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Water Tower Update

"Groton" will be painted on the southwest side of the new water tower. The work is not completed yet as the lift they were using broke down.

CRP Deadline is July 23rd

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has set a July 23, 2021, deadline for agricultural producers and landowners to apply for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General signup 56. Additionally, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will accept applications for CRP Grasslands from July 12 to August 20. This year, USDA updated both signup options to provide great incentives for producers and increase its conservation benefits, including reducing the impacts of climate change.

Both signups are competitive and will provide for annual rental payments for land devoted to conservation purposes.



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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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

June 15, 2021 – 7:00pm

120 N Main Street

(NOTICE ADDRESS)

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
2. Minutes
3. Bills
4. May Finance Report
5. Special Event Alcoholic Beverage License for Amateur Baseball Games at 411 W 3rd Avenue in Groton on 6/20/21 & 7/18/21
6. 2nd Reading of Ordinance #747 Revising Water Rates
7. Chamber Main Street Project – Providing the City new trash cans and flower pots with the help of the POET Never Satisfied Grant
8. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
9. Adjournment



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Superintendent's Report to the Groton Area School District 06-6 Board of Education

June 14, 2021

School Lunch – Seamless Summer Option 2021-22. We've received initial approval to provide free school lunches to students in grades K-12 for the 2021-2022 school year through the same program that was utilized during the 2020-2021 school year.

2021-2022 COVID-19 Testing. The state is offering two different COVID testing opportunities for school districts for the 2021-2022 school year.

One is the Abbot BinaxNOW Rapid testing for symptomatic individuals that was utilized during the 2020-2021 school year. I have indicated to the Department of Education that we will continue to participate in this program for the 2021-2022 school year.

The second is for weekly screening of asymptomatic individuals. I have indicated to the Department of Education that we will decline this testing option. If you believe this is a testing option that we should pursue further, please let me know and I can make contact with DOE.

Medical Marijuana. The Legislative Interim Rules Review Committee rejected the South Dakota Board of Education Standards' proposed rules around medical marijuana in schools. It seems that the primary concern was the scope of rules and providing clarity as to which schools these rules would apply (e.g. private schools). The rules are now sent back to the South Dakota Board of Education Standards for revision.

The law allowing for the administration of medical marijuana will still be in effect on July 1. It looks as though the South Dakota Department of Health will have their process in place for issuing medical marijuana cards to qualifying patients sometime this fall (October or November 2021).

Homeschool Legislation. There haven't been any additional updates from Department of Education around the new homeschool legislation scheduled to take effect July 1. Recent correspondence from School Administrators of South Dakota indicated a likely "white paper" release with additional information about how to proceed with the new changes to procedures including participation in school activities.

ASBSD/SASD Joint Convention. Associated School Boards of South Dakota and School Administrators of South Dakota are planning a full in-person joint convention for August 5 and 6 in Sioux Falls. There are two keynote speakers scheduled along with many breakout sessions on a wide variety of education-related topics. If you're interested or would like additional information, please let me know.

Upcoming Events.

June 16 – June 22	Joe Out-of-Office
June 28, 2021	Year-End School Board Meeting (7 PM)
June 29 – July 6	Joe Out-of-Office
July 12, 2021	Reorganization School Board Meeting/Budget Hearing (7 PM)

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Principal's Report

MS/HS Building

Mrs. Sombke

June 14, 2021

1) New 6th-12th Grade Staff Settling In

- * Ms. Bortnem: will be teaching grades 6-8 in the Special Education Department
- * Mr. Gerlach: will be teaching grades 6-8 PE and 6-9 Health
- * Mrs. Hubsch: will be teaching 6th grade computers, 8th grade computers, Internship, Personal Finance, Intro to Business/Intro to Business Law, and Dual Credit Supervisor
- * Ms. Pederson: will be teaching 7th grade Reading, 7th grade Social Studies, and 8th grade Reading
- * Ms. Spier: will be teaching 6th grade Reading, 6th grade English, and 6th grade Social Studies
- * All new teachers have been in, collected their keys, teacher's textbooks, classroom, and have gotten a start on planning for next school year
- * New staff will be gathering later this summer to do some "light" in-service to help them get acquainted with district paperwork, district building/operations, department and district procedures, and to be able to support and guide new staff to facilitate a great start for each teacher here as a "new" Groton Tiger Staff Member

