents possibly still trapped.

The New Delhi Television channel said the building collapsed onto another structure in a slum in the Malad West area of Mumbai.

Residents joined the fire and police officers in rescuing people and they took the seven injured to a hospital in the suburban Kandivali area.

Mumbai recorded 222 millimeters (8 inches) of rain in 12 hours Wednesday. Tidal waves that reached up to 4.6 meters (13 feet) prevented the rainfall from being drained, and roads, rail tracks and neighborhoods were left waterlogged.

Building collapses are common in India during the June-September monsoon season when heavy rains weaken the foundations of structures that are poorly built.

In 2019, a three-story building collapsed in a hilly area in the northern Indian town of Solan following heavy rains, killing 14 people. A four-story building collapsed in Mumbai the same year and killed 10 people.

As Iran prepares to vote, its battered economy a major worry

By MEHDI FATTAHI Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Almost six years ago, Iranians poured into the streets to celebrate Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers. They saw it as a chance for the Islamic Republic to re-enter the world economy and create opportunities like purchasing airplanes and selling its oil on the international market.

Today, that dream has faded into a daily grinding nightmare of high inflation, an ever-weakening national currency and high unemployment worsened by the coronavirus pandemic.

The West considers Iran's nuclear program and Mideast tensions as the most important issues facing Tehran, but those living in the Islamic Republic repeatedly point to the economy as the major issue facing it ahead of its June 18 presidential election.

Whoever takes the presidency after the relatively moderate President Hassan Rouhani will face the unenviable task of trying to reform Iran's largely state-controlled economy. Efforts to privatize it have seen corruption allegations swirl as many lose their life savings and nationwide protests rage.

"One day they said the nuclear deal was accepted, everyone was happy, the dollar rate went down over one day," said Mohammad Molaei, a 50-year-old commodities trader. "Then things start to happen. Missiles are fired. The nuclear deal is bust. One tears it apart, the other burns it. Only the people lose."

Iran's economic freefall accelerated when then-President Donald Trump in 2018 unilaterally withdrew America from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers. That saw crushing sanctions target Iran, hurting its already ailing economy.

Perhaps nothing illustrates the crisis gripping Iran's economy as well as the battering of its currency, the rial. In July 2015 amid those raucous nuclear deal celebrations, \$1 bought some 32,000 rials. Today, \$1 buys 238,000 rials.

The weakening of the rial has seen the value of the money Iranians hold in the bank collapse, as well as the decimation of retiree benefits. The price of milk has risen by 90%, while the cost of imported foreign goods like mobile phones and electronics has skyrocketed.

Iranians able to exchange their rials for foreign currencies have bought precious metals like gold or invested in real estate. Those property purchases have fueled a spike in housing values, pricing people out of the market.

"In the past, buying a place to live in was a dream for the people," said Salimi, a 48-year-old man who declined to give his first name in order to speak freely with Associated Press journalists in Tehran's Grand Bazaar. "But ... unfortunately now renting a house has become a dream as well, because of the inefficiency of the officials, especially the president, who gave empty promises and deceived the people."

Salimi added: "Why is that? Are land, housing materials and workers under sanctions?"

The Tehran stock exchange became another refuge sought by investors, which saw its value shoot up

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to 2 million points in August 2020 as the government encouraged the public to buy. But values dropped by nearly half and now hover around 1.1 million points as some investors remain stuck with stocks they can't sell.

"The biggest challenge for the next president is to restore trust and confidence to the stock market," said Mahdi Samavati, a prominent economic analyst who runs his own investment firm. "Restoring confidence to the market is very difficult. The people have been seeing their money melting away for nine to 10 months. The longer the crash takes, the longer it would take to fix things and bring back the trust."

It's not immediately clear how the next Iranian president will handle the economy, particularly if hard-liners take over and if Tehran doesn't reach an agreement on returning to the nuclear deal, which limits its atomic program and restores sanctions relief. President Joe Biden says he's willing for the U.S. to return, but weeks of negotiations in Vienna have yet to see public progress.

Iranian leaders in the past have relied on populist programs, such as cash handouts and subsidized housing. Without the hard currency of oil sales, Iran likely would need to print more rials to fund those programs, which in turn would lower the rial's value further. That would fuel Iran's high inflation, making goods even more expensive.

"If the (next) government prints money to fulfil those promises, without a doubt we will have an unleashed growth in inflation," Samavati said.

During the first televised presidential debate in Iran, former Central Bank chief Abdolnasser Hemmati warned that as an economist, he didn't see a way to fund the "colorful and fascinating promises" of his rivals.

"These friends are not talking about distributing wealth, they are talking about distributing poverty," he said.

Hemmati, viewed as the sole surrogate for the outgoing Rouhani in the election, came under withering criticism from much of the field. The exception was hard-line judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi, the presumed front-runner, who sought to appear above the fray.

"Different classes of people have started shouting about the inefficiencies, cruelty, poverty, discrimination and corruption," Raisi said.

Former Revolutionary Guard commander Mohsen Rezaei discussed Iran's dire economy by repeatedly referring to the desperately poor "eating out of trash cans." But none of the candidates apart from Hemmati offered any specific thoughts on economic policy, other than to promise more aid for the poor.

Salimi, the man in the bazaar, said he would still vote for hard-liners and would support Iran's theocracy no matter the challenges ahead. He blamed Rouhani for the nation's woes and said he'd vote for Raisi.

"I have no worries for my children. ... They are the children of the revolution," he said. "They won't bow down to difficulties."

Molaei, the commodities trader, said he hoped to send his children abroad for a better life as many other Iranians have.

"We have been wasted. When I opened my eyes (after birth) there was the revolution, and then came the (Iran-Iraq) war and killing and bloodshed," he said. "I've been working ever since then."

Scientists hail golden age to trace bird migration with tech

CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

TAKOMA PARK, Md. (AP) — A plump robin wearing a tiny metal backpack with an antenna hops around a suburban yard in Takoma Park, then plucks a cicada from the ground for a snack.

Ecologist Emily Williams watches through binoculars from behind a bush. On this clear spring day, she's snooping on his dating life. "Now I'm watching to see whether he's found a mate," she said, scrutinizing his interactions with another robin in a nearby tree.

Once the bird moves on at season's end, she'll rely on the backpack to beam frequent location data to the Argos satellite, then back to Williams' laptop, to track it.

The goal is to unravel why some American robins migrate long distances, but others do not. With more

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precise information about nesting success and conditions in breeding and wintering grounds, “we should be able to tell the relative roles of genetics versus the environment in shaping why birds migrate,” said Williams, who is based at Georgetown University.

Putting beacons on birds is not novel. But a new antenna on the International Space Station and receptors on the Argos satellite, plus the shrinking size of tracking chips and batteries, are allowing scientists to remotely monitor songbird movements in much greater detail than ever before.

“We’re in a sort of golden age for bird research,” said Adriaan Dokter, an ecologist at Cornell University who is not directly involved with Williams’ study. “It’s pretty amazing that we can satellite-track a robin with smaller and smaller chips. Ten years ago, that was unthinkable.”

The device this robin is wearing can give precise locations, within about 30 feet (about 10 meters), instead of around 125 miles (200 kilometers) for previous generations of tags.

That means Williams can tell not only whether the bird is still in the city, but on which street or backyard. Or whether it’s flown from the Washington, D.C., suburbs to land on the White House lawn.

A second new tag, for only the heaviest robins, includes an accelerometer to provide information about the bird’s movements; future versions may also measure humidity and barometric pressure. These Icarus tags work with a new antenna on the International Space Station.

That antenna was first turned on about two years ago, “but there were some glitches with the power-supply and the computer, so we had to bring it down again with a Russian rocket, then transport it from Moscow to Germany to fix it,” said Martin Wikelski, director of the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior, whose scientific team is honing the technology. After “the usual troubleshooting for space science,” the antenna was turned back on this spring.

As researchers deploy precision tags, Wikelski envisions the development of “an ‘Internet of animals’ — a collection of sensors around the world giving us a better picture of the movement of life on the planet.”

The American robin is an iconic songbird in North America, its bright chirp a harbinger of spring. Yet its migratory habits remain a bit mysterious to scientists.

“It’s astounding how little we know about some of the most common songbirds,” said Ken Rosenberg, a conservation scientist at Cornell University. “We have a general idea of migration, a range map, but that’s really just a broad impression.”

An earlier study Williams worked on showed some robins are long-distance migrants — flying more than 2,780 miles (4,480 km) between their breeding area in Alaska and winter grounds in Texas — while others hop around a single backyard most of the year.

What factors drive some robins to migrate, while others don’t? Does it have to do with available food, temperature fluctuations or success in mating and rearing chicks?

Williams hopes more detailed data from satellite tags, combined with records of nesting success, will provide insights, and she’s working with partners who are tagging robins in Alaska, Indiana and Florida for a three-year study.

Scientists have previously put GPS-tracking devices on larger raptors, but the technology has only recently become small and light enough for some songbirds. Tracking devices must be less than 5% of the animal’s weight to avoid encumbering them.

In a Silver Spring, Maryland, yard, Williams has unfurled nylon nets between tall aluminum poles. When a robin flies into the net, she delicately untangles the bird. Then she holds it in a “bander’s grip” — with her forefinger and middle finger loosely on either side of the bird’s neck, and another two fingers around its body.

On a tarp, she measures the robin’s beak length, takes a toenail clipping and plucks a tail feather to gauge overall health.

Then she weighs the bird in a small cup on a scale. This one is about 80 grams, just over the threshold for wearing the penny-sized Argos satellite tag.

Williams fashions a makeshift saddle with clear jewelry cord looped around each of the bird’s legs. She then tightens the cord so the tag sits firmly on the bird’s back.

When she opens her hand, the robin hops to the ground, then takes a few steps under a pink azalea

shrub before flying off.

In addition to providing very precise locations, the satellite tags transmit data that can be downloaded from afar onto Williams' laptop. The data on older tags couldn't be retrieved unless the same bird was recaptured the following year — a difficult and uncertain task.

Wilkeski hopes the new technology will help scientists better understand threats birds and other creatures face from habitat loss, pollution and climate change.

"It is detective work to try to figure out why a population is declining," said Ben Freeman, a biologist at the Biodiversity Research Centre at the University of British Columbia. Better information about migration corridors "will help us look in the right places."

A 2019 study co-written by Cornell's Rosenberg showed that North America's population of wild birds declined by nearly 30%, or 3 billion, since 1970.

He said tracking birds will help explain why: "Where in their annual cycles do migratory birds face the greatest threats? Is it exposure to pesticides in Mexico, the clearing of rainforests in Brazil, or is it what people are doing in their backyards here in the U.S.?"

Legislators, students push for K-12 Asian American studies

By ANNIE MA Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — When the Asian American Student Union at a Connecticut high school organized a Zoom call following the killing of six Asian women in Atlanta, senior Lily Feng thought maybe 10 or 15 classmates would attend. When she logged on, more than 50 people from her school were online. By the call's end, nearly 100 people had joined.

Seeing her peers at Farmington High School turn out for the conversation — one piece of a student-led effort to explore Asian American identity issues — made her realize how much they wanted to listen and learn about a topic that is often absent from the curriculum.

"Our Asian American and Pacific Islander community members, they want their voices to be heard," said Feng, co-president of the student group that also has brought in speakers, hosted panels and created lessons about Asian American history. "They are almost desperate to be speaking about it. This is so heavy, this is heartbreaking and it was a space for them to really voice that."

As students push for more inclusive curriculum, some lawmakers, educators and students themselves are working to address gaps in instruction and fight harmful stereotypes by pushing for more Asian American history to be included in K-12 lesson plans.

Illinois would become the first state to require public schools to teach Asian American studies if the governor signs a bill that cleared the state Legislature. Lawmakers have proposed similar mandates this year in Connecticut, New York and Wisconsin.

Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz, an Illinois representative, said she sponsored the bill in response to the increasing anti-Asian violence and rhetoric. Growing up, she said she knew little of the discrimination her family had faced in earlier generations because it wasn't taught in school and her family did not openly speak about it.

"I think, like a lot of Asian families, their response to that discrimination was to endure, to survive," she said. "And that meant moving past it, not talking about it, not educating the next generation about the struggles faced by a first generation."

It wasn't until law school that Gong-Gershowitz learned about the Chinese Exclusion Act, an 1882 law that prohibited Chinese workers from immigrating and the only law to exclude a specific ethnicity from entering the country, and the deportation threat it represented for her grandparents. Understanding that history is central to addressing the violence today, she said.

"When people talk about what are we going to do about racism, hate, violence, otherization, my answer is always look at the root cause of that," she said. "Empathy comes from understanding, and we cannot do better unless we know better."

On the federal level, U.S. Rep. Grace Meng, D-N.Y., has reintroduced legislation intended to promote

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teaching Asian American history. The bill would require Presidential and Congressional Academies, which offer history and civics programming to students and teachers, to include Asian American history in their grant applications. It would also encourage state and national assessment tests to include Asian American history.

Asian Americans are largely excluded from textbooks, shown as stereotypes or framed as model minorities, said Nicholas Hartlep, an associate professor at Berea College in Kentucky who authored a book on those depictions in instructional materials. He said it is encouraging to see the legislation, but funding to support the requirements is necessary for them to make a difference.

"Is that an unfunded mandate where they just say, 'Yes, it has to be covered?'" Hartlep said. "Or does it come with funding? And what quality assurances do we have for what's being taught? Because if it's just glossing over, that can be equally damaging."

The growing conversations around anti-Asian hate have also given new urgency to long-running efforts to develop and introduce instructional material for schools that explores Asian American history.

Some educators have taken it upon themselves to fill the content gap.

As public school teachers earlier in their careers, Freda Lin and Cath Golding each saw little of their personal history reflected in the lessons they were teaching unless they designed their own. Now, as co-directors of Project YURI, they provide curriculum and professional development around teaching Asian American history.

Golding said that while the push for inclusion dates back to the 1960s, recent advocacy to expand Asian American and ethnic studies, including Black, Latino and Native American history, in K-12 classrooms has tried to go beyond representation to look at how race shapes power structures and lived experiences.

"When I was becoming a teacher in the early 2000s, the trend in education then was multiculturalism," Golding said. "At its core, it was not about critiquing power and for me that's been the real shift in the conversations."

At its best, ethnic studies helps students understand their own agency and teaches children to draw connections between historic events like the Chinese Exclusion Act and modern-day immigration issues, said Jason Oliver Chang, a professor at the University of Connecticut who has worked to advance the state's legislation on Asian American studies.

"I think ethnic studies is in some ways a way of practicing citizenship," Chang said. "Learning about ourselves, but then also acting on that knowledge. It's about teaching in a way that engages the student and their own story and perspective, with content that engages with the structures of power that shape their world."

Students at Farmington High School are pushing those lessons forward on their own. This year, the Asian American Student Union's leaders met with the school administration to propose changes to the social studies curriculum.

Mingda Sun, a member of the organization, recalls being taunted by racist slurs from her peers in elementary and middle school. Back then, she said, she was too young to fully understand the racism that fed the bullying, and her experiences were rarely acknowledged at school.

She hopes the advocacy that has followed this year of violence can change that in the future, starting with her own school and state.

"At the end of the day it's about empowering young Asian Americans to feel proud of who they are," she said. "It's about helping schools that are able to provide resources and opportunities to do that."

Asian shares advance as investors await US inflation data

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — Asian shares are higher after Wall Street logged modest losses, as investors await key U.S. inflation data. Benchmarks rose across the region, but stayed in a narrow range.

Investors will get closely watched U.S. inflation data on Thursday. The focus is on how it might impact ultra-low interest rates and other market-supporting policies.

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"There's a sense of every man for himself ahead of the U.S. inflation data this evening, a data point that has left markets in limbo and seems to be taking an interminably long time to arrive," Jeffrey Halley of Oanda said in a report.

The Labor Department's release of the consumer price index comes shortly before a meeting next week of the Federal Reserve's Open Market Committee, which sets policy on interest rates and other measures.

Trading has been relatively constrained this week, with investors parsing any data to judge whether rising inflation will be temporary, as the Federal Reserve thinks, or more permanent.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 rose 0.3% to 28,951.07 and the Kospi in South Korea picked up 0.4% to 3,228.76. In Hong Kong, the Hang Seng added 0.3% to 28,812.05, while the Shanghai Composite index advanced 0.8% to 3,620.72. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 gained 0.3% to 7,292.10.