2) 2021-2022 Class Schedule

* Schedule times are as follows for normal start school day:

Warning Bell: 8:26

1st Hour 8:30-9:23

2nd Hour 9:27-10:20

3rd Hour 10:24-11:17

4th Hour (1st) 11:21-12:14

First Lunch 11:17-11:42

4th Hour (2nd) 11:46-12:39

Second Lunch 12:14-12:39

5th Hour 12:43-1:36

6th Hour 1:40-2:33

7th Hour 2:37-3:30

3) MS/HS Student Handbook

*Dual Credit Recommended Changes:

-p. 14: #4, #5, #6, and #7

-p. 29: #1

*Senior Privilege Recommended Changes:

-p. 40: #1, #2, #3, and #7

Educate rather mandate for volleyball bottoms

There was a 45 minute discussion on volleyball uniforms. Patty Daly along with Coach Chelsea Hanson talked about the length of the bottoms. Hanson said that it is "better to educate than to mandate." She said there are options for the volleyball players and that not everyone has to wear to the same bottoms. The school provides the tops but the players provide the bottoms.

Free school lunches will be available to all K-12 students in the upcoming school year. It will be the same program that was done for the past school year.

There were some recommended changes to the student handbook.

Dual Credit Courses - junior and seniors - allow them to continue to leave the building during their dual credit time as long as they maintain a C- or better, have no missing work and properly check in and out now at the office. "Most of our kids did really well," said middle/high school principal Kiersten Sombke.

Senior privileges would be similar to Dual Credit requirements. Driving during school hours would be limited to dual credit students.

Due to the fact there is a shortage of used vehicles, the Brown County Fair Board had asked the school for the use of its two passenger vans to be used during the fair week to transport performers from their hotel to the fair grounds. The board agreed with the normal fee structure.

The potential cooperative agreement with Langford Area for boys soccer was taken off the agenda as things are not ready to move forward.

Several staff lane changes were approved and the resignation/retirement of Loren Bahr as transportation director was accepted effective July 30, 2021. He will, however, be around to help out as needed.

Groton Transit

FUNDRAISER

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

**Due to the heat, the event
has been moved to the
Groton Community Center**

*Please join us and help
support Groton Transit!*

FREE WILL OFFERING!

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



Witnesses: Chandler Larson, Jackson Cogley, Vicki Jorgensen, (Reilly Ell in the middle) Jamie Jorgensen, and Doug Jorgensen. (Courtesy Photo)

Ell sinks Hole in One

Reilly Ell aced his first career hole-in-one on Saturday, June 5, 2021 at Olive Grove Golf Course in Groton. Ell used his pitching wedge on the 135-yard hole #4. Witnessing the shot was Jamie Jorgensen, Doug and Vicki Jorgensen, Chandler Larson, and Jackson Cogley. Reilly had golfed 18 holes at Lee Park in Aberdeen earlier that day with the Jorgensen's and did not want to golf again, but it is a good thing that he did!



Groton Ford Owner, Nick Simon, presented Reilly Ell with his golden putter.

(Courtesy Photo)