On Wednesday, a slide in banks and industrial companies nudged stocks on Wall Street to modest losses after an early gain faded in the last half-hour of trading. Stocks championed by hordes of online retail investors, the "meme" stocks as they have become known, were volatile once again.

The S&P 500 slipped 0.2% to 4,219.55, erasing its meager gain from a day earlier. The benchmark index's modest moves this week have it on track for its first weekly loss in three weeks. The Dow Jones Industrial Average gave up 0.4% to 34,447.14, while the Nasdaq held up somewhat better, ending down just 0.1% at 13,911.75.

The tech-heavy index was lifted by the same Big Tech companies that have pushed it generally higher for the last 18 months. Microsoft rose 0.4% and Amazon added 0.5%.

Treasury yields slipped. The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 1.48% from 1.52% late Tuesday. The falling yields have weighed down banks, which rely on higher yields to charge more lucrative interest on loans.

Small company stocks, which have outgained the broader market this year, also fell. The Russell 2000 index gave up 0.7% to 2,327.13.

Elsewhere in the market, volatility in stocks embraced by investors using online forums like Reddit continued. Clover Health fell 23.6% while AMC Entertainment sank 10.4%. Wendy's sank 12.7% after soaring 25.9% a day earlier.

The original "meme" stock, GameStop, said after the closing bell Wednesday that it has brought in a pair of Amazon veterans as its new chief executive and chief financial officer to aid in its much anticipated digital turnaround. The company also reported a smaller quarterly loss than a year ago as revenue increased. Its shares fell 3% in after-hours trading.

In other trading, U.S. benchmark crude dropped 54 cents to \$69.42 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It lost 9 cents to \$69.96 per barrel on Wednesday.

Brent crude, the international standard, gave up 56 cents to \$71.66 per barrel.

The U.S. dollar was trading at 109.54 Japanese yen, down from 109.64 late Wednesday. The euro weakened to \$1.2171 from \$1.2182.

Sales pitch summer? Dems aim to showcase virus relief effort

By STEVEN SLOAN Associated Press

MAIDENS, Va. (AP) — When Sherry Brockenbrough and her family opened a distillery on a leafy vista overlooking the James River on March 5, 2020, the coronavirus still seemed like a distant threat.

But in the coming weeks, Hill Top Distillery faced the kind of barriers few businesses could survive and almost none had prepared for. By the thousands, restaurants, breweries and distilleries across the country would largely shutter.

Brockenbrough moved to swiftly adapt, replacing tasting room gatherings with curbside pickup and outdoor, distanced activities. Still, she was not close to meeting her financial goals and the distillery hasn't turned a profit, leaving the 63-year-old Brockenbrough and her husband, John, to pump even more of their savings into the business to keep it going.

"It's a really scary place to be with no money coming in," she said.

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Her business was sustained in part by money that came from the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, the pandemic relief legislation that Congress passed in March solely with Democratic votes. She is using the funds to buy new equipment and make improvements to the property, investments she hopes will lure customers interested in her vodka, whiskey and moonshine.

This summer, Democrats are also hoping they get a return on the investment in businesses like Brockenbrough's. With Democrats facing formidable prospects in the battle to retain both chambers of Congress, the virus rescue package may be the party's best opportunity to argue their work in Washington had a positive, tangible effect on communities across the country during a time of historic crisis.

The sense of urgency is growing as other ambitious pillars of the Democratic agenda, ranging from the protection of voting rights to a far-reaching infrastructure package and reforms of policing, gun rights and immigration, are at risk in an evenly divided Senate. That raises the prospect that the rescue package may emerge as the most significant piece of legislation for Democrats to campaign on next year.

That could be crucial in some of the nation's most narrowly divided congressional districts that may decide control of the House, including this one that stretches through 10 counties of suburbs and rural communities in central Virginia. Republicans need a net gain of just five seats to retake the House next year and are eyeing this district, currently represented by Democrat Abigail Spanberger, as a prime pickup opportunity.

As they make their sales pitch, Democrats are aiming to avoid a repeat of the perceived mistakes of former President Barack Obama's administration, when policy accomplishments on health care, taxes and the economy didn't translate into easy political wins. Democrats suffered dramatic losses in the first midterm after Obama's election, and the former president himself has acknowledged that he and his team often focused more on designing sound policy than selling it politically.

"We can't just be the nice people and say, oh, this is great, all the things we've been able to do," said Democratic National Committee Chair Jaime Harrison. "People need to understand who actually did it. The 'D' in Democrat stands for delivers."

The DNC has already spent the past several months peppering local markets across the country with billboards, digital and television ads reminding voters of the hometown Democrats who helped pass the rescue plan. As Americans gather for more traditional July Fourth celebrations next month, the party plans to start a new campaign highlighting the role the legislation played in restoring normalcy this summer.

The enhanced child tax credit that will begin rolling out on July 15 will give Democrats another opportunity to highlight provisions of the rescue package and make the case that Americans have more money ahead of the back-to-school shopping season because of the legislation.

The rescue measure is the centerpiece of President Joe Biden's pandemic response and has, so far, received praise from a majority of Americans. A late March poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research showed 54% approving of the massive virus relief package, while 25% disapproved. There's a dramatic partisan split, however, with 80% of Democrats backing the measure compared to just 26% of Republicans.

Although Republicans united in opposing the legislation, they have promoted some of its more popular provisions, including the assistance for restaurants, prompting accusations of hypocrisy from Democrats. Democrats are certain to use the legislation as a cudgel against Republicans next year, but the GOP is betting that other economic issues may take precedence, including concerns about inflation and arguments that some provisions in the bill make it less attractive for the jobless to find work.

"Countless small businesses across the country have been hurt by Democrats' \$1.9 trillion socialist giveaway because it incentivized people not to work," said Mike Berg, a spokesperson for the National Republican Congressional Committee, which focuses on retaking control of the House. "Even worse, Democrats' spending spree is causing inflation, which is a hidden tax on every single American."

If Republicans successfully recast the legislation as a costly government giveaway, that could prove powerful in sharply divided congressional districts like the one that includes Hill Top Distillery. Extending from the western suburbs of Richmond to exurban Washington, D.C., it was once firmly Republican territory and sent Eric Cantor, the former House majority leader, to Congress.

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But the booming Richmond suburbs have tipped the district narrowly toward Democrats. In 2018, Spanberger became the first Democrat to win the seat in several decades. She was reelected last year by about 8,000 votes out of roughly 453,000 cast and is a top target of Republicans heading into 2022.

After touring the distillery this week, Spanberger acknowledged concerns about the cost of the rescue program, but said she would enter the election year focused on its benefits.

"It's a risk to spend billions of dollars supporting distilleries and breweries and restaurants," Spanberger said. "But if they all go under, that's a loss for the community, that's a loss from an employment standpoint."

"When I'm talking about what the value of this bill was," she continued, "yes, it was a tremendous investment, but that's what it was — an investment."

The new guy? Biden debuts at democracy's most exclusive club

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Angela, Boris, Emmanuel, Justin, Mario, Yoshihide and a relative newcomer: Joe. They're the board of global democracy's most exclusive club, and they're meeting this week after four years of U.S. disruption and a two-year coronavirus interruption.

Already on a first-name basis with relationships that range from just months to years, the leaders of the Group of Seven industrialized democracies are gathering Friday amid hopes that the departure of their most unruly member and a new era of personal friendships enhanced by face-to-face discussions can restore a global anti-authoritarian consensus on climate, the coronavirus, China and Russia.

The G-7's return to polite quasi-normality comes as President Joe Biden seeks to restore steady U.S. leadership to the bloc, which had been hamstrung by his predecessor Donald Trump's often confrontational approach to longtime American allies. U.S. officials believe Biden's decadeslong experience in foreign policy combined with his personal skills and folksy demeanor will ease lingering resentments.

Trump had thrown a wrench into G-7 unity, demanding the absolute prioritization of U.S. interests, threatening decades-old security guarantees, insulting colleagues and loudly suggesting that Russian President Vladimir Putin be invited back into the group despite his refusal to meet demands for Moscow to stay out of Ukraine.

Biden aims to take a new tack. Asked about his goals upon departing from Washington, Biden replied: "Strengthening the alliance and make it clear to Putin and to China that Europe and the United States are tight, and the G-7 is going to move."

Of the seven leaders meeting Friday in Britain's southwest Cornwall, two are newbies. Biden and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi took office within weeks of each other this year.

Two others have been in power for two years or less: Britain's Boris Johnson since 2019, and Japan's Yoshihide Suga since 2020. Yet the other three have a long history together, some of them with Biden dating to his days in the Senate and as vice president.

Germany's Angela Merkel will be attending her last G-7 summit before stepping down as chancellor in September after 16 years. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has been in office since 2015 and French President Emmanuel Macron since 2017. All had famously testy relations with Trump over trade, defense spending, climate change and other issues.

Trump once accused Trudeau of being "very dishonest and weak" in the context of a G-7 summit. He frequently disparaged Merkel and Johnson's predecessor Theresa May in similar terms and denounced Macron's skepticism of NATO abilities as "nasty" and "insulting." Johnson was the exception, as Trump saw him as a kindred iconoclastic spirit.

The open hostility hindered the group's ability to present a unified front. Biden hopes to soothe those relations on his first overseas trip as president.

Since taking office, Biden has met in person with only one of his G-7 counterparts, Suga. But in virtual sessions and phone calls, he has sought to build on his personal connections with the others and has said he wants more in-person meetings.

"There's no substitute for face-to-face discussions," Biden told Suga when they met at the White House

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in April. "Those personal bonds of friendship and connection, they're the ones that are going to keep this alliance strong and vibrant for decades to come."

Good relations "make it easier to do business," said Ronald Neumann, president of the American Academy of Diplomacy and a retired three-time U.S. ambassador.

"You won't find that people will act against what they perceive as their interests just because they're friends, but it does mean that it's easier to have conversations to explore whether there are ways to bring interests closer together," he said.

That didn't happen in the Trump years. "My sense is that we were not very interested in exploring areas for compromise — we were interested in getting, or rather telling, the others to do things our way," Neumann said.

As Biden has pursued some policies identical to Trump's, he has met far less resistance than his predecessor did, notably winning support for the military withdrawal from Afghanistan. Just weeks before Biden announced he had decided to generally stick with Trump's pullout plan, U.S. allies had warned against any precipitous moves.

Similarly, Biden's reversal of Trump's approval of the Keystone XL pipeline from Canada was met with only a muted response from Ottawa amid the new president's outreach to Trudeau. "The United States has no closer friend — no closer friend — than Canada. That's why you were my first call as president," Biden told Trudeau.

On Wednesday, though, the sponsor of Keystone XL pulled the plug on the project after Canadian officials failed to persuade Biden to reverse his cancellation of its permit on the day he took office.

Biden and Macron will be meeting for the first time in person, and French officials said Macron is eager to build on discussions they have had by phone and video. A centrist, Macron did not hide that he was counting on Biden's election to bring the United States' positions closer to France's over the Paris climate accord, a minimum global corporate tax and global security issues.

But, perhaps, no G-7 leader has been a greater beneficiary than Merkel, the doyenne of the group. Biden slapped a hold on Trump's decision to reduce the U.S. military presence in Germany and used a national security waiver to avoid hitting a German company and its CEO with sanctions over a controversial pipeline.

"It's a basic truth of foreign policy that each country has its own values and interests. But then there is of course also the hard-to-measure factor of understanding that can form between two sides' leaders — or sometimes doesn't form," said Merkel spokesperson Steffen Seibert. "And of course it's better if it does form, if one does have a common culture of dialogue, if one listens to each other, if one also tries to understand the other person's stance and convictions."

Johnson, meanwhile, is keen to ensure Biden remains committed to Washington-London comity, especially as he continues to seek preferential post-Brexit trade status with America that had been all but guaranteed under Trump.

Trump had praised Johnson and Britain's withdrawal from the European Union unequivocally, calling him "Britain's Trump." Biden had reacted in kind as a candidate, calling the British leader a "physical and emotional clone" of Trump. Still, the British government has worked hard to overcome that impression, stressing Johnson's common ground with Biden on issues such as climate change and his support for international institutions.

Bruised but unbowed, meme stock investors are back for more

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After feeling the thrill of victory early this year by singlehandedly causing GameStop's stock to soar — only to get crushed when it quickly crashed back to earth — armies of smaller-pocketed and novice investors are back for more.

These undaunted investors have resuscitated GameStop shares back above \$300, up from \$40 in February after plunging from a peak of \$347. They're also hauling new stocks onto the bandwagon they say is heading for the moon, including the lesser-known health insurance company Clover Health Investments.

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This second wave of leaps for meme stocks are just as staggering — the movie theater chain AMC Entertainment soared to \$62 last week from \$2 early this year — and once again professional Wall Street is calling the gains illogical. Many of these professionals had predicted the phenomenon of regular, small-fry investors piling into a stock en masse and sending it incredibly higher would fizzle out, particularly after they felt the pain of losing some money.

Instead, the frenzy has endured and shows how powerful these investors remain, at least for now. They're armed with social media where they can convince others to champion the same stocks. They also have zero-fee trading apps that allow many to buy stock options, which can offer bigger gains at a smaller upfront cost than buying a share of stock, in exchange for potentially bigger percentage losses.

"They'll do surprising things if given the tools," said Hossein Azari, CEO of cmorq, a company that helps customers get into cryptocurrencies and advocates for a new world of "decentralized finance."

Azari sees it all stemming from people feeling left out as they watched wealthy investors and firms suck up the majority of the economy's gains in recent years. Now they see a way to get some for themselves.

"They are not out there trying to prove anything," he said. "They just want to kind of materialize the American dream for themselves."

Some of the meme-stock buyers believe fervently in the financial futures of the companies they're backing. Others say on social media posts that they're merely looking to cash in on whatever the next hot stock is. Most say that as long as other like-minded investors stick together and hold the stock, they'll protect each other and the stock's price.

Malcolm Ethridge, a financial adviser with CIC Wealth outside Washington, D.C., said a range of his clients want to talk about meme stocks, as well as cryptocurrencies. Ethridge also says it's not only younger investors pushing up meme stocks — he's gotten just as many requests from his clients who are retirees.

"I think in most cases, though, they really just wanted a professional to tell them why it wasn't a good idea to get involved just so that they could stop feeling like they were missing out," he said.

This resurgence for meme stocks is a little different from the earlier supernova. For one, it hasn't dragged down the broader stock market. Back in January, the mania helped knock down the S&P 500 to its worst day in months. That was a result of fears that some hedge funds would have to sell big, unrelated stocks to raise cash to cover losses they were taking after betting that GameStop would fall.

Several of today's meme-stock winners do have chunks of their shares sold "short," where investors have made trades to profit if the price falls, but not to the same degree as in January. At GameStop, roughly one in five of its shares available to trade has been sold short, for example. Earlier this year, more than 100% of them effectively were, with some getting shorted multiple times.

The buying activity this time around also seems less fervent. Trading in call options, which can give a buyer the right to buy 100 shares of stock at a set price at a later date, surged to a two-month high recently. But it's still below the heights set in January.

Over the last year, trading activity for call options on single stocks has tended to move up and down with how restricted the economy has been by the pandemic, according to Deutsche Bank strategists. When people have been leaving their houses more often, call option trading has tended to fall off, which makes the last few weeks a notable exception.

So, if getting burned by plunging prices for meme stocks once before didn't stop them, and the possibility of doing things other than trading options while sitting on a couch hasn't so far, what could slow the phenomenon?

Regulators and politicians in Washington have been discussing some options, though nothing's come out of it yet.

Gary Gensler, chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission, gave a speech Wednesday where he once again criticized "gamified" investing. Many trading apps use features that encourage customers to make trades more often. That brings in more revenue for the apps but some research also suggests it leads to lower returns for the average investor.

Gensler said he's asked the SEC's staff to gather public input on the topic. He also said he's asked the staff for recommendations on changes to rules that govern the stock market's plumbing and how trading

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apps route retail investors' orders, to make sure they're getting the best execution.

GameStop separately said late Wednesday that the SEC's staff is conducting an investigation into the trading activity in its stock and those of other companies. GameStop, which received a request for documents on May 26, said it doesn't expect the inquiry to hurt the company.

The SEC and other regulators could look for ways to force trading apps to offer more warnings to customers in hopes of slowing them down, said John Coffee, a professor of law at Columbia University. They could start with making it clearer that trading options can be riskier than buying actual shares of a stock.

Coffee is skeptical GameStop, AMC and others can hold onto their lofty prices, which would need profits to explode higher extremely quickly to look rational according to traditional models used by financial analysts. That means he's worried many retail investors may be setting themselves up for big losses in their zeal to ride the meme-stock wave.

And he acknowledges that even if brokerages do offer more warnings, that may not be enough to stop some traders, as social media posts continue to encourage them to pile into certain stocks, and given human nature.

"As much as I believe in consumer protection," Coffee said, "I believe a fool and his money are parted."

Underwood wins at CMT Awards; Gladys Knight, H.E.R. perform

By MESFIN FEKADU AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Carrie Underwood has another reason to rejoice — she extended her record as the most decorated artist in the history of the CMT Music Awards, thanks to her song "Hallelujah."

The music video for the singer's hit, a collaboration with John Legend, was named video of the year at Wednesday's show, which aired from Nashville, Tennessee.

Underwood, who now has 23 CMT Awards, thanked her die-hard fans while accepting the honor: "You're the reason we're all here doing what we do, doing what we love (and) making music videos."

She also shouted-out Legend, particularly for sending her the song, which appeared on her first holiday album "My Gift."

"Congratulations on what I think is your first CMT Award. Whoa!" she exclaimed.

Though Underwood owned part of the night — she also performed with rock band NEEDTOBREATHE — other female stars, some outside of country music, took over the awards show honoring the year's best country music videos.

Grammy-winning R&B star H.E.R. and fellow guitar slayer Chris Stapleton had the night's best performance. They joined forces for a smoky, thrilling performance of "Hold On," coming off like a veteran duo.

The legendary Gladys Knight won over audience members — not wearing masks — during a performance of "Friendship Train" with Mickey Guyton. Part of the show felt dedicated to Black female voices thanks to the top notch performances by Knight, H.E.R. and Guyton, who was nominated for two awards and presented the CMT Equal Play Award to Linda Martell, one of the pioneering Black acts in country music and the first Black woman to perform solo at the Grand Ole Opry.

Martell had a country hit with the song "Color Me Country" 50 years ago, and she had other songs reach the charts, but she dealt with major hardships. She experienced racism while performing onstage and was shunned by the music industry as a mainstream country performer. Her record label shelved her album and she was prohibited from finding a new deal.

"Hearing Linda sing makes it very clear that she had all the talent to be a huge star but her career was cut short for one reason: the color of her skin," said Guyton, who made history this year as the first solo Black woman nominated for a country Grammy Award.

"I would not be standing here today without you, and none of us would be here without you, so thank you!"

Martell, 86, didn't attend the awards show but CMT aired photos of the icon holding her award and said she was watching the show from her home in South Carolina.

Guyton also hit the stage with BRELAND, the Black singer who has mixed country, trap and R&B music

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and had a country hit with the platinum success "My Truck."

And the night featured more collaborative performances like it.

Lady A kicked off the show with Carly Pearce and Lindsay Ell, Ingrid Andress sang with pop singer-songwriter JP Saxe, while Miranda Lambert performed with Jack Ingram and Jon Randall.

Hosts Kane Brown and Kelsea Ballerini also performed onstage and won awards.

Brown won male video of the year for "Worship You" and collaborative video of the year for "Famous Friends" with Chris Young. CMT performance of the year went to Ballerini and Halsey's "The Other Girl" from the 2020 CMT Music Awards.

Gabby Barrett, who was originally supposed to perform at the show but backed out, won female video of the year and the best family feature award went to Taylor Swift's "The Best Day (Taylor's Version)," which was re-released this year and featured home movies starring the pop star, her brother and parents.

Little Big Town's "Wine, Beer, Whiskey" won the night's first award — duo/group video of the year.

"This is awesome. First of all, we're back and making music people," Kimberly Schlapman yelled, referring to the pandemic.

"I know you like drinking songs," Karen Fairchild added.

AP Exclusive: State bar investigating Texas attorney general

By JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — The Texas bar association is investigating whether state Attorney General Ken Paxton's failed efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election based on bogus claims of fraud amounted to professional misconduct.

The State Bar of Texas initially declined to take up a Democratic Party activist's complaint that Paxton's petitioning of the U.S. Supreme Court to block Joe Biden's victory was frivolous and unethical. But a tribunal that oversees grievances against lawyers overturned that decision late last month and ordered the bar to look into the accusations against the Republican official.

The investigation is yet another liability for the embattled attorney general, who is facing a years-old criminal case, a separate, newer FBI investigation, and a Republican primary opponent who is seeking to make electoral hay of the various controversies. It also makes Paxton one of the highest profile lawyers to face professional blowback over their roles in Donald Trump's effort to delegitimize his defeat.

A spokesman for the attorney general's office did not respond to requests for comment. Paxton's defense lawyer, Philip Hilder, declined to comment.

Kevin Moran, the 71-year-old president of the Galveston Island Democrats, shared his complaint with The Associated Press along with letters from the State Bar of Texas and the Board of Disciplinary Appeals that confirm the investigation. He said Paxton's efforts to dismiss other states' election results was a wasteful embarrassment for which the attorney general should lose his law license.

"He wanted to disenfranchise the voters in four other states," said Moran. "It's just crazy."

Texas' top appeals lawyer, who would usually argue the state's cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, notably did not join Paxton in bringing the election suit. The high court threw it out.

Paxton has less than a month to reply to Moran's claim that the lawsuit to overturn the results in Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin was misleading and brought in bad faith, according to a June 3 letter from the bar. All four of the battleground states voted for Biden in November.

From there, bar staff will take up the case in a proceeding that resembles the grand jury stage of a criminal investigation. Bar investigators are empowered to question witnesses, hold hearings and issue subpoenas to determine whether a lawyer likely committed misconduct. That finding then launches a disciplinary process that could ultimately result in disbarment, suspension or a lesser punishment. A lawyer also could be found to have done nothing wrong.

The bar dismisses thousands of grievances each year and the Board of Disciplinary Appeals, 12 independent lawyers appointed by the Texas Supreme Court, overwhelmingly uphold those decisions. Reversals like that of Moran's complaint happened less than 7% of the time last year, according to the bar's annual

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report.

Claire Reynolds, a spokeswoman and lawyer for the bar, said state law prohibits the agency from commenting on complaints unless they result in public sanctions or a court action.

The bar's investigation is confidential and likely to take months. But it draws renewed attention to Paxton's divisive defense of Trump as he and Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush vie for the former president's endorsement in the Republican primary to run for attorney general in 2022.

On the Democratic side, Joe Jaworski, the former mayor of Galveston, has said he'll run. Moran said Jaworski is a friend but that he played no role in the complaint against Paxton.

Paxton's election challenge was filled with claims that failed to withstand basic scrutiny. A succession of other judges and state elections officials have refuted claims of widespread voter fraud, and Trump's own Justice Department found no evidence of fraud that could have changed the election's outcome.

Nonetheless, Paxton's lawsuit won him political and financial support from Trump loyalists at a time when fresh allegations of criminal wrongdoing led many in the state GOP to keep their distance from the attorney general.

Last fall, eight of Paxton's top deputies mounted an extraordinary revolt in which they accused him of abusing his office in the service of a wealthy donor. The FBI is investigating their claims.

Paxton has denied wrongdoing and separately pleaded not guilty in a state securities fraud case that's languished since 2015. He has also used his office in ways that have benefited allies and other donors.

The new criminal allegations prompted an exodus of the top lawyers from Paxton's office. But Solicitor General Kyle Hawkins was still serving as Texas' top appellate lawyer at the time of the election lawsuit.

Although the solicitor general usually handles cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, it was a private Washington, D.C.-based lawyer who brought the election challenge with Paxton. Hawkins has since moved to private practice. A spokesman for his firm said "we can't help you" with questions about why he didn't handle the suit.

AP: Louisiana police unit probed over Black driver arrests

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — The same Louisiana State Police unit whose troopers stunned, punched and dragged Ronald Greene on video during a deadly 2019 arrest is now under internal investigation by a secret panel over whether its officers are systematically targeting Black motorists for abuse.

The panel, whose existence was confirmed to The Associated Press by four people familiar with it, was set up in response to Greene's death as well as three other violent stops of Black men: one who was punched, stunned and hoisted to his feet by his hair braids in a body-camera video obtained by the AP, another who was beaten after he was handcuffed, and yet another who was slammed 18 times with a flashlight.

"Every time I told him to stop he'd hit me again," said Aaron Bowman, whose flashlight pummeling left him with three broken ribs, a broken jaw, a broken wrist and a gash to his head that required six staples to close. "I don't want to see this happen to nobody — not to my worst enemy."

The panel began working a few weeks ago to review thousands of body-camera videos over the past two years involving as many as a dozen white troopers, at least four of whom were involved in Greene's arrest.

The review is focused on Louisiana State Police Troop F, a 66-officer unit that patrols a sprawling territory in the northeastern part of the state and has become notorious in recent years for alleged acts of brutality that have resulted in felony charges against some of its troopers.

"You'd be naïve to think it's limited to two or three instances. That's why you're seeing this audit, which is a substantial undertaking by any agency," said Rafael Goyeneche, a former prosecutor who is president of the Metropolitan Crime Commission, a New Orleans-based watchdog group. "They've got to identify these people and remove them from the organization."

Other than the federal civil rights investigation into Greene's death, the state police panel is the only known inquiry into possible systemic abuse and racism by its troopers.

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Its seven members, drawn from officials from across the State Police, are not only scouring the videos for signs of excessive force, the people told the AP, but also examining whether troopers showed racist tendencies in their traffic stops and pursuits, and whether they mislabeled body-camera videos, turned off their cameras or used other means to hide evidence from internal investigators.

It's not clear if the panel has a deadline or if it plans to expand the inquiry to the eight other troops in the 1,200-officer state police.

State Police spokesman Capt. Nick Manale didn't comment on the review but in a statement said the agency conducted a "thorough and detailed investigation" into the beatings, resulting in the resignation of two troopers and the firing of two others last week.

Secrecy has permeated the Greene case from the beginning.

Soon after Greene's May 10, 2019, death, troopers told his relatives he died in a crash following a chase on a rural road near Monroe. Later, State Police issued a one-page statement saying that troopers struggled with Greene during his arrest and that he died on the way to the hospital.

For more than two years, Louisiana officials from Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards down rebuffed repeated requests to release the body-camera video of Greene's arrest.

But that changed last month after the AP released footage it obtained showing troopers converging on Greene's car, repeatedly jolting the 49-year-old unarmed man with stun guns, putting him in a chokehold, striking him in the head and dragging him by his ankle shackles. Greene can be heard apologizing to the officers, telling them he is scared and moaning and gasping for air.

One 30-minute clip, which a supervisor denied having for two years, shows troopers ordering the heavy-set Greene to remain facedown with his hands and feet restrained for more than nine minutes — a tactic use-of-force experts criticized as dangerous and likely to have restricted his breathing.

An autopsy report obtained by AP lists Greene's cause of death as "cocaine induced agitated delirium complicated by motor vehicle collision, physical struggle, inflicted head injury and restraint."

No troopers have been charged in Greene's arrest. Trooper Kory York, who was seen dragging Greene, was suspended without pay for 50 hours. Master Trooper Chris Hollingsworth, who was recorded on his body camera bragging that he "beat the ever-living f---" out of Greene, was told he would be fired last year just hours before he died in single-vehicle car crash.

While none of the other beatings that prompted the broader review of Troop F resulted in deaths, all led to felony charges against some of the troopers involved. And like Greene, all the suspects were driving alone, were unarmed and didn't appear to resist after troopers closed in.

State police have not released body-camera video of any those cases, but AP obtained footage from the May 2020 arrest of Antonio Harris, who sped away from a traffic stop and led troopers through rural Richland Parish at speeds topping 150 mph before his car was finally stopped with a spike strip.

He can clearly be seen on the video surrendering next to a cornfield by lying on the ground with his arms and legs outstretched before at least seven officers converged.

Dakota DeMoss, a trooper involved in the Greene arrest, can be seen striking Harris in the face and later, after he was handcuffed, yanking him onto his feet by his dreadlocks. Another trooper, George Harper, uses a fist reinforced by his flashlight to punch Harris in the head and threatens to "punish" him while Trooper Jacob Brown pulls the man's hair.

An unidentified officer also can be seen in the footage shocking Harris with a stun gun.

"I hope you act up when we get to the f—— jail," Harper can be heard saying. "What the f—— is wrong with you, stupid motherf——."

Internal investigators found that troopers produced "wholly untrue" reports saying Harris resisted and that they sought to conceal the existence of body-camera video. Troopers also exchanged 14 text messages peppered with "lol" and "haha" in which they boasted about the beating.

"He gonna be sore tomorrow for sure," Brown texted. "Warms my heart knowing we could educate that young man."

State police arrested Brown, Harper and DeMoss on charges of simple battery and malfeasance in Har-

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ris' case.

Another beating happened in late May 2019 — 20 days after Greene's death — when a Ouachita Parish deputy sheriff tried to pull over Bowman for a traffic violation a block from his Monroe home. The deputy reported that Bowman failed to pull over and continued into his driveway, where he was ordered out of his vehicle.

Brown, the trooper charged in the Harris incident, quickly responded to the arrest and, according to court documents, can be seen on his own body-camera video pummeling Bowman with a flashlight designed for shattering car glass, striking him 18 times as he was being handcuffed and not resisting.

"I thought I was going to die that night — I bled so much," Bowman told the AP. "It's hard to deal with. I can't function half of the time. It's just hard for me to think now."

For months, state police were not aware footage of Bowman's arrest existed because Brown misclassified it and failed to document any use of force, according to court records. Brown was charged with aggravated battery and malfeasance.

Brown also faces charges in yet another beating of a Black motorist — the July 2019 arrest of Morgan Blake, who was pulled over for a traffic violation on Interstate 20 in Ouachita Parish.

Troopers said Blake had 13 pounds of marijuana concealed in a locked compartment of the vehicle and was taken into custody. At some point, he complained that his handcuffs were too tight, and Brown took him to the ground.

Body-worn camera captured Trooper Randall Dickerson punching Blake five times and kneeling him. State Police determined that Blake "was not resisting, attempting to escape or being aggressive," and that the troopers failed to document their use of force in any reports.

Brown and Dickerson were charged with simple battery and malfeasance.

In its statement, State Police said Brown and Dickerson have resigned, and Harper and DeMoss were fired last week.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana on Wednesday called for a "top-to-bottom federal investigation" of the State Police.

"This is not a matter of a few bad apples," the group said, "this is a systemic issue that demands a systemic and transparent response."

Bruised but unbowed, meme stock investors are back for more

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After feeling the thrill of victory early this year by singlehandedly causing GameStop's stock to soar — only to get crushed when it quickly crashed back to earth — armies of smaller-pocketed and novice investors are back for more.

These undaunted investors have resuscitated GameStop shares back above \$300, up from \$40 in February after plunging from a peak of \$347. They're also hauling new stocks onto the bandwagon they say is heading for the moon, including the lesser-known health insurance company Clover Health Investments.

This second wave of leaps for meme stocks are just as staggering — the movie theater chain AMC Entertainment soared to \$62 last week from \$2 early this year — and once again professional Wall Street is calling the gains illogical. Many of these professionals had predicted the phenomenon of regular, small-fry investors piling into a stock en masse and sending it incredibly higher would fizzle out, particularly after they felt the pain of losing some money.

Instead, the frenzy has endured and shows how powerful these investors remain, at least for now. They're armed with social media where they can convince others to champion the same stocks. They also have zero-fee trading apps that allow many to buy stock options, which can offer bigger gains at a smaller upfront cost than buying a share of stock, in exchange for potentially bigger percentage losses.

"They'll do surprising things if given the tools," said Hossein Azari, CEO of cmorq, a company that helps customers get into cryptocurrencies and advocates for a new world of "decentralized finance."