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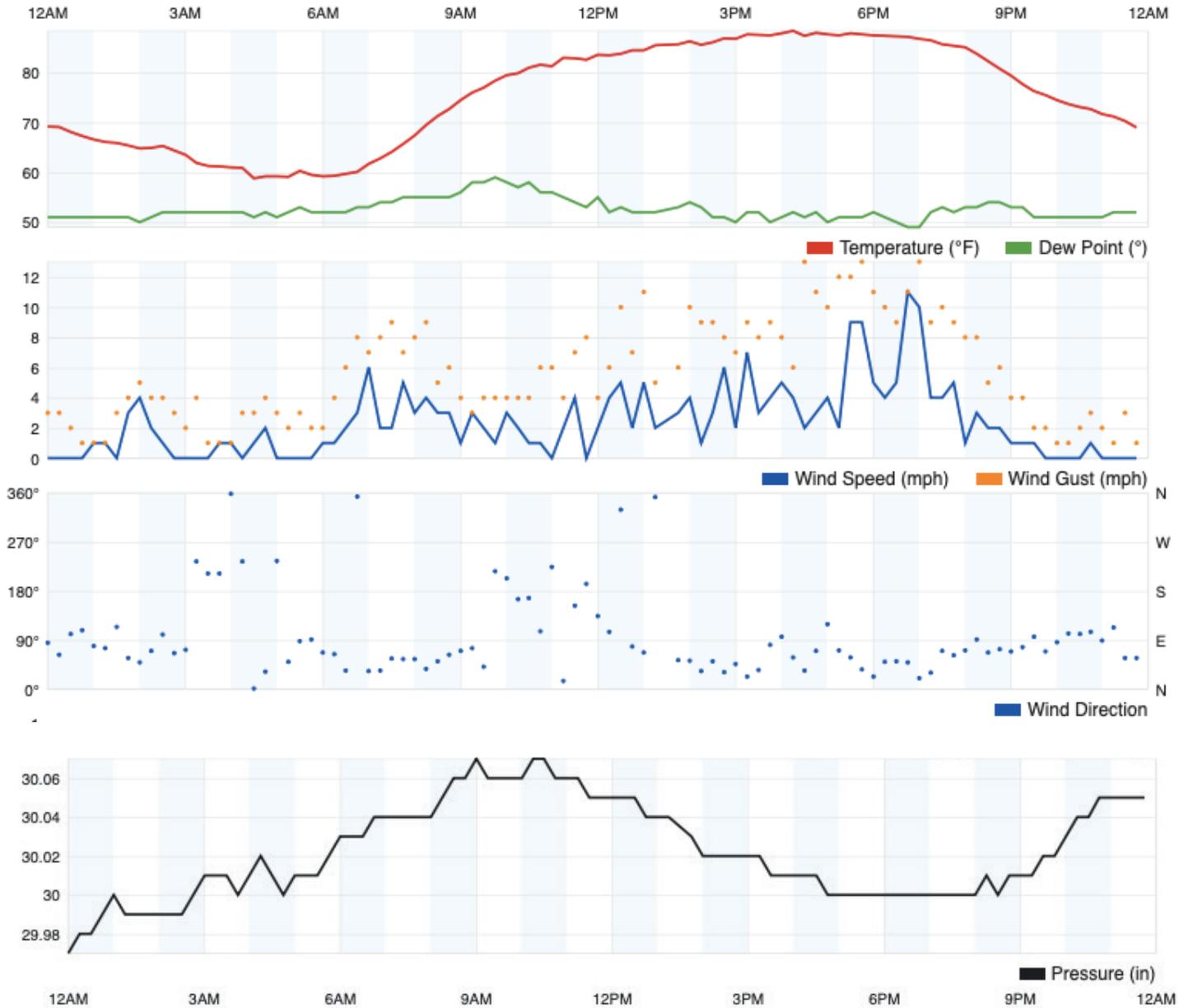
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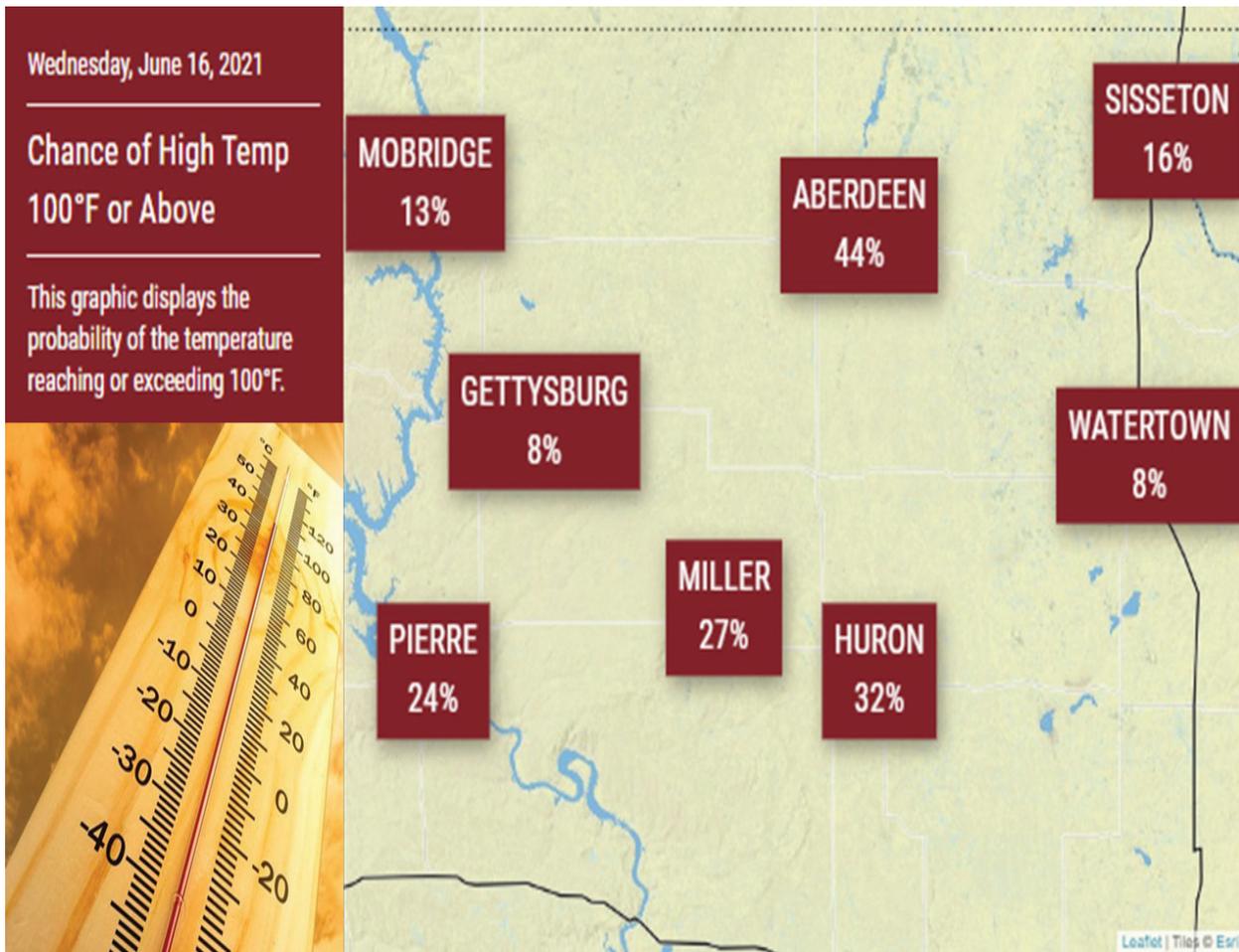
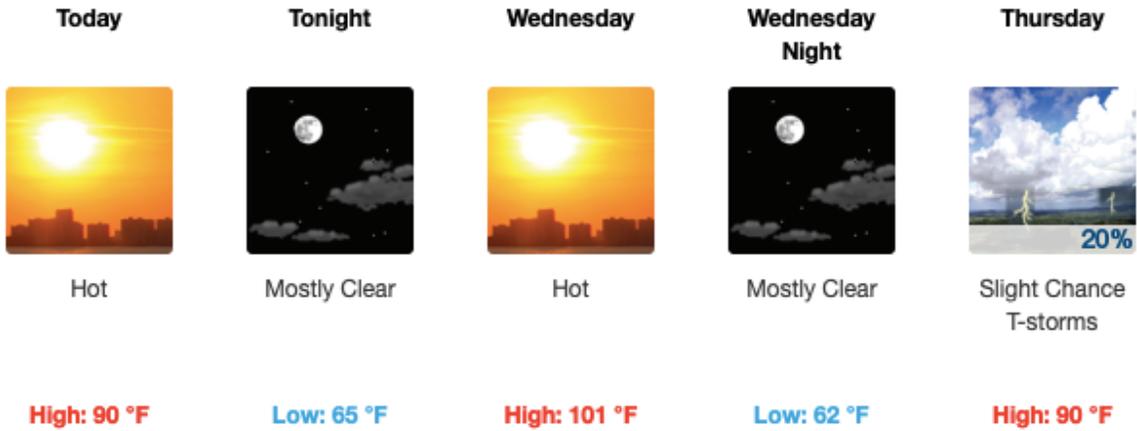
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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While not so outside the norm for this spring, it looks like we have another shot at the century mark Wednesday. After that, temperatures and weather will be much more late spring-like for the latter half of the work week and into the weekend.

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Today in Weather History

June 15, 1935: This estimated F3 tornado moved east from 17 miles southwest of Onida. There was near F4 damage to one farm about 9 miles SSW of Onida. The house was destroyed, 60 cattle were killed, and five people were injured. At another farm, the home shifted over the storm cellar, trapping a family.

June 15, 1977: There were thunderstorms with heavy rain and some hail which began on the 15th and continued into the 16th. At Watertown, almost 6.9 inches of rain fell during this two day period. In Deuel County, Gary received 6 inches, Altamont 5.5 and Brandt, 4.5 inches in Goodwin, and 3.70 inches in Clear Lake. Other amounts include; 4.85 inches at 3NE of Raymond; 4.57 inches in Clark; 4.21 at 1NE of Bryant; and 3.97 inches in Castlewood.

June 15, 1978: Numerous severe thunderstorms developed over all of central South Dakota. Tornadoes, funnel clouds, hail up to baseball size, and wind gusts to near 80 mph caused widespread destruction. Estimated loss was between 20-25 million dollars. The Governor declared some counties disaster areas. Six trailers were destroyed, and a home was unroofed northwest of Aberdeen. Fifteen people were injured from these storms.

June 15, 1978: Torrential rains began during the evening hours and continued into the morning hours on the 16th. Heavy rains were estimated between 5 to 6 inches, causing flash flooding south of Watertown. Some rainfall amounts include; 2.43 inches in Watertown; 2.07 in Castlewood; and 2.05 inches in Clear Lake. Hail caused severe crop damage in Hughes County.

1662 - A fast was held at Salem MA with prayers for rain, and the Lord gave a speedy answer. (David Ludlum)

1879 - McKinney ND received 7.7 inches of rain in 24 hours, a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1896 - The temperature at Fort Mojave, CA, soared to 127 degrees, the hottest reading of record for June for the U.S. The low that day was 97 degrees. Morning lows of 100 degrees were reported on the 12th, 14th and 16th of the month. (The Weather Channel)

1953 - Dust devils are usually rather benign weather phenomena, however, two boys were injured by one near Prescott AZ. One of the boys suffered a black eye, and the other boy had two vertebrae fractured by wind-blown debris. (The Weather Channel)

1957 - East Saint Louis was deluged with 16.54 inches of rain in 24 hours, a record for the state of Illinois. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather in the northwestern U.S. A tornado damaged five homes and destroyed a barn near Salmon ID. It lifted a metal shed 100 feet into the air, and deposited it 100 yards away. Hail an inch and a half in diameter caused ten million dollars damage to automobiles at Nampa ID. (The National Weather Channel) (Storm Data)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms in the Central High Plains Region spawned five tornadoes around Denver, CO, in just one hour. A strong (F-3) tornado in southern Denver injured seven persons and caused ten million dollars damage. Twenty-six cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. The high of 97 degrees at Portland ME was a record for June. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather over the Southern and Middle Atlantic Coast States. The thunderstorms spawned eight tornadoes, including strong (F-3) tornadoes which injured three persons at Mountville PA and four persons at Columbia, PA. There were 111 reports of large hail and damaging winds, including wind gusts to 80 mph at Norfolk, VA, and Hogback Mountain, SC. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1991: The second largest volcanic eruption of the 20th Century began as Mt. Pinatubo injected 15 to 30 million tons of sulfur dioxide 100,000 feet into the atmosphere. 343 people were killed in the Philippines as a result of the eruptions, and 200,000 were left homeless. Material from the explosion would spread around the globe, leading to climate changes worldwide as the sun's energy was blocked out and global temperatures cooled by as much as one degree Fahrenheit. 1992 was globally one of the coldest since the 1970s.

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HAVE MERCY!

When we are offended by another person, we have four options: we can pout like a spoiled child, pity ourselves, take it out on someone else, or pray.

When we pout, we pollute ourselves with the poison of displeasure. It's like pouring a teaspoonful of black dye into a glass of pure water and watching the darkness destroy what was pristine. It ruins the beauty that light brings to life. Pouting brings distress into our lives - not deliverance from an insult or problem.

When we pity ourselves, we are simply poisoning ourselves. Self-pity distorts our thinking, disrupts our work, disturbs our body, and even disfigures our face with wrinkles. It depresses our friends, demoralizes our life, and above all, dishonors our Lord.