Azari sees it all stemming from people feeling left out as they watched wealthy investors and firms suck

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up the majority of the economy's gains in recent years. Now they see a way to get some for themselves. "They are not out there trying to prove anything," he said. "They just want to kind of materialize the American dream for themselves."

Some of the meme-stock buyers believe fervently in the financial futures of the companies they're backing. Others say on social media posts that they're merely looking to cash in on whatever the next hot stock is. Most say that as long as other like-minded investors stick together and hold the stock, they'll protect each other and the stock's price.

Malcolm Ethridge, a financial adviser with CIC Wealth outside Washington, D.C., said a range of his clients want to talk about meme stocks, as well as cryptocurrencies. Ethridge also says it's not only younger investors pushing up meme stocks — he's gotten just as many requests from his clients who are retirees.

"I think in most cases, though, they really just wanted a professional to tell them why it wasn't a good idea to get involved just so that they could stop feeling like they were missing out," he said.

This resurgence for meme stocks is a little different from the earlier supernova. For one, it hasn't dragged down the broader stock market. Back in January, the mania helped knock down the S&P 500 to its worst day in months. That was a result of fears that some hedge funds would have to sell big, unrelated stocks to raise cash to cover losses they were taking after betting that GameStop would fall.

Several of today's meme-stock winners do have chunks of their shares sold "short," where investors have made trades to profit if the price falls, but not to the same degree as in January. At GameStop, roughly one in five of its shares available to trade has been sold short, for example. Earlier this year, more than 100% of them effectively were, with some getting shorted multiple times.

The buying activity this time around also seems less fervent. Trading in call options, which can give a buyer the right to buy 100 shares of stock at a set price at a later date, surged to a two-month high recently. But it's still below the heights set in January.

Over the last year, trading activity for call options on single stocks has tended to move up and down with how restricted the economy has been by the pandemic, according to Deutsche Bank strategists. When people have been leaving their houses more often, call option trading has tended to fall off, which makes the last few weeks a notable exception.

So, if getting burned by plunging prices for meme stocks once before didn't stop them, and the possibility of doing things other than trading options while sitting on a couch hasn't so far, what could slow the phenomenon?

Regulators and politicians in Washington have been discussing some options, though nothing's come out of it yet.

Gary Gensler, chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission, gave a speech Wednesday where he once again criticized "gamified" investing. Many trading apps use features that encourage customers to make trades more often. That brings in more revenue for the apps but some research also suggests it leads to lower returns for the average investor.

Gensler said he's asked the SEC's staff to gather public input on the topic. He also said he's asked the staff for recommendations on changes to rules that govern the stock market's plumbing and how trading apps route retail investors' orders, to make sure they're getting the best execution.

GameStop separately said late Wednesday that the SEC's staff is conducting an investigation into the trading activity in its stock and those of other companies. GameStop, which received a request for documents on May 26, said it doesn't expect the inquiry to adversely hurt the company.

The SEC and other regulators could look for ways to force trading apps to offer more warnings to customers in hopes of slowing them down, said John Coffee, a professor of law at Columbia University. They could start with making it clearer that trading options can be riskier than buying actual shares of a stock.

Coffee is skeptical GameStop, AMC and others can hold onto their lofty prices, which would need profits to explode higher extremely quickly to look rational according to traditional models used by financial analysts. That means he's worried many retail investors may be setting themselves up for big losses in their zeal to ride the meme-stock wave.

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And he acknowledges that even if brokerages do offer more warnings, that may not be enough to stop some traders, as social media posts continue to encourage them to pile into certain stocks, and given human nature.

"As much as I believe in consumer protection," Coffee said, "I believe a fool and his money are parted."

Closed cold case murder tied to ousted Tennessee governor

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (AP) — A former Tennessee governor's administration helped fund a contract murder of a key federal witness decades ago while embroiled in the state's largest political scandal, law enforcement officials announced Wednesday.

The new details revealed for the first time Wednesday have elements that ring of a movie: a trusted ally of union boss Jimmy Hoffa gunned down after testifying about a corrupt governor selling prison pardons and a gunman who donned a wig and blackface to throw authorities off the scent.

Investigators in Hamilton County, which encompasses Chattanooga, have been chipping away at the 42-year-old cold case of Samuel Pettyjohn since they renewed their investigation in 2015. No new charges will be filed because all of the major players involved are now dead, but authorities say closing the case provides closure to one aspect of a complicated piece of Tennessee history.

Pettyjohn, a Chattanooga businessman and close friend of Hoffa, was fatally shot in 1979 in downtown Chattanooga after testifying before a federal grand jury during the early phases of Tennessee's notorious "cash-for-clemency" scandal.

"Essentially, Mr. Pettyjohn cooperated with authorities and knew too much about what was going on locally, as well as the state level, and individuals didn't like that and so individuals hired someone to murder him," Hamilton County District Attorney Neal Pinkston said. "Here we are some 42 years later."

The scandal ultimately led to the ousting of Democratic Gov. Ray Blanton, who was never indicted in the investigation — but three of his aides were. However, questions have lingered about the extent to which the governor's administration actively worked to thwart the investigation. Officials say at least five witnesses in the case were murdered or killed themselves.

Pinkston told reporters that Pettyjohn would meet with inmates to indicate that money would help secure an early release from prison starting in 1976. Pettyjohn was joined by William Thompson, who had been involved in Blanton's election campaign and would later be convicted in the cash-for-clemency scandal.

According to Pinkston, Pettyjohn and Thompson would drop payments off at the governor's office in the Capitol.

As federal investigators began examining whether the governor's office was exchanging cash for parole, Pettyjohn was subpoenaed to testify about the ongoing scheme. Pettyjohn eventually agreed to cooperate with FBI agents, even going as far as providing a list of people who made payments to the governor's office for the early release of certain prisoners.

Shortly after, Pettyjohn was killed in what authorities describe as an "execution style hit." Witnesses told authorities that they saw a Black man in a trench coat exiting Pettyjohn's store. Meanwhile, Pettyjohn was found with his pistol nearby, which had not been fired, and more than \$100,000 on him.

According to Pinkston, Ed Alley — a known bank robber who died in 2005 in federal prison — was hired by several sources to kill Pettyjohn. Pinkston said those sources included an undisclosed third party who paid some of the contract money on behalf of the Blanton administration. The estimated total murder price was between \$25,000 and \$50,000.

"I'm very sure. I'm proof positive," Pinkston said when asked how certain he was that the Blanton administration helped pay for Pettyjohn's murder.

Officials say Alley, who was white, wore a wig, glasses and covered his skin in heavy brown makeup to deceive any witnesses.

"Cooperating individuals indicated Alley admitted Pettyjohn was murdered for various reasons including he was a source of cooperation for the FBI in investigations of Gov. Ray Blanton," according to findings

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from a Hamilton County grand jury.

The grand jury concluded that if Alley were alive today, he would be charged with first-degree premeditated murder of Pettyjohn.

Mike Mathis, supervisor of Hamilton County's cold case unit, acknowledged that it was highly unusual for a prosecutor's office to pursue a grand jury when most of the involved parties were dead but said the county chose to do so for the first time it because "it gives you a legal closing."

Saadique Pettyjohn, one of Samuel Pettyjohn's sons, said his mother often described his father as someone with a "heart of gold" and "very generous, giving person," while acknowledging his father was associated with criminal activity. Authorities say Pettyjohn was part of an organized effort to blow up a building to collect insurance payouts, but he was never brought to trial due to his untimely death.

"It's a curse and a blessing to grow up in a family that's connected to crime," he added. "When that person dies, you can go that route or you can go a different route; all of us chose to try to do better in our lives."

Blanton, who died in 1996, had sparked outrage after he pardoned and commuted prison terms for more than 50 state inmates in the waning days of his gubernatorial term. Blanton's fellow Democrats worked with Republicans in the Legislature to move up the inauguration of his Republican successor, Lamar Alexander, by three days.

Blanton was never charged in the scandal, but in 1981, he was convicted of unrelated charges of extortion and conspiracy for selling a liquor license for \$23,000 to a friend while in office.

Russian court outlaws opposition leader Navalny's groups

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — A Moscow court on Wednesday night outlawed the organizations founded by Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny by labeling them extremist, the latest move in a campaign to silence dissent and bar Kremlin critics from running for parliament in September.

The Moscow City Court's ruling, effective immediately, prevents people associated with Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption and his sprawling regional network from seeking public office. Many of Navalny's allies had hoped to run for parliamentary seats in the Sept. 19 election.

The ruling, part of a multipronged Kremlin strategy to steamroll the opposition, sends a tough message one week before President Vladimir Putin holds a summit meeting with U.S. President Joe Biden in Geneva.

The extremism label also carries lengthy prison terms for activists who have worked with the organizations, anyone who donated to them, and even those who simply shared the groups' materials.

Navalny, Putin's most ardent political foe, was arrested in January upon returning from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin — an accusation that Russian officials reject. In February, Navalny was given a 2 1/2-year prison term for violating the terms of a suspended sentence from a 2014 embezzlement conviction that he dismissed as politically motivated.

In a statement posted on his Instagram account after the verdict, Navalny denounced the hearing as a travesty of justice and vowed to continue defying the Kremlin.

"When corruption is the foundation of the government, fighters against corruption are cast as extremists," the statement said. "We will not abandon our goals and ideas. It's our country and we don't have another one."

The U.S. State Department condemned the court's ruling, saying that "Russia has effectively criminalized one of the country's few remaining independent political movements."

"The Russian people, like all people, have the right to speak freely, form peaceful associations to common ends, exercise religious freedom, and have their voices heard through free and fair elections," State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

The court session, lasting more than 12 hours, was held behind closed doors on grounds that classified materials would be discussed. The judge rejected a defense appeal to allow Navalny to take part via a video link from prison and dismissed other motions by the defense.

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Lawyer Yevgeny Smirnov said during the hearing that the prosecutors' motion was intended to bar Navalny's associates from running for public office. "This case has been linked to the law that bans all those who are connected with the Foundation for Fighting Corruption from getting elected," Smirnov said.

Lawyers said they would appeal the ruling.

Navalny's offices in dozens of Russian regions already shut down in April after prosecutors issued an injunction to suspend their activities pending the court ruling, but the opposition leader's associates have vowed to continue their work in different formats.

His foundation, started 10 years ago, has relentlessly targeted senior government officials with colorful and widely watched videos that detail corruption allegations against them. One of its latest productions, which has received 117 million views on YouTube, claimed that a lavish palace on the shores of the Black Sea was built for Putin through an elaborate corruption scheme. The Kremlin has denied any links to Putin.

Navalny also has relied on his offices across Russia to organize anti-Kremlin protests and implement his Smart Voting strategy — a project to support the candidates most likely to defeat those from the Kremlin's dominant United Russia party in various elections.

During the hearing, prosecutors accused Navalny's organizations of staging protests to overthrow the government.

As the Moscow court was preparing to consider the case, Russian lawmakers fast-tracked a measure that banned members of organizations declared extremist from running for public office. The law was signed by Putin last week, and combined with the court ruling will dash the hopes of several Navalny associates who have declared their intention to run for parliament.

Ivan Zhdanov, a top Navalny associate who headed his foundation, vowed that the team will continue publishing exposes of corrupt officials and apply the Smart Voting strategy.

"Navalny's team will not stop its activities, they shouldn't hope for that," Zhdanov, who lives abroad, told the independent Dozhd TV.

The September vote is widely seen as an important part of Putin's efforts to cement his rule ahead of the 2024 presidential election. The 68-year-old leader, who has been in power for more than two decades, pushed through constitutional changes last year that would potentially allow him to hold onto power until 2036.

Ahead of the vote, the government has targeted other opposition figures as well. Last week, authorities arrested Andrei Pivovarov, the head of another anti-Kremlin group that they have labeled "undesirable" — a designation used by the Kremlin to outlaw more than 30 groups.

Days before his arrest, Pivovarov announced the dissolution of his Open Russia movement to protect members from prosecution, but that didn't stop authorities from pulling him off a Warsaw-bound plane at St. Petersburg's airport last week. A court in southern Russia's Krasnodar region ordered him to be held for two months pending an investigation.

Membership in "undesirable" organizations is a criminal offense under a 2015 law, and another bill now making its way through the Russian parliament increases the punishment for it, introducing prison terms of up to six years for their members.

Open Russia was financed by Russian tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who moved to London after spending 10 years in prison in Russia on charges widely seen as political revenge for challenging Putin's rule. Khodorkovsky has described the ongoing crackdown on dissent as a reflection of authorities' concern about the waning popularity of the main Kremlin-directed party, United Russia.

Another opposition activist, Dmitry Gudkov, a former Russian lawmaker who has aspired to run again for the parliament, was held for two days last week on financial charges that he and his supporters allege were trumped up. He went abroad after being released, saying that he had received a warning that he would be jailed if he didn't leave the country.

US drops Trump order targeting TikTok, plans its own review

By MATT O'BRIEN, ERIC TUCKER and TALİ ARBEL Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House dropped Trump-era executive orders intended to ban the popular apps TikTok and WeChat and will conduct its own review aimed at identifying national security risks with software applications tied to China, officials said Wednesday.

A new executive order directs the Commerce Department to undertake what officials describe as an “evidence-based” analysis of transactions involving apps that are manufactured or supplied or controlled by China. Officials are particularly concerned about apps that collect users’ personal data or have connections to Chinese military or intelligence activities.

In revoking some of President Donald Trump’s blanket-style orders against Chinese tech companies and replacing them with a narrower approach, the Biden administration has not actually weighed in yet on whether TikTok and other apps pose a danger to Americans.

But a senior administration official said Wednesday that the Trump actions weren’t “always implemented in the soundest fashion” and the aim of the review is to set up clear criteria to evaluate specific data security and privacy risks for each app. He said that could lead to a range of potential future actions on an app-by-app basis.

“We want to take a tailored, tough approach here,” he said.

The department will also make recommendations on how to further protect Americans’ genetic and personal health information, and will address the risks of certain software apps connected to China or other adversaries, according to senior administration officials.

TikTok on Wednesday declined to comment. WeChat did not respond to a request for comment.

The Trump administration’s attempted bans didn’t hold up legally as courts blocked them, and also “ran up against this critique that they were mimicking China’s Great Firewall,” said Samm Sacks, a fellow at Yale Law School’s Paul Tsai China Center. “What the Biden administration wants to do is maintain an open, secure internet that doesn’t take a page from Beijing’s playbook, while addressing legitimate risk.”

The Biden administration’s move reflects ongoing concern that Americans’ personal data could be exposed by popular apps tied to China, a chief U.S. economic and political rival. The White House and Congress have both taken action to address Beijing’s technological advancement.

The Biden administration last week expanded a Trump-era list of Chinese companies that Americans can’t invest in because of purported links to the Chinese military and surveillance. Companies on the list include China’s state-owned telecommunications companies, telecom equipment maker Huawei and Chinese oil company China National Offshore Oil Corp.

On Tuesday, the Senate passed a bill that aims to boost U.S. semiconductor production and the development of artificial intelligence and other technology in the face of growing international competition. The bill would also ban the federal government’s use of Chinese-made drones.

The new executive order should lead to a framework for protecting Americans’ data from China, rather than targeting specific companies, and could pressure Congress to enact a data-security law in the years ahead, said Paul Triolo, a tech policy expert at the Eurasia Group consultancy.

Biden also on Wednesday revoked a Trump order from January that had banned transactions with digital wallets Alipay and WeChat Pay and six lesser-known Chinese apps over unspecified data security concerns.

Courts had blocked the Trump administration’s efforts last year to ban TikTok, a video app widely popular with young people, and the main WeChat messaging service. But a national-security review of TikTok by a government group called the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, or CFIUS, is ongoing. CFIUS had set deadlines for TikTok to divest its U.S. operations, but such a sale never happened.

Last year, the Trump administration brokered a deal that would have had U.S. corporations Oracle and Walmart take a large stake in the app on national security grounds. Oracle didn’t returned requests for comment on Wednesday. Walmart declined to comment.

The Biden administration earlier this year sought to delay its legal defense of Trump’s attempts to ban TikTok and WeChat as it reviewed national security threats posed by Chinese technology companies. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit has put on hold a case challenging Trump’s TikTok divestment order.