When we take our hurt out on others, it not only pains them, but will come right back to pain us as well - and eventually punish us in one way or another. Revenge is like a boomerang: Although it flies into the path of the other person, it will eventually come back to attack us in the process. It can hit the one who threw it with the heaviest blow.

When we pray, we protect ourselves and place the responsibility for "settling the score" up to God. We are God's children and what offends us offends Him; what hurts us will hurt Him, and what affects us has already affected Him. He understands our pain and our sorrow.

The Psalmist expresses this in a beautiful way: "I cried unto the Lord, and He heard me." God will always take care of us, remove the sadness from our hearts, erase the insults from our memory, and bring His healing. When we pray, He makes things right!

Prayer: Father, when we have been injured or insulted by the ways and words of others, may we look to You for Your healing - both them and us! In Jesus' Name, Amen!

Scripture For Today: Though we are overwhelmed by our sins, you forgive them all. Psalm 65:3

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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 **Postponed to Aug. 28th:** 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
08/28/2021 Lions Club Crazy Golf Fest 9am 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

Federal judge charges US marshals in vaccination dispute

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — A federal judge in South Dakota on Monday criminally charged three members of the U.S. Marshals Service with contempt of court and obstructing justice after a dispute with a marshal who refused to disclose her COVID-19 vaccination status and removed prisoners from a courthouse.

Three supervisory marshals, including the agency's Chief of Staff John Kilgallon, were accused of allowing a deputy marshal to leave the courthouse in Aberdeen, South Dakota, with prisoners in tow on May 10, after the marshal refused to tell the judge whether she had been vaccinated against COVID-19, the Aberdeen American News reported.

U.S. District Judge Charles Kornmann gave the U.S. Attorney's Office until Friday to decide whether to charge the marshals, including Daniel Mosteller, the head of the agency in South Dakota, and Stephen Houghtaling, the state's chief deputy. Kornmann said he was determined to find another prosecutor if the U.S. Attorney declined to prosecute the case.

Kornmann moved in March to require vaccinations for courthouse employees, but Mosteller, told the judge the Marshals Service was not requiring employees to get vaccinated and would not provide their vaccination status to the court.

The U.S. marshal who brought the first defendant into the courtroom last month refused to disclose her vaccination status. As a result, Kornmann told her to leave and pulled in a different deputy marshal to sit in the courtroom. Later that day, Houghtaling told Kornmann by phone that the remaining defendants scheduled for hearings had been removed from the courthouse because the marshals service didn't think it could keep the courtroom secure without two marshals in the room.

Kornmann initially summoned the supervising officers to determine whether they would face civil contempt of court charges. But by the end of the hearing Monday, he had criminally charged the officers and accused them of kidnapping the prisoners. He also offered the officers an opportunity to admit wrongdoing and pay a \$5,000 fine, but they declined.

The three officers were represented by U.S. Department of Justice attorneys who usually handle civil matters. The attorneys indicated the officers were in the process of obtaining criminal defense attorneys and would not comment in court.

The Marshals Service declined to comment on the charges.

The Marshals Service operates under the DOJ, an executive branch agency, but it is tasked with the protection and enforcement of federal courts. Federal law grants the Marshal Service "final authority regarding security requirements for the judicial branch."

In a separate ruling last year, Kornmann, who was appointed under President Bill Clinton in 1995, slammed South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem's response to the pandemic, writing that the state "has done little, if anything, to curtail the spread of the virus."

A trial date for the three marshals has been set for Sept. 13.

10-year-old dies in South Dakota river after saving sister

HUDSON, S.D. (AP) — A 10-year-old boy who died in the Big Sioux River saved one of his younger siblings who had fallen into the water, family members said.

The body of Ricky Lee Sneve was recovered Saturday night, Lincoln County sheriff's officials said. His mother, Nicole Eufers, told the Argus Leader that Ricky was out on the river with his dad and siblings when several fell into the water near Hudson, in southeastern South Dakota.

Eufers said Ricky jumped in to save his sister Chevelle and got her to shore, but when his father and siblings turned around, Ricky was missing.

The boy's father, Chad Sneve, said his son was the type of boy to do anything for anyone. Ricky was smart, dedicated and conservative, Sneve said.

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"He was generous, kind and special in more ways than I can begin to explain," Chad Sneve said. "He was my everything, and he touched everyone he encountered."

He was the oldest of Eufers' four children and had one step-sibling.