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A cybersecurity and privacy analysis of TikTok published in March by the internet watchdog group Citizen Lab found no evidence of malicious behavior and said TikTok's practices of collecting personal data and tracking users' behavior were no worse than other major social platforms such as Facebook.

"Our research shows that there is no overt data transmission to the Chinese government by TikTok," the report said. It added that TikTok's service did not contact any servers within China, but it was still theoretically possible that servers outside China could later transfer user data to China-based servers.

Citizen Lab, based at the University of Toronto, also described a "plausible" though speculative scenario in which the Chinese government could use one of its national security laws to force TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, to turn over user data, but said there's no evidence China has yet exerted such pressure on the company.

Federal probe: Protest not broken up due to Trump photo op

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An internal government investigation has determined that the decision to forcibly clear racial justice protesters from an area in front of the White House last summer was not influenced by then-President Donald Trump's plan to stage a Bible-toting photo opportunity at that spot.

The report released Wednesday by the Interior Department's inspector general concludes that the protesters were cleared by U.S. Park Police last June 1 so that a contractor could get started installing new fencing.

The demonstrators were protesting the death of George Floyd, who died after a then-Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck and pinned him to the ground for about 9 1/2 minutes. A half-hour after the Washington protesters were forced from the area with pepper pellets and flash-bangs, Trump walked across Lafayette Park amid the lingering scent of pepper spray and delivered a short speech while holding a Bible in front of St. John's Church.

Park Police officials had already planned to clear the area and "had begun implementing the operational plan several hours before they knew of a potential Presidential visit to the park," Inspector General Mark Lee Greenblatt said in a statement accompanying the report.

The report documents Trump's attorney general, William Barr, encouraging commanders shortly before the push to clear the protesters because of Trump, but being dismissed.

In a remarkable exchange, the report recounts the testimony of an unnamed Park Police operations commander: "The Attorney General asked him, 'Are these people still going to be here when POTUS (President of the United States) comes out?' The USPP operations commander told us he had not known until then that the President would be coming out of the White House and into Lafayette Park. He said he replied to the Attorney General, 'Are you freaking kidding me?' and then hung his head and walked away. The Attorney General then left Lafayette Park."

The report determined that the decision to clear the protesters was justified, but that law enforcement agencies on the scene failed to effectively communicate with each other and failed to communicate warnings to the protesters about the impending crackdown. Several different law enforcement agencies moved ahead of schedule and started engaging with protesters before the protesters had been sufficiently warned.

The confrontation and church photo-op capped several days of escalating tension and scattered violence. Nights of protests over Floyd's death had resulted in scattered vandalism through the downtown area. Trump declared that Washington's mayor, Muriel Bowser, was incapable of maintaining the peace and he called in his own security response.

The report details how on June 1, a contingent from the Bureau of Prisons arrived to the scene late, didn't receive a full briefing and used pepper pellets on protesters "contrary to the USPP incident commander's instructions."

The conclusions, which deny any political influence on decisions and cite fog-of-war confusion for any missteps, are likely to be dismissed as insufficient by critics of last summer's crackdown.

Lafayette Park, the Washington nexus of the last summer's national wave of racial justice protests, is

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under Park Police jurisdiction; that agency falls under the Interior Department.

The new report focuses on the Park Police decision-making and its complicated interactions with various law enforcement entities, including the Secret Service and the Metropolitan Police Department.

It points out that "the USPP and the Secret Service did not use a shared radio channel to communicate" and determines that "weaknesses in communication and coordination may have contributed to confusion during the operation."

The report tries to explain one of the main points of lingering contention: who used tear gas and when? It concludes that members of the city's police department, who were stationed down the block, used CS gas near the corner of 17th and H Street.

In the aftermath of that day, the Park Police repeatedly insisted that its officers never used tear gas, while the police insisted that its officers were not involved in clearing protesters away from the church. Just last month, lawyers for the police department stated in federal court that its officers had used CS gas and other chemical irritants, claiming protesters had become violent and that one officer had his arm burned by a firework.

Much of the criticism of the clearing, and the accusations of political influence, stem from the decision to move in before the 7 p.m. curfew that Bowser had set. The push surprised protesters and was criticized as unnecessarily confrontational after two nights of clashes and property damage.

The report concludes that Park Police commanders viewed the curfew as irrelevant. It cites an incident commander as saying, "We were not enforcing the Mayor's curfew. We're a Federal entity. We don't work directly for the Mayor."

It continues that commanders on the scene "did not believe protesters would comply with the Mayor's June 1 curfew order or that waiting would necessarily reduce unrest."

JBS settles Muslim discrimination lawsuit for \$5.5 million

By THOMAS PEIPERT Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — The second-largest producer of beef, pork and chicken in the U.S. will pay up to \$5.5 million to settle a lawsuit that claimed the company discriminated against Muslim employees at a meat processing plant in northern Colorado.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission filed the lawsuit in federal court in Denver in 2010, saying JBS Swift & Company discriminated against employees at its beef processing plant in Greeley by denying them bathroom breaks and disciplining them more harshly than other workers because they were Muslim, immigrants from Somalia, and Black.

JBS USA LLC, doing business as JBS Swift & Company, must pay the \$5.5 million to about 300 employees who were included in the settlement, which was announced by the commission on Wednesday.

Nikki Richardson, a spokeswoman for JBS USA, said the company does not admit any liability in the settlement, prohibits all discrimination and harassment at its facilities and "is committed to diversity and inclusion in the workplace."

According to the lawsuit, JBS prevented Muslim employees from praying and harassed them when they tried to pray during scheduled breaks and bathroom breaks.

JBS also was accused of shutting off water fountains during the holy month of Ramadan in 2008, keeping Muslim Somali workers from getting a drink at sundown after a day of fasting, and from washing before prayers. According to the lawsuit, JBS managers and other employees threw meat or bones at Black and Somali employees, called them offensive names and tolerated offensive graffiti in restrooms at the Greeley plant, including the use of the N-word, "Somalis are disgusting," "F--- Somalians" and "F--- Muslims."

"This case serves as a reminder that systemic discrimination and harassment remain significant problems that we as a society must tackle," EEOC Chair Charlotte Burrows said in a statement.

JBS must take several steps to prevent further discrimination, including allowing former employees covered under the settlement to be eligible for rehire; reviewing, updating and posting its anti-discrimination policies; and maintaining a 24-hour hotline for reporting discrimination. The company also will be required to provide quiet locations other than bathrooms for employees to pray.

Many Somalis started working at the Greeley plant following a 2006 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement raid in which 270 Hispanic employees were detained.

The treatment of the Somali workers came to a head two years later when they asked company officials to move the plant's scheduled meal break so they could stop fasting at sunset during Ramadan.

Officials agreed to an earlier meal break but changed course three days later and, according to the lawsuit, Muslim workers who were told to go outside to pray weren't allowed back into the plant.

Days later, several workers were fired for what the company said was an unauthorized work stoppage, according to the lawsuit.

Pacers fire Bjorkgren as coach after just 1 season

By MICHAEL MAROT AP Sports Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Kevin Pritchard hired Nate Bjorkgren to take the Indiana Pacers in a new direction. They went the wrong way.

A season filled with defensive struggles, missed chances and locker room drama resulted Wednesday in the firing of Bjorkgren after only one season as coach.

"This was my decision," said Pritchard, the Pacers' president of basketball operations. "This was a really tough decision, one that had a lot of thought behind it. I brought in my management team, something we didn't do lightly."

Pritchard expected the 45-year-old coach, who spent the previous two seasons as Nick Nurse's top assistant in Toronto, to make an impact with his new-age approach and his creativity. When the hiring was announced in October, Pritchard acknowledged he was betting big on a young coach.

It just didn't pay off.

Indiana went 34-38 before finishing the season with an embarrassing 142-115 loss to Washington in the play-in tournament — a fitting end to an abysmal season. The Wizards averaged 140.3 points in sweeping four games from the Pacers.

Indiana finished 25th in defensive scoring average (115.3 points), blew 17 fourth-quarter leads and produced its first losing record at home in 32 seasons.

Sure, injuries played a part in the results.

Indiana's top scorer from 2019-20, T.J. Warren, suffered a season-ending foot injury after playing just four games. NBA blocks champion Myles Turner went down with a season-ending foot injury on April 18. And after trading two-time All-Star Victor Oladipo for swingman Caris LeVert in January, LeVert missed the next 24 games because team doctors found a cancerous growth on his left kidney.

"I've never really seen anything like it," potential free agent Doug McDermott said at season's end.

But there was tumult behind the scenes, too.

While Warren publicly disputed a report that he didn't want to play for Bjorkgren following the season finale, other confrontations spilled into public view.

The injured Turner helped break up a spat between center Goga Bitadze and assistant coach Greg Foster during a game in early May. Team officials fined Bitadze and gave Foster a one-game suspension.

On May 24, Pritchard even acknowledged that players described Bjorkgren as a micromanager during their annual end-of-season interviews.

"We have a lot of firepower, a lot of guys who can score," two-time All-Star Domantas Sabonis said in May. "But we're definitely going to have to sacrifice to get as far as we can in the playoffs. We have to come in with a different mindset next season."

Even then, it appeared Bjorkgren's future with the Pacers was tenuous at best. Pritchard, who also drew criticism for the team's underwhelming results, didn't endorse Bjorkgren and instead explained what he thought went wrong and how it could be fixed.

Then he consulted with former Pacers president Donnie Walsh and had multiple discussions with Bjorkgren before making Wednesday's announcement.

"There are certain things (traits) that are non-negotiables for me going forward," Pritchard said. "I hope

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I've learned from this in terms of selecting the right coach. Nate gets let go, but it's my fault. We've got to do better."

Not all of the problems in this unusual season were Bjorkgren's fault.

Pritchard said he challenged some current players to become more vocal leaders and that he might add another veteran to help hold the bench more accountable.

The Pacers have now fired two coaches in less than 12 months. Pritchard let go of Nate McMillan in August after a third consecutive first-round playoff exit and just weeks after announcing the coach had received a contract extension.

McMillan has since helped led the Atlanta Hawks into the second round of the playoffs this season after losing his final nine playoff games with the Pacers.

Now McMillan's successor is gone, too, albeit with next season's salary guaranteed.

Though Pritchard could move quickly after researching between 12 and 18 job candidates during last year's abbreviated offseason, Pritchard plans to spend this coaching search looking for someone who can get the Pacers turned around.

Maybe even a more experienced coach such as former Trail Blazers coach Terry Stotts, a high school graduate of Bloomington North, about a one-hour drive from Indianapolis.

"I wanted to take a risk — maybe a lower floor and higher ceiling," Pritchard said. "Maybe this year we look at something a little different. I have something in my mind, but I don't want to quite come forward with that yet."

San Antonio base locked down for hour after gunfire reported

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — An Air Force base in San Antonio was placed on lockdown for about an hour Wednesday after military officials said gunfire was reported near a base gate.

Two gunshots were reported heard coming from outside Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland onto the base about 11:50 a.m., said Lt. Col. Brian Loveless, 802nd Security Forces Squadron commander. Investigators were trying to determine whether the gunfire report was true or a false alarm, Loveless said.

It was unclear whether anyone saw a shooter or whether more than one shooter may have been involved, he said.

"We're trying to investigate a couple of leads right now to confirm that gunshots actually did take place on the installation.

No injuries were reported, Loveless said.

Lackland is on San Antonio's southeast side and is where the Air Force conducts all of its basic training.

"There's a lot of facilities on this installation that are very important to the Air Force. I would rather overreact (to a gunfire report) than underreact," Loveless said.

The base issued an alert midday, telling all Lackland Air Force Base personnel to go into lockdown. An alert on Twitter said: "Real World, LOCKDOWN, LOCKDOWN, LOCKDOWN."

Officials said the shots were reportedly fired near the Valley Hi gate on the western side of the main base, just east of Interstate 410 and near a shopping center.

After an hour, the lockdown was lifted except for the Valley Hi gate.

San Antonio police said they were assisting in the investigation. In a statement, police spokeswoman Jennifer Rodriguez said officers were looking for the spot from which gunfire might have originated.

Slap to Macron puts focus on ultra-right groups

ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Bubbling beneath France's political landscape is an assortment of ultra-right groups, a subculture that shot to the nation's attention when a young man slapped President Emmanuel Macron and blurted out a centuries-old royalist cry.

Ultra-rightist groups are considered increasingly dangerous despite their small following and are on the

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radar of authorities. Numerous arrests have been made and several groups banned. Challenges to the French identity are often at the center of their ideologies.

During Wednesday's Cabinet meeting, Macron stressed the incident a day earlier was "an isolated act by a violent individual" that wouldn't stop his direct contact with the population.

"No violence can be considered banal in the country," government spokesman Gabriel Attal said.

The town of Tain-l'Hermitage, where the assault occurred, was the president's most recent stop on a tour designed to "feel the pulse of the country" that's been laid low by the coronavirus and trying to get back on its feet.

Damien Tarel, 28, the man who slapped the president, and a second man, identified only as Arthur C., also 28, were quickly arrested. Neither had police records, the local prosecutor said.

Tarel told investigators he struck out without thinking, the prosecutor's office said. He is to appear in court Thursday on a charge of violence against a person invested with public authority.

While Tarel's motives remained unclear, it was his Medieval-era cry "Montjoie! Saint Denis!" as he slapped Macron's cheek, that pointed to the aggressor's potential interest in the tiny royalist fringe movement. Social media posts showed he followed royalist TV channels and a smattering of extreme-right figures.

At the home of Arthur C, police found weapons, old books on the art of war, a copy of Adolf Hitler's manifesto "Mein Kampf," and two flags, one symbolizing Communists and another of the Russian revolution, the prosecutor's office said. He is to be summoned to court next year for illegal possession of arms.

Tarel told investigators he was close to the Yellow Vest movement for social and economic justice, but also held right- or ultra-right political convictions without being a member of a party or group, according to a statement by the prosecutor's office.

"Testimony of witnesses and (Tarel's) companion do not add clarity to what motivated" the suspect to slap Macron, the prosecutor's office said.

In 2018, the royalist call-to-arms dating to Medieval times was cried out by someone who threw a cream pie at the far-left lawmaker, Eric Coquerel. The extreme-right pro-monarchist group Action Francaise took responsibility. Action Francaise did not claim a role in Tuesday's slapping incident, but hours later tweeted, "Vive la tarte a Tain," a play on words combining the slang for "slap" (tarte), the French apple desert, tarte tatin, and Tain-l'Hermitage, where the incident occurred.

Far-right leader Marine Le Pen was among political chiefs to quickly condemn the assault. Le Pen, a candidate in 2022 presidential elections, has spent years working to rid her National Rally party of extremist elements who gravitated around her father's National Front party, which she renamed.

Obscure to most of France, ultra-right movements are a priority on the radar of investigators.

A probe into an alleged plot uncovered in 2018 against Macron by a mini-group whose members were scattered around France is still in progress. The group, known as Les Barjols, was ordered disbanded.

Mediapart, an online investigative outlet, reported last month that investigators are on alert for the eventual return of ultra-right terrorists. It cited a confidential report from the prosecutor's office detailing the professionalism and ability to obtain weapons by some groups. It said 17 deaths can be attributed to the ultra-right between 2016-2019, and quoted investigators as counting about 1,000 militants and 2,000 followers of the ultra-right.

In March, France banned Generation Identity, citing its ideology "inciting hate, violence or discrimination of individuals ... based on origins, race or religion." The organization was known for spectacular actions to get out its anti-migrant message in what it claimed was a mission to preserve French and European civilization.

Tarel's social media profile showed an interest in medieval combat and martial arts, confirmed by a friend in an interview on BFMTV. The friend, identified only as Loic, said he was "stunned" by the slap. In October 2018, Tarel put out a call on a social media platform for funds for an association of Medieval martial arts in the town where he and Arthur C. were born and live, Saint-Vallier, with a population of under 4,000.

Four hours before Tuesday's assault, a TV news show, Le Quotidien, broadcast a brief clip of Tarel, Arthur C. and another man waiting to see Macron. Neither Tarel nor Arthur C. spoke, but the third person said: "There are things that should be said, but unfortunately cannot be said."

Among the issues, he said, was "the decline of France."

'This IS INSANE': Africa desperately short of COVID vaccine

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — In the global race to vaccinate people against COVID-19, Africa is tragically at the back of the pack.

In fact, it has barely gotten out of the starting blocks.

In South Africa, which has the continent's most robust economy and its biggest coronavirus caseload, just 0.8% of the population is fully vaccinated, according to a worldwide tracker kept by Johns Hopkins University. And hundreds of thousands of the country's health workers, many of whom come face-to-face with the virus every day, are still waiting for their shots.

In Nigeria, Africa's biggest country with more than 200 million people, only 0.1% are fully protected. Kenya, with 50 million people, is even lower. Uganda has recalled doses from rural areas because it doesn't have nearly enough to fight outbreaks in big cities.

Chad didn't administer its first vaccine shots until this past weekend. And there are at least five other countries in Africa where not one dose has been put into an arm, according to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The World Health Organization says the continent of 1.3 billion people is facing a severe shortage of vaccine at the same time a new wave of infections is rising across Africa. The shortfall is estimated at 700 million doses. And vaccine shipments to the continent have ground to a "near halt," WHO said last week.

"It is extremely concerning and at times frustrating," said Africa CDC Director Dr. John Nkengasong, a Cameroonian virologist who is trying to ensure some of the world's poorest nations get a fair share of vaccines in a marketplace where they can't possibly compete.

The United States and Britain, in contrast, have fully vaccinated more than 40% of their populations, with higher rates for adults and high-risk people. Countries in Europe are near or past 20% coverage, and their citizens are starting to think about where their vaccine certificates might take them on their summer vacations. The U.S., France and Germany are even offering shots to youngsters, who are at very low risk of serious illness from COVID-19.

Poorer countries had warned as far back as last year of this impending vaccine inequality, fearful that rich nations would hoard doses.

In an interview, Nkengasong called on the leaders of wealthy nations meeting this week at the Group of Seven summit to share spare vaccines — something the United States has already agreed to do — and avert a "moral catastrophe."

"I'd like to believe that the G-7 countries, most of them having kept excess doses of vaccines, want to be on the right side of history," Nkengasong said. "Distribute those vaccines. We need to actually see these vaccines, not just ... promises and goodwill."

Others are not so patient, nor so diplomatic.

"People are dying. Time is against us. This IS INSANE," South African human rights lawyer Fatima Hasan, an activist for equal access to health care, wrote in a series of text messages.

The Biden administration made its first major move to ease the crisis last week, announcing it would share an initial batch of 25 million spare doses with desperate countries in South and Central America, Asia and Africa.

Then, on Wednesday, a person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press that the U.S. will buy 500 million more doses of the Pfizer vaccine that will be donated through the U.N.-backed COVAX program to 92 lower-income countries and the African Union over the next year. President Joe Biden was set to make the announcement Thursday before the start of the G-7 summit. The person spoke on condition of anonymity.

Billionaire British philanthropist Mo Ibrahim, who was born in Sudan, added his voice to the issue Tuesday, saying the pandemic-era phrase "Nobody is safe until everybody is safe" — often repeated by leaders of

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wealthy nations — will be meaningless until they share their excess vaccine.

"They say that while they are hoarding the vaccine," Ibrahim said. "Can you walk the talk? Stop just talking like parrots, you know, and do you really mean what you said?"

Uganda just released a batch of 3,000 vaccine doses in the capital, Kampala — a minuscule amount for a city of 2 million — to keep its program barely alive.

There and elsewhere, the fear is that the luck that somehow enabled parts of Africa to escape the worst of previous waves of COVID-19 infections and deaths might not hold this time.

"The first COVID was a joke, but this one is for real. It kills," said Danstan Nsamba, a taxi driver in Uganda who has lost numerous people he knew to the virus.

In Zimbabwe, Chipso Dzimba embarked on a quest for a vaccine after witnessing COVID-19 deaths in her community. She walked miles to a church mission hospital, where there were none, and miles again to a district hospital, where nurses also had nothing and told her to go to the region's main government hospital. That was too far away.

"I am giving up," Dzimba said. "I don't have the bus fare."

South African health workers faced similar disappointment when they crowded into a parking garage last month, hoping for vaccinations and ignoring in their desperation the social distancing protocols. Many came away without a shot.

Femada Shamam, who is in charge of a group of old-age homes in the South African city of Durban, has seen only around half of the 1,600 elderly and frail people she looks after vaccinated. It is six months, almost to the day, since Britain began the global vaccination drive.

"They do feel very despondent and they do feel let down," Shamam said of her unvaccinated residents, who are experiencing "huge anxiety" as they hunker down in their sealed-off homes 18 months into the outbreak. Twenty-two of her residents have died of COVID-19.

"It really highlights the biggest problem ... the haves and the have-nots," Shamam said.

'In the Heights' lifts hopes for a Latino film breakthrough

By SIGAL RATNER-ARIAS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Color. Dance. Music. Joy. An all Latino cast!

The hype for "In the Heights" has brought great expectation for Latinos in the United States, a group that's been historically underrepresented and widely typecast in films. And with upcoming titles like "Cinderella" with Cuban-American singer Camila Cabello, "The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard" with Mexican star Salma Hayek and Steven Spielberg's revival of "West Side Story," this seems to be just the beginning of a string of productions that place Latinos front and center.

"In the Heights," which opens Friday, is an adaptation of the Tony-award winning musical by Lin-Manuel Miranda and Quiara Alegría Hudes about the hopes and struggles of residents of New York City's Washington Heights. Directed by Jon M. Chu ("Crazy Rich Asians"), many hope it will mark a new beginning on the big screen for the largest minority group in the country — one that mirrors shifts that have already happened for Black and Asian actors and creators.

"You know, every decade there's, 'Is this movie gonna break through? Or is this particular music style gonna break through? Or this particular performer or singer? Are they gonna open the doors for a kind of explosion?'" says Jimmy Smits, who is of Puerto Rican descent. "I think the dynamics right now in terms of where we are culturally, just in terms of our population, and the potential economic power that we have, ... the universe aligned in a nice way.

"You have this beautiful collage of people in the community," says Smits, the star of "NYPD Blue" and "West Wing" who plays Kevin Rosario, a single father and the owner a taxi cab service, in "In the Heights." "It's the immigrant experience that's been part of the fabric of this country since it started. And it's positive. So we need that right now after the pandemic."

John Leguizamo agrees.

"I think that 'In the Heights' is gonna be THE project that changes the whole thing finally," says the

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Colombian-American actor and playwright, who started his career on film and television but, like Miranda, found a place to tell his stories — and validation of this work — on and off Broadway.

Leguizamo, who won a special Tony Award in 2018 for his commitment to bringing diverse stories and audiences to Broadway through his one-man shows including "Freak," "Ghetto Clown" and "Latin History for Morons," says he's been pitching stories to Hollywood for 30-plus years.

"I started to believe that maybe I don't know how to write, maybe I just don't know how to pitch, cause all my stories were rejected," he says. "And then I started to realize, 'Oh my God, it's because it was Latin content!' They didn't know what to do with it.

"They weren't rejecting my ability, there were rejecting my culture."

He found success on the stage "because there aren't any gatekeepers in theater," he says. "I just needed to write something dope, get somebody to produce it and the audience was so hungry for it. They were dying to see themselves!"

About 60.6 million Hispanics live in the United States, the Census Bureau estimates. And many are devoted filmgoers: Latinos have consistently led the box office, reaching 29% of tickets sold, according to the latest Motion Picture Association report on theatergoers.

Yet they only represent 4.5% of all speaking or named characters and a mere 3% of lead or co-lead actors, a 2019 study of 1,200 popular movies from 2007 to 2018 by the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative found.

Awards recognition, too, has been elusive. This year's Oscars featured a diverse slate of nominees, but no Latino performers.

"I think our absence at the Oscars was appalling," Leguizamo says. "(But) the Oscars is the symptom; the disease is Hollywood. We need more Latin executives making decisions."

In 1951, Puerto Rican José Ferrer became the first Latino actor to receive an Academy Award for his leading role in "Cyrano de Bergerac." The same decade, Mexican-born Anthony Quinn got two for best supporting actor, for "Viva Zapata!" (1953) and "Lust for Life" (1957). Puerto Rican Rita Moreno became the first Latina to get the best supporting actress award in 1962 as Anita in "West Side Story."

Since then, only one more Latino has been recognized in the supporting actor category: Puerto Rican Benicio del Toro for 2000's "Traffic." Spaniards Javier Bardem and Penélope Cruz got supporting roles awards in 2008 and 2009, for "No Country for Old Men" and "Vicky Cristina Barcelona," respectively. Kenyan actor Lupita Nyong'o, who was born in Mexico, won the same prize in 2014 for "12 Years a Slave."

No Latina has won best actress at the Oscars, and few have even been considered. Hayek was nominated for the English-language movie "Frida," but other contenders competed for performances in foreign language films: Fernanda Montenegro for Brazil's "Central Station," Catalina Sandino Moreno for Colombia's "Maria Full of Grace" and Yalitza Aparicio for Mexico's "Roma."

Rita Moreno, an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony winner whose career spans seven decades, says she has seen huge progress for women and other minorities in Hollywood.

"What still concerns me mightily and profoundly is that Hispanics haven't gotten their hold on our profession," she says in an interview ahead of the release of the documentary "Rita Moreno: Just a Girl Who Decided to Go for It." "I don't know what the hell is wrong. I don't know what is not working right. The Black community has done incredibly, and I have nothing but the deepest admiration for the Black professional community. They've done it. And I think we can take some lessons from them. But where is our 'Moonlight'? Why are we not advancing?"

Moreno noted that Hispanic identity is often rooted in specific countries.

"It's very complicated. People forget that we're not just Hispanic," she says. "Maybe the answer, or the beginning of the answer, lies in some kind of summit."

At 89, and despite all the titles coming this year, she doesn't expect to see this happen in her lifetime: "My age forbids it. But I sure as hell hope something happens. I can't believe we're still struggling the way we are."

Behind the camera, many Latin American artists have been recognized at the Oscars in different areas, most recently and prominently "The Three Amigos" — Alfonso Cuarón, Alejandro González Iñárritu and

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Guillermo del Toro, all Academy Award winning directors from Mexico.

Leguizamo, who has been very vocal about the lack of representation in Hollywood, includes them on the list of achievements: "They are from our culture and they are like us. I just wish it was easier to make it in America as a Latin artist."

However, he says he's seen an important change during the COVID-19 pandemic and with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement.

"The studios woke up," says Leguizamo, who is now in talks to direct a few projects, including one he's written. "I think everybody is making moves to change into being inclusive. I see it from small producers, directors in their offices, in their casting. I see it at Viacom. I see it at Univision. I see it at Netflix. I see it everywhere!"

Audiences will too, starting this summer with releases like Everardo Gout's "The Forever Purge" with Ana de la Reguera (both Mexican); M. Night Shyamalan's "OLD," with Mexican actor Gael García Bernal and Steven Soderbergh's "No Sudden Move" with Benicio del Toro.

Spielberg's "West Side Story," set for December 10, includes a Latino cast this time around. Many "Puerto Ricans" in the original were white actors in brown makeup and, although widely successful, the 1961 movie was also criticized for portraying Latinos in a stereotypical way.

Beyond that, studios are working on a "The Father of the Bride" remake with music star Gloria Estefan alongside Andy Garcia (both Cuban-American.) "Encanto," the first Walt Disney Animation Studios movie co-directed by a Latino woman, Charise Castro Smith, about a young Colombian girl who's frustrated she's the only member of her family without magical powers, is also premiering this year.

"It's terrifying sometimes," says Castro Smith, who is of Cuban descent, "but is also one of the reasons I decided to do this, because it means the world to me for little brown kids everywhere to get to see themselves and to see themselves represented in a positive way and feel seen."

Anthony Ramos, who leads the cast of "In the Heights" as Usnavi, the character originally played by Miranda on the stage, says that "now is an incredible, beautiful moment where we can capitalize on Hollywood being receptive to what is naturally happening in the streets."

He praised filmmakers like Spike Lee and movies like "Black Panther" for helping pave the way, and Miranda for "writing himself into history."

Miranda, who became a superstar with the Broadway hit "Hamilton" and since then has been working also on TV and film, says "the way time has caught up to 'In the Heights', I think, is we have learned as people of color to build a coalition around ourselves and advocate for ourselves."

"We're part of a larger series of voices," Miranda says. "I remember how important it was for me to go support 'Black Panther' opening weekend, to go and support 'Crazy Rich Asians' opening weekend, to vote with my wallet, to go and support 'Minari' opening weekend. If you want newer and richer stories beyond the ones you've heard, you vote with your wallet on that stuff."

Journalists demanding more action against online harassment

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Associated Press' recent firing of a young reporter for what she said on Twitter has somewhat unexpectedly turned company and industry attention to the flip side of social media engagement — the online abuse that many journalists face routinely.

During internal meetings after the Arizona-based reporter, Emily Wilder, was let go, several journalists expressed concern over whether the AP would have the backs of employees under attack from the outside.

"The Emily Wilder situation triggered this for many people on the staff," Jenna Fryer, an AP sportswriter who spoke at one of the meetings, said in a subsequent interview.

Wilder was fired last month because of what the company said were tweets on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that violated AP's social media policy against offering opinions on contentious issues. Before her firing, a conservative group had sparked an online campaign against her over her pro-Palestinian views, and while the AP has said it wasn't responding to pressure, her dismissal ignited debate over whether the

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news organization acted too rashly.

Journalists are often subjected to racist or sexist slurs, vile insults and threats of rape, dismemberment or other violence from online readers.

Online harassment is hardly unique to journalists. But the visibility of reporters makes them particularly vulnerable to attack, said Viktorya Vilks, program director for digital safety and free expression at the literary and human rights organization PEN America.

Fryer, who covers auto racing, said she "was in tears daily" over online abuse she received for coverage of a noose found last year in an Alabama garage stall used by NASCAR's only full-time Black driver. She said the only time she heard from the company about harassment was when a manager remarked that Fryer had gotten a lot of it.

"Sometimes you feel like you're on a total island," she said.

The news agency says it has worked with law enforcement in many cases when its journalists were attacked online. Still, following the meetings, the AP ordered a study on whether more can be done.

"I can speak from personal experience that we have not been ignoring this," said Julie Pace, the AP's Washington bureau chief. "What we have to do is put this on a par with the way we handle what we have traditionally viewed as security threats for our journalists — if you are going to Syria, or if you're covering protests that could potentially become chaotic."

News organizations were often quick over the past decade to press their journalists to build social media profiles, recognizing it as important to their brands, but slow to see its dangers, said Vilks, who has worked with more than a dozen media outlets on this issue.

Women and minorities usually have it worse. Vilks believes the preponderance of white men in management has contributed to the industry's delay in reacting.

Some members of the AP's race and ethnicity reporting team approached their editor, Andale Gross, following Wilder's firing with concerns over whether the company would support them if their stories or tweets proved controversial, he said. Racist slurs and threats happen frequently to the reporters he supervises, who include Blacks, Latinos and Asian-Americans, and AP security has responded to a number of them, he said.

The team's story two weeks ago about racism in the military provoked many hateful messages from people who said they were in the military — essentially proving the article's point, he said.

"I don't want people to think it should be accepted or tolerated," Gross said. "But it comes with the territory of the things we write about. We know that every story we produce, we can be dealing with an onslaught of racism."

The National Association of Black Journalists has offered members help on the problem through in-person information sessions and webinars, said Dorothy Tucker, NABJ president.

Nearly three-quarters of 714 female journalists surveyed said they had experienced online attacks, according to a study released in April by UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists. Twelve percent sought medical or psychological help. The survey said 4% left their jobs and 2% quit the business altogether.

Washington Post columnist Margaret Sullivan wrote in March about receiving "viciously misogynistic name-calling and sexualized fantasies about dismembering me."

"Unless you've been there, it's hard to comprehend how deeply destabilizing it is, how it can make you think twice about your next story, or even whether being a journalist is worth it," she wrote.

Taylor Lorenz, a reporter at The New York Times, wrote on Twitter this spring about the "unimaginable" attacks she had received online. "It's not an exaggeration to say that the harassment and smear campaign I've had to endure over the past year has destroyed my life," she wrote. "No one should have to go through this."

Both journalist Glenn Greenwald and Fox News Channel host Tucker Carlson belittled her concerns.