"He taught me how to love and appreciate life. He never failed to amaze me," Eufers said.

Funeral arrangements are pending.

Australia, Britain reach a free trade deal, cut many tariffs

By ROD McGUIRK and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain and Australia announced the broad outlines of a free trade deal Tuesday, eliminating tariffs on a wide range of goods as the U.K. seeks to expand links around the world following its exit from the European Union.

The pact is expected to boost exports of traditional British products such as Scotch whisky, while boosting imports of lamb and wine from Australia. The U.K. also hopes the deal will help it join the trans-Pacific trade partnership, which would open the door to increased trade throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

It is the first trade deal Britain has negotiated from scratch since it left the EU. Earlier deals with countries including Japan and Canada were built on existing agreements struck by the EU.

"This is global Britain at its best — looking outwards and striking deals that deepen our alliances and help ensure every part of the country builds back better from the pandemic," U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in a statement.

Johnson and his Australian counterpart, Scott Morrison, discussed the outlines of the deal they reached during talks Monday night in London.

Britain is Australia's fifth largest trading partner with two-way goods and services valued at 36.6 billion Australian dollars (\$28.2 billion) a year.

Australian Trade Minister Dan Tehan said the agreement would create jobs and help businesses.

"British consumers are missing out on choosing high quality, well priced Australian products," Tehan told the Australian parliament earlier Tuesday. "What's more, they're missing out on eating the best lamb chops, the best steak in the world and washing it down with the best glass of Australian wine that you could imagine."

U.K. farm groups reacted with caution, saying they were waiting to see the details of the agreement. British meat producers have expressed concerns that they wouldn't be able to compete with cheap imports from Australia.

Johnson's office defended the deal, saying U.K. farmers would be protected by a cap on tariff-free imports for 15 years. The government also said it would seek to increase agricultural exports to Asia and the Pacific.

U.K. Cabinet Office minister Michael Gove said Australian beef imports would be a "pretty small" portion of U.K. consumption.

"It's important that we maintain protections and support for farmers, but it's also the case that opening up trade barriers, bringing them down and opening up the opportunities, provides our farmers with the chance to show on the world stage the amazing quality of U.K. produce," Gove told Sky News.

White House to host July 4 'independence from virus' bash

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Cue the fireworks.

President Joe Biden wants to imbue Independence Day with new meaning this year by encouraging nationwide celebrations to mark the country's effective return to normalcy after 16 months of coronavirus pandemic disruption.

Even as the U.S. is set to cross the grim milestone of 600,000 deaths from the virus on Tuesday, the White House is expressing growing certainty that July Fourth will serve as a breakthrough moment in the nation's recovery. That's even though the U.S. is not expected to quite reach its goal of having 70% of adults vaccinated by the holiday.

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As COVID-19 case rates and deaths drop to levels not seen since the first days of the outbreak, travel picks up and schools and businesses reopen, Biden is proclaiming "a summer of freedom" to celebrate Americans resuming their pre-pandemic lives.

The holiday will see the largest event yet of Biden's presidency: He plans to host first responders, essential workers and military servicemembers and their families on the South Lawn for a cookout and to watch the fireworks over the National Mall. Well more than 1,000 guests are expected, officials said, with final arrangements still to be sorted out.

The plan shows the dramatic shift in thinking since Biden just three months ago cautiously held out hope that people might be able to hold small cookouts by the Fourth, an idea that seems quaint now given the swift pace of reopening.

"By July the 4th, there's a good chance you, your families and friends will be able to get together in your backyard or in your neighborhood and have a cookout and a barbeque and celebrate Independence Day," Biden had said as he marked the one-year anniversary of the pandemic on March 11. "That doesn't mean large events with lots of people together, but it does mean small groups will be able to get together."

For most Americans, that reopening target was hit last month, by Memorial Day weekend, after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention relaxed mask-wearing guidance for fully vaccinated people and the accompanying relaxation in state and local virus restrictions.

Now, officials say July Fourth will serve as an unofficial kickoff to a new phase in the U.S. pandemic response. The federal government is looking to turn the page on the domestic public health crisis and focus on an economic and civic revival at home and marshaling support for vaccinations around the globe.

Across the country, the White House is hoping to see the similar Independence Day activities, after last year saw the mass cancellation of July Fourth festivities, according to two White House officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to outline the administration's thinking.