"Destroyed her life? Really?" Carlson said on the air. "By most people's standards Taylor Lorenz would seem to have a pretty good life, one of the best lives in the country, in fact."

A "suck it up" attitude or feeling that nothing can really be done about online harassment leads many

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journalists to stay silent. Anne M. Peterson, a veteran sportswriter for the AP, said she has received lewd pictures online and a threat from someone who chillingly attached a Google image of her house. She has never reported an incident to management.

The AP's Pace, who also writes stories and appears on television, said she has been a target of abuse and has had to address it for employees she manages.

"There have been moments when I sort of chalked it up to, 'Yeah, this is part of the job,'" she said in an interview. "I know I'm in a high-profile job. ... Then there are moments where they really cross a line, or if it affects your personal safety or your family where you think, 'No, this is not something I should have to put up with. This is unacceptable and scary.'"

"So we don't want to normalize it," she said. "We don't want people to feel like they have to sit there and take it."

Online attacks in general have worsened. The Pew Research Center said in January that 41% of U.S. adults say they have been harassed online, up from 35% in 2017. The percentages of people who say they have been threatened or sexually harassed online have both doubled since 2014, Pew said.

There are signs that the problem is being taken more seriously in newsrooms.

One indication is a greater willingness to publicly back journalists under attack. That happened this past winter, when Washington Post reporter Seung Min Kim was criticized for asking Sen Lisa Murkowski her reaction to something President Joe Biden's failed nominee for budget director, Neera Tanden, had tweeted about Murkowski.

Kim's boss, Post national editor Steven Ginsberg, said the attacks were "wildly misguided and a bad-faith effort at intimidation. What she did was basic journalism."

Vilk advises news organizations to conduct an anonymous internal survey to determine the extent of their problems, and to examine social media policies. Most policies concentrate on what journalists should or shouldn't do, as opposed to what happens when the audience goes on attack, she said.

Organizations should provide cybersecurity training and support, legal and mental health counseling and access to services that can scrub an employee's personal information from the web, she said. Companies must also be aware that harassment is often more organized than it appears, and be prepared to investigate the source of campaigns, she said.

The AP set a Sept. 1 deadline for a committee of staff members to bring forward ideas to improve how harassment is dealt with.

Bolivia's 'People of the Water' try to survive loss of lake

By CARLOS VALDEZ Associated Press

PUNACA TINTA MARIA, Bolivia (AP) — For many generations, the homeland of the Uru people here wasn't land at all: It was the brackish waters of Lake Poopo.

The Uru — "people of the water" — would build a sort of family island of reeds when they married and would survive on what they could harvest from the broad, shallow lake in the highlands of southwestern Bolivia.

"They collected eggs, fished, hunted flamingos and birds. When they fell in love, the couple built their own raft," said Abdón Choque, leader of Punaca, a town of some 180 people.

Now what was Bolivia's second-largest lake is gone. It dried up about five years ago, victim of shrinking glaciers, water diversions for farming and contamination. Ponds reappear in places during the rainy season.

And the Uru of Lake Poopo are left clinging to its salt-crusted former shoreline in three small settlements, 635 people scabbling for ways to make a living and struggling to save even their culture.

"Our grandfathers thought the lake would last all their lives, and now my people are near extinction because our source of life has been lost," said Luis Valero, leader of the Uru communities around the lake.

Not long before the lake was lost, the language of the Uru-Cholo had perished as well. The last native speakers gradually died and younger generations grew up schooled in Spanish and working in other, more common Indigenous languages, Aymara and Quechua.

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To save their identities, the communities are trying to revive that language — or at least its closest sibling. Aided by the government and a local foundation, they have invited teachers from a related branch of the Uru, the Uru-Chipaya near the Chilean border to the west, to teach that tongue — one of 36 officially recognized Bolivian languages — to their children.

"In this times, everything changes. But we are making efforts to maintain our culture," Valero said. "Our children have to recover the language to distinguish us from our neighbors."

"The instructors teach us the language with numbers, songs and greetings," said Avelina Choque, a 21 year old student who said she one day would like to teach mathematics. "It's a little difficult to pronounce."

The pandemic has added to that struggle. The teachers have been unable to hold in-person classes during the pandemic, leaving students to learn from texts, videos and radio programs.

Punaca Mayor Rufino Choque said the Uru began settling on the lakeshore several decades ago as the lake began to shrink, though by then, most of the lands around them had been occupied.

"We are ancient (as a people), but we have no territory. Now we have no source of work, nothing," said the 61-year-old mayor, whose town consists of ribbon of round, plastered block homes along an earthen street.

With no land for farming, the young men hire themselves out as laborers, herders or miners in nearby towns or more distant cities. "They see the money and they don't return," said Abdón. Some of the woman make handicrafts of straw.

The broader Uru people once dominated a large swath of the region, and branches remain around Peru and Lake Titicaca to the north, around the Chilean border and near the Argentine border.

US deaths from heart disease and diabetes climbed amid COVID

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. saw remarkable increases in the death rates for heart disease, diabetes and some other common killers in 2020, and experts believe a big reason may be that many people with dangerous symptoms made the lethal mistake of staying away from the hospital for fear of catching the coronavirus.

The death rates — posted online this week by federal health authorities — add to the growing body of evidence that the number of lives lost directly or indirectly to the coronavirus in the U.S. is far greater than the officially reported COVID-19 death toll of nearly 600,000 in 2020-21.

For months now, researchers have known that 2020 was the deadliest year in U.S. history, primarily because of COVID-19. But the data released this week showed the biggest increases in the death rates for heart disease and diabetes in at least 20 years.

"I would probably use the word 'alarming,'" said Dr. Tannaz Moin, a diabetes expert at UCLA, said of the trends.

Earlier this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that nearly 3.4 million Americans died in 2020, an all-time record. Of those deaths, more than 345,000 were directly attributed to COVID-19. The CDC also provided the numbers of deaths for some of the leading causes of mortality, including the nation's top two killers, heart disease and cancer.

But the data released this week contains the death rates — that is, fatalities relative to the population — which is considered a better way to see the impact from year to year, since the population fluctuates.

Of the causes of death for which the CDC had full-year provisional data, nine registered increases. Those included Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's, chronic liver disease, stroke and high blood pressure.

Some of the increases were relatively small, but some were dramatic. The heart disease death rate — which has been falling over the long term — rose to 167 deaths per 100,000 population from 161.5 the year before. It was only the second time in 20 years that the rate had ticked up. This jump, of more than 3%, surpassed the less than 1% increase seen in 2015.

In raw numbers, there were about 32,000 more heart disease deaths than the year before.

Diabetes deaths rose to 24.6 per 100,000 last year, from 21.6 in 2019. That translated to 13,000 more diabetes deaths than in 2019. The 14% increase was the largest rise in the diabetes death rate in decades.

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The death rate from Alzheimer's was up 8%, Parkinson's 11%, high blood pressure 12% and stroke 4%. The CDC offered only the statistics, not explanations. The agency also did not say how many of the fatalities were people who had been infected with — and weakened by — the coronavirus but whose deaths were attributed primarily to heart disease, diabetes or other conditions.

Some experts believe a larger reason is that many patients did not seek treatment in an emergency because they feared becoming infected with the virus.

"When hospitalization rates for COVID would go up, we would see dramatic declines in patients presenting to the emergency room with heart attacks, stroke or heart failure," Dr. Donald Lloyd-Jones, a Northwestern University researcher who is president-elect of the American Heart Association.

Other possible explanations also point indirectly to the coronavirus.

Many patients stopped taking care of themselves during the crisis, gaining weight or cutting back on taking high blood pressure medications, he said. Experts said the stress of the crisis, the lockdown-related disappearance of exercise options, and the loss of jobs and the accompanying health insurance were all factors, too.

Increases in Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, and West Virginia pushed the four into the group of states with the highest rates of death from heart disease, the CDC data showed. For diabetes, similar changes happened in Indiana, New Mexico, West Virginia and some other Southern and Plains states.

The death rate from the nation's No. 2 killer, cancer, continued its decline during the year of COVID-19. It fell about 2% in 2020, similar to the drop seen from 2018 to 2019, even though cancer screenings and cancer care declined or were often postponed last year.

Lloyd-Jones' theory for the decline: Many of the virus's victims were fighting cancer, "but COVID intervened and became the primary cause of death."

Earlier research done by demographer Kenneth Johnson at the University of New Hampshire found that an unprecedented 25 states saw more deaths than births overall last year.

The states were Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Traditionally the vast majority of states have more births than deaths.

Pandemic shows risk of obesity, and challenge of weight loss

By CANDICE CHOI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Jennifer Bergin was already obese and pre-diabetic before the pandemic, and learning she also had high blood pressure made her worry about how sick she might get with COVID-19. She began walking three hours a day, eventually losing 60 pounds.

"I just knew I was a prime candidate for getting it and not recovering," said Bergin, a 50-year-old resident of Charlotte, North Carolina. Now 170 pounds and 5 feet, 4 inches tall, she is no longer considered obese, but would like to continue improving her health.

Since the early days of the pandemic, health officials have warned that obesity and related conditions such as diabetes were risk factors for severe COVID-19. It was another reminder of the many underlying health issues often signaled by obesity — as well as of how stubbornly difficult sustained weight loss can be. Even faced with such risks, it's not clear how common Bergin's dramatic weight loss may be.

Across the country, countless people of all body sizes have either gained or lost weight during the pandemic. For some like Bergin, no longer commuting to an office meant more time for walking, eating out less and greater control over what she ate.

But for others, being stuck at home meant moving less and eating more because of stress, anxiety, depression — or just proximity to the kitchen.

The spectrum of weight changes underscores the complexities of obesity, including how much of a role a person's circumstances can play in their health, said Karen H. Yeary, an obesity researcher at the Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center in Buffalo, N.Y. That's contrary to the notion that losing weight is just

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a matter of willpower, she said.

"It takes a lot of effort and energy to eat healthy and then to lose weight," Yeary said.

Another reason tackling obesity is so difficult: Weight gain often happens slowly over years, making it easier to dismiss as a health issue. In the U.S., an estimated one in four adults are considered obese, and another one in three are overweight.

It's often not until a major health scare, like a heart attack or a notable deterioration in lifestyle, that people are motivated to lose weight, said Eric Plaisance, an obesity researcher at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

And though the pandemic illuminated the risks of obesity, he said people were already used to hearing about how unhealthy it is to be overweight.

"It usually takes a much greater, life-changing event at a personal level," he said of what often triggers successful weight loss for people.

That was the case for Mickey Beatima, a 29-year-old Seattle resident who started trying to lose weight a couple months before the pandemic, when his diabetes led to eye problems.

"That really hit me," said Beatima, who is 5 feet, 8 inches tall and has gone from about 300 pounds to 170 pounds.

The pandemic accelerated his efforts by making weight loss easier. He was no longer getting takeout, going out with friends or gathering with his family for their customary feasts.

He also found solace in dancing to YouTube videos, and was motivated by the knowledge that getting healthier would reduce his risk for severe COVID-19.

"If I were to get it and I was still 300, I think it would be way more of a battle than if I got it today," Beatima said.

Christian Hains, a 42-year-old resident of Hammond, Indiana, also lost about 50 pounds during the pandemic, and at 180 pounds and 5 feet, 11 inches tall is no longer considered obese.

His weight had crept up over the years, peaking at around 230 pounds. But it wasn't until he was diagnosed as diabetic around the start of the pandemic that he felt the urgency to make changes — especially since data was emerging that it was one of the conditions that was more likely to lead to severe coronavirus disease.

"All of those long-term scary things that can happen because of obesity no longer became long-term concerns," Hains said.

For many others, the spotlight the pandemic put on risks of obesity has faded as vaccines and treatments have dampened the threat of the virus, said obesity researcher Yeary. That might lessen the sense of urgency that was helping to motivate some people. The circumstances of the pandemic that made weight loss easier for some — more time for long walks, eating out less — are also going away.

Beatima, for example, is spending more time with his family again and has put some weight back on. But he's not worried about it derailing his overall fitness goals, because, he said, the pandemic gave him perspective on how his weight was tied to what he valued, such as being healthy enough to spend time with his nieces and nephews for many years to come.

"That new ground is understanding the value of my physical health, my social health and my mental health," he said.

Iran candidate says he's willing to potentially meet Biden

By MEHDI FATTAHI Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — A prominent Iranian presidential candidate said Wednesday he'd be willing to meet with U.S. President Joe Biden if he wins his country's election next week, though "America needs to send better and stronger signals" to the Islamic Republic.

Speaking to The Associated Press, former Iranian Central Bank chief Abdolnasser Hemmati stressed that an American return to Iran's tattered nuclear deal was key to any possible relationship amid the wider tensions in the Mideast.

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"I think we haven't seen anything serious from Mr. Biden's side yet," Hemmati said. "They first need to go back to the (nuclear deal) that they withdrew from. If we see the process and more confidence is built, then we can talk about that."

Hemmati, 64, is one of the seven candidates approved by Iranian authorities to run for the presidency in the Islamic Republic's June 18 election. Polling and analysts suggest he lags in the race behind hard-line judiciary chief and front-runner Ebrahim Raisi, believed to be a favorite of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

While Khamenei has final say on all matters of state, whoever serves as president can affect domestic issues and set the tone for Iran's broader approach with the world. Outgoing President Hassan Rouhani, a relatively moderate cleric within Iran's theocracy, helped his nation reach its landmark 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

However, Rouhani has struggled with the fallout of then-President Donald Trump's decision to unilaterally withdraw America from the accord in 2018. That's seen crushing sanctions target Iran and Tehran later abandoned all the limits on its nuclear program. It now enriches small amounts of uranium to 60% purity — a record high, though still short of weapons-grade levels of 90%.

While Hemmati has been at pains to distance himself from Rouhani due to the cleric's unpopularity over the nuclear deal's collapse, he's viewed widely as being the candidate who would carry out similarly moderate policies within the theocracy.

Talking to AP journalists at his Tehran office, Hemmati repeatedly said that the signal Iranians hoped to see from the U.S. was Washington's return to the nuclear deal. A visit with Biden also would hinge on it being "within the framework of the general policies of the ruling system," he said.

"The Americans have sent positive signals but those signals haven't been strong enough," he said. "If there are stronger signals, it will affect how optimistic or pessimistic we are."

Asked about whether Iran would be willing to accept further restrictions, such as on its ballistic missile program to get sanctions relief, Hemmati said Tehran would refuse such an offer.

"Iran's nuclear commitments must be inside the framework of the (deal)," he said. "If they are not, neither the (supreme) leader nor the president will accept that."

The White House declined to comment on Hemmati's remarks to the AP.

The U.S. had a close relationship with Iran's Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, hosting the monarch for visits with presidents from Harry S. Truman to Jimmy Carter. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution toppled the shah's government, relations strained and then broke with the U.S. Embassy hostage crisis in Tehran.

In the time since, Iranian leaders have taken pains to avoid Americans, even using different hallways at the United Nations so as to not bump into each other. That relationship slightly warmed during negotiations for the nuclear deal. Rouhani had a telephone conversation with then-President Barack Obama in 2013. A face-to-face meeting, however, has not happened.

As the former Central Bank chief, Hemmati, has made economics a cornerstone of his campaign. During two televised presidential debates, he's repeatedly mentioned the challenges facing Iranians, who have seen their life savings evaporate due to the rapid devaluation of the country's rial currency. Inflation remains in the double digits, while good jobs remain scarce.

If the talks in Vienna over the nuclear deal fail, Hemmati said he would manage that as president.

"We managed to neutralize the sanctions and run the economy over the past three years of difficult sanctions," he said. "Definitely I have plans for that (scenario) as well, but we will try to help the deal reach positive results, God willing."

He didn't elaborate on those plans. The sanctions also have shut off Iran's ability to openly sell crude oil on the world market, further cutting into an industry vital to government budgets.

He's also repeatedly brought up both internet censorship, as well as Iranian women receiving threatening text messages from authorities over not strictly following the country's mandatory head-covering, or hijab, law. That's a way for him to criticize Raisi as the judiciary handles hijab-related offenses.

Hemmati kept up his criticism of the text messages, saying it put women under "social and mental stress."

"I believe that our people are Muslims," Hemmati said. "People have beliefs and they can observe it

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themselves better.”

It remains unclear how the election will go, particularly on the issue of turnout. The state-linked Iranian Student Polling Agency has projected a 38% turnout from the country's 59 million eligible voters, which would be a historic low amid a lack of enthusiasm by voters and the coronavirus pandemic. Officials have been trying to boost interest in the election as they see turnout as a sign of confidence in the theocracy since 1979.

Within Iran, candidates exist on a political spectrum that broadly includes hard-liners who want to expand Iran's nuclear program and confront the world, moderates who hold onto the status quo and reformists who want to change the theocracy from within.

Asked about his chances, Hemmati offered an optimistic assessment despite polling suggesting Raisi held the advantage in a race that includes five hard-liners, a little-known reformist and himself.

“Against those five people who belong to the same political front, I don't count them as rivals,” Hemmati said. “My rival is the people's breakup with the ballot box.”

EXPLAINER: The differences between Democrats' 2 voting bills

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — The Democratic Party's hopes of passing a massive overhaul of elections may have suffered a fatal blow when West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin became the first member of the party to say he wouldn't support it, ensuring the bill, known as HR1, would not pass the Senate.

Instead, Manchin prefers an update to the Voting Rights Act known as HR4, or the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, named after the late congressman and civil rights leader.

There's a big difference between the two bills. HR1 is an ambitious proposal that would transform every aspect of elections and campaigns across the country, including how they're financed. Written in 2017, when Democrats were out of power, it is what is often referred to as a messaging bill — a proposal for candidates to tout on the campaign trail and not crafted specifically to garner enough votes to pass a narrowly-divided Congress.

In contrast, the John Lewis Act is a comparatively narrow bill designed to fix a specific problem, in this case, addressing a 2013 Supreme Court ruling that made it harder for the federal government to block racially discriminatory voting laws and redistricting proposals.

Democrats will struggle to get either bill through Congress, as they look for a way to combat what they view as a Republican-assault on voting rights in state legislature. Here's a look at the differences between the bills:

WHAT'S IN THE BILLS?

HR1's number shows its importance to Democrats. Also known as the For the People Act, it became HR1 because it was the first bill on the House floor after Democrats retook the chamber in the 2018 elections. (The Senate version is known as S1.)

The bill does a little about a lot of topics. It changes the way people vote by automatically registering every eligible citizen, guaranteeing mail and early in-person voting options in every state and effectively neutering voter identification laws.

The legislation would also establish bipartisan commissions to draw the lines for legislative districts and require redistricting not favor either major party. The provision has the potential to create scores of newly competitive districts and, supporters say, would combat the partisan polarization in the House.

The bill would provide \$6 in public money to campaigns for every \$1 in small-dollar donations they raise. Finally, it'd require groups currently shielded from disclosing their donors to identify their funders. The last provision targets a 2010 Supreme Court ruling, known as the Citizens United decision, that lets “dark money” groups hide their contributors even while getting involved in elections.

The John Lewis Act was written in reaction to a different Supreme Court decision. It tries to effectively reverse the 2013 Shelby County case, in which the court's conservative majority threw out the formula the federal government used to determine which states had such a history of racial discrimination in elections

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and were, under the Voting Right Act, required to have Justice Department approval before implementing new voting laws or redrawing legislative districts.

HR4 would put in place an updated formula designed to meet the court's Shelby County test. That would once again require about a dozen, mostly Southern, states to get approval from the Justice Department's civil rights division before making those changes.

The bill would also make it easier for the department to send election observers and for courts to block election law changes for violating the constitutional protections guaranteeing voting rights for all U.S. citizens. And, of course, some of the elements from HR1 could always be added in if the John Lewis Act becomes Democrats' primary vehicle for an election overhaul.

HOW WOULD THE BILLS EFFECT THE NEW STATE LAWS ON VOTING?

The Democrats' voting push isn't happening in a vacuum. Republican-controlled states are passing new voting restrictions at a remarkable clip — the Brennan Center for Justice, a group that supports both HR1 and HR4 bills, tallied up 14 states that have passed 22 laws putting new restrictions on when and how Americans vote. The GOP push has been fueled by former President Donald Trump's lies that he lost the election due to fraud.

HR1 could neutralize some of these laws because it creates national standards for voting access. For example, new laws in Arizona and Florida that potentially remove people from the states' mail voting lists could be moot, because all voters would now have a right to cast ballots by mail.

But the John Lewis Act would have no impact. The Justice Department would only be required to approve new laws, not ones that passed before the bill was approved. What's more, the bill's "preclearance" provision would only affect about a dozen states and some additional counties or cities that meet its standard. Manchin has talked about expanding preclearance nationwide, but that could run into problems with the Supreme Court.

Additionally, future laws could only be blocked under the bill's new legal formula if they were deemed to be racially discriminatory by making it harder for specific racial groups to vote. Laws that present new hurdles for other groups — such as no longer accepting student IDs as voting identification, as Montana as done — could still be allowed.

Most importantly, neither bill would stop a trend of Republicans making it easier for partisan political officials to interfere in elections. In Georgia, for example, the GOP-controlled state legislature now will appoint most members of a board that can replace local election officials. In Texas, Republicans are considering legislation that would make it easier for a judge to overturn an election.

WHAT ARE THE CHANCES OF EITHER BILL PASSING?

Not good. Democrats control the House and Senate, but only narrowly. HR1 has passed the House but is stuck in the Senate, where Manchin's opposition means the bill doesn't even get a majority and is nowhere near the 60 votes it needs to break a filibuster and pass. Currently, no Republican backs the bill.

The John Lewis Act hasn't even been introduced in this Congress because of a lengthy fact-gathering and hearing process required to meet the Supreme Court's new standard. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in a letter to colleagues Tuesday predicted the bill won't be introduced until the fall.

Prior updates to the Voting Rights Act passed the Senate unanimously — 98-0 as recently as 2006 — but earlier versions of HR4 have only drawn one Republican sponsor, Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska. That's a testament to how partisan even the basic act of voting has become, a phenomenon that predates Trump.

Indeed, the Republican senate leader, Mitch McConnell, on Tuesday blasted the John Lewis Act. "It's against the law to discriminate in voting on the basis of race already, and so I think it's unnecessary," McConnell said.

Time is not on Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's side, said Jessica Anderson, executive director of Heritage Action, a conservative group that opposes both bills. "Every day we inch closer to 2022, the harder it is for Schumer to get this to the finish line."

WHAT'S MANCHIN'S PLAN?

It's unclear. He's the former West Virginia secretary of state and warns that any voting reform that's too

partisan will simply increase distrust in elections. On the other hand, he says there needs to be some new election overhaul to protect voting rights.

One of those principles may have to give.

Wedding boom is on in the US as vendors scramble to keep up

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Couples in the U.S. are racing to the altar in a vaccination-era wedding boom that has venues and other vendors in high demand.

With restrictions on large gatherings loosening, wedding planners and others who make the magic happen said they've started pushing their bookings into late 2022 and early 2023.

"We've run out of trucks for some dates this year and that hasn't happened before," said Ben Goldberg, co-founder and president of the New York Food Truck Association. "Our phones have been ringing off the hook with clients looking to have the weddings they had to put off during COVID."

Also contributing to the rush are couples who went ahead and got hitched during stricter pandemic times with few or no guests and are now on their second go-arounds with larger groups. They're competing for services with those who had always intended to marry this year.

"We're seeing a lot of last-minute bookings with shorter planning windows," said Anna Noriega, who owns the luxury Alorè Event Firm in Miami. "With vaccinations becoming more prevalent and on-site COVID testing available for events, we've seen an uprise in guest counts and a push for bookings."

Namisha Balagopal, 27, in Emeryville, California, is among the double brides.

She and Suhaas Prasad, 33, met in 2014 and got engaged in May 2019. They planned a traditional South Asian Indian wedding last August in Utah, where Balagopal grew up, with 320 guests and events over five days. But they couldn't make it happen under pandemic restrictions. They decided on a small sunset ceremony that month with fewer than 10 people in attendance on Muir Beach near San Francisco. It's where they had their first date and where Prasad proposed.

Now, their big celebration is on for Aug. 15 outdoors at their original venue in Park City, Utah, with about 230 guests and events over several days, including seven clothing changes for bride and groom. Many of their closest loved ones in India aren't permitted to travel to the U.S.

"It's just a really big part of our culture," Balagopal said of the extravaganza. "In the end, it was really important to our parents."

She's mostly beyond the frustration phase of being a pandemic bride.

"The wedding is going to be so much fun. It's just delayed gratification at this point," Balagopal smiled.

The boom is on in bridal and bridesmaids dresses, too.

The budget-friendly David's Bridal chain, with 282 stores in the U.S. and more in the UK, Canada and Mexico, has 300,000 dresses in stock due in part to the wedding drought of 2020.

"Moving forward it's going to be an unprecedented wedding season this year," said Maggie Lord, a vice president at David's whose online wedding planning guide, Rustic Wedding Chic, was acquired by the company. David's has been tracking broad wedding data through the pandemic.

"Couples are getting super creative and having Thursday night ceremonies or Friday afternoon ceremonies just because of the amount of people getting married this year," Lord said. "We do know that 90 percent of brides this year are looking to have their weddings at outdoor venues," where there are fewer restrictions.

Lord said the pandemic has helped normalize non-traditional aspects of weddings: an end to passed hors d'oeuvres and buffets, for instance, more livestreaming to accommodate travel restrictions, and more online planning and shopping.

Competition for vendors has some upping their prices. "They know they have customers who will pay it," she said. "Wedding vendors are making up for a year of limited if no work at all."

Anna Price Olson, associate editorial director for Brides magazine, said many vendors in the wedding industry are small businesses.

"They're trying to meet the demand of new clients and clients who have postponed," she said. "In order

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to do so, in many cases, they're having to charge more. They're having to hire additional resources, bring staff members back. Also the cost of goods is increasing. There are only so many linens, only so many rentals and only so many flowers that were planted this past season."

One thing's for sure, Lord said: Brides and grooms are "bringing back the big wedding, with guest lists that are a little bit more curated and maybe not 300 people on a crowded dance floor."

Tirusha Dave is the owner and CEO of the upscale wedding planning company Bravura Brides used by Balagopal. She handled 10 weddings in 2019, with just three in 2020. Dave already has 11 weddings booked this year with 250 to 300 guests planned at each.

"I think everybody's ready for things to bounce back, but just in a safe way," she said.

Lord's online planning site has far more vendors with bookings two years out, rather than the more traditional 12-month planning period as couples hold out for venues they want and seek to distance their special days from the pandemic altogether.

Justin Warshaw is the creative director and CEO of the global Justin Alexander Group, a bridal design and manufacturing house with five core brands and more under licensing and white-labeling arrangements.

He's seen wedding dress bookings increase by 593% from April 1-May 15 2020 compared to the same period this year. Eighty-eight percent of his 2,200 retailers in 80 countries are now open and operating, with the U.S. his largest market.

Comparing January through May 2019, before the pandemic began, with January through May this year, Warshaw experienced a 40% increase in sales of made-to-order gowns in the U.S.

"A lot of that has to do with pent-up demand and also what we envisioned would happen: So many COVID couples turning into COVID engagements, turning into weddings," said Warshaw, who's among the newly engaged. "With the optimism from vaccinations, people want to celebrate with family and friends, and get on with their lives."

Chappall Gage, who with his mother runs Susan Gage Caterers in Washington, D.C., has seen a boom in special events overall, with 30% to 40% of their weekend business in weddings.

"It's the one big event that's coming back quickly," he said. "Right now we're at this transition point where micro-weddings are ending and now people are starting to get comfortable doing larger weddings. When the mayor announced she was allowing dancing at weddings I could hear an audible cheer from the city."

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, June 10, the 161st day of 2021. There are 204 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 10, 1963, President John F. Kennedy signed into law the Equal Pay Act of 1963, aimed at eliminating wage disparities based on gender.

On this date:

In 1692, the first execution resulting from the Salem witch trials in Massachusetts took place as Bridget Bishop was hanged.

In 1922, singer-actor Judy Garland was born Frances Ethel Gumm in Grand Rapids, Minnesota.

In 1935, Alcoholics Anonymous was founded in Akron, Ohio, by Dr. Robert Holbrook Smith and William Griffith Wilson.

In 1942, during World War II, German forces massacred 173 male residents of Lidice (LIH'-dyiht-zeh), Czechoslovakia, in retaliation for the killing of Nazi official Reinhard Heydrich.

In 1944, German forces massacred 642 residents of the French village of Oradour-sur-Glane.

In 1967, six days of war in the Mideast involving Israel, Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq ended as Israel and Syria accepted a United Nations-mediated cease-fire.

In 1971, President Richard M. Nixon lifted a two-decades-old trade embargo on China.

In 1977, James Earl Ray, the convicted assassin of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., escaped from

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Brushy Mountain State Prison in Tennessee with six others; he was recaptured June 13.

In 1978, Affirmed, ridden by Steve Cauthen, won the 110th Belmont Stakes to claim horse racing's 11th Triple Crown.

In 1991, 11-year-old Jaycee Dugard of South Lake Tahoe, California, was abducted by Phillip and Nancy Garrido; Jaycee was held by the couple for 18 years before she was found by authorities.

In 2004, singer-musician Ray Charles died in Beverly Hills, California, at age 73.

In 2013, jury selection began in Sanford, Florida, in the trial of neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman, charged with second-degree murder in the fatal shooting of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. (Zimmerman was acquitted.)

Ten years ago: In a stern rebuke, Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned in Brussels that the future of the historic NATO military alliance was at risk because of European penny pinching and a distaste for front-line combat. Tony La Russa managed his 5,000th game as his St. Louis Cardinals lost to the Milwaukee Brewers 8-0.

Five years ago: Muhammad Ali was laid to rest in his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, after an all-day send-off. "Mr. Hockey" Gordie Howe, who set scoring records that stood for decades, died in Sylvania, Ohio, at 88. Singer Christina Grimmie, 22, a finalist on NBC's "The Voice," was shot to death during a meet-and-greet after giving a concert in Orlando, Florida, by an apparently obsessed fan who then killed himself. Actor Michael Jace was sentenced in Los Angeles to 40 years to life in prison for fatally shooting his wife, April.

One year ago: Protesters pulled down a century-old statue of Confederate President Jefferson Davis in Richmond, Virginia, the former capital of the Confederacy. President Donald Trump said his administration would "not even consider" changing the name of any of the 10 Army bases that were named for Confederate Army officers. NASCAR announced that it was banning the Confederate flag at all of its races and venues; the flag had been a common sight at those events for more than 70 years. The Mall of America reopened, nearly three months after the Minnesota tourist attraction shut down because of the coronavirus. An international economic report said the virus crisis had triggered the worst global recession in nearly a century, with hundreds of millions of people losing jobs.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Alexandra Stewart is 82. Singer Shirley Alston Reeves (The Shirelles) is 80. Actor Jurgen Prochnow is 80. Media commentator Jeff Greenfield is 78. Actor Frankie Faison is 72. Football Hall of Famer Dan Fouts is 70. Country singer-songwriter Thom Schuyler is 69. Former Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C., is 68. Actor Andrew Stevens is 66. Singer Barrington Henderson is 65. Rock musician Kim Deal is 60. Singer Maxi Priest is 60. Actor Gina Gershon is 59. Actor Jeanne Tripplehorn is 58. Rock musician Jimmy Chamberlin is 57. Actor Ben Daniels is 57. Actor Kate Flannery is 57. Model-actor Elizabeth Hurley is 56. Rock musician Joey Santiago is 56. Actor Doug McKeon is 55. Rock musician Emma Anderson is 54. Country musician Brian Hofeldt (The Derailers) is 54. Rapper The D.O.C. is 53. Rock singer Mike Doughty is 51. R&B singer Faith Evans is 48. Actor Hugh Dancy is 46. R&B singer Lemisha Grinstead (702) is 43. Actor DJ Qualls is 43. Actor Shane West is 43. Country singer Lee Brice is 42. Singer Hoku is 40. Actor Leelee Sobieski is 39. Olympic gold medal figure skater Tara Lipinski is 39. Americana musician Bridget Kearney (Lake Street Drive) is 36. Actor Titus Makin is 32. Actor Tristin Mays is 31. Sasha Obama is 20. Actor Eden McCoy is 18.