"We welcome you to join us by hosting your own events to honor our freedom, salute those who have been serving on the frontlines, and celebrate our progress in fighting this pandemic," the White House wrote in an email to state and local officials Tuesday. It asked them to share their plans to be highlighted later by the administration.

In Washington, the National Mall will host the traditional fireworks ceremony, the White house said.

"America is headed into a summer dramatically different from last year," the administration wrote to officials. "A summer of freedom. A summer of joy. A summer of reunions and celebrations."

The upbeat announcement contrasts with the drearier reality in Europe, where Biden is on an eight-day, three-country tour — not to mention much of the rest of the world where vaccines remain scarce.

Instead of having a mission accomplished moment, in Britain, one of the few countries that has a vaccination rate similar to the U.S., the government announced Monday it plans to further delay reopening for at least another month to try to get more people vaccinated. But cases there, unlike the U.S., are rising, and not all adults have been offered a vaccine yet, nor have children.

While in Europe, Biden and Group of Seven allies announced plans to provide 1 billion shots for poorer nations, half of them from the U.S., but aid groups said a far greater commitment is needed to defeat the virus around the globe.

Still, the U.S. vaccination campaign is far from over as rates slip. Fewer than 370,000 Americans are now getting their first dose on average each day, down from a high of nearly 2 million per day two months ago.

White House officials acknowledged that there are still deep geographic disparities in vaccination and that the administration will continue to remind Americans that if they are not vaccinated they remain at risk of serious illness and death from the virus.

All American adults have been eligible for shots for two months, and the administration has mounted an aggressive "month of action" to try to drive up demand for doses, though that has done little to change the trend lines: Fewer Americans are interested in getting vaccinated.

Officials say the effects of the July 4 vaccination goal of 70% of Americans on driving down COVID-19 cases are already being felt even if the benchmark won't be attained. Some 166.5 million adults have

received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, according to CDC data. To reach his goal, Biden would need to vaccinate about 14 million more in less than three weeks.

"Regardless of where we are on July Fourth, we're not shutting down shop," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said last week. "On July 5th, we're going to continue to press to vaccinate more people across the country."

The Democratic president intends to use his remarks on July Fourth to highlight the administration's "wartime response," with a vaccination campaign that helped bring cases and deaths down by about 90% from where they were before he took office on Jan. 20.

Eriksen sends public thank you message from hospital

By MATTIAS KARÉN Associated Press

COPENHAGEN (AP) — Christian Eriksen sent his first public message from the hospital on Tuesday, thanking supporters for their "sweet and amazing" well-wishes after his collapse at the European Championship.

Eriksen remains in the hospital after suffering cardiac arrest during Denmark's game against Finland on Saturday, when he had to be resuscitated with a defibrillator on the field.

"Big thanks for your sweet and amazing greetings and messages from all around the world. It means a lot to me and my family," Eriksen wrote in a message that was shared by the Danish soccer association on Twitter.

The message was accompanied by a photo of the 29-year-old Eriksen giving a thumbs up from his hospital bed.

"I'm fine – under the circumstances," he added. "I still have to go through some examinations at the hospital, but I feel okay. Now, I will cheer on the boys on the Denmark team in the next matches. Play for all of Denmark."

Eriksen and the rest of the Denmark players have received an outpouring of support from all over the world since Saturday's incident, including from fans of rival teams.

Denmark coach Kasper Hjulmand said the flood of messages shows that "football is the biggest social phenomenon in the world."

"It's the one thing that can unite most people in the world," Hjulmand said at a news conference on Tuesday. "It brings friendship across nations, race, gender, everything. Football is one big family. ... And we see this with all this recognition we get from people all over the world."

Denmark, which lost to Finland 1-0 after the game was resumed, next plays Belgium on Thursday in Group B. On Monday, Eriksen's teammates said the midfielder had told them to re-focus on the tournament.

And Hjulmand said he can tell that his players are gradually getting back the right mindset to play again. But he acknowledged that returning to Parken Stadium again, where the players formed a ring around Eriksen as he was getting emergency medical treatment that saved his life, will be emotionally challenging.

"I don't think they're afraid to play," Hjulmand said. "But the normal reaction to a trauma like this, you should know, it's not only yourself. It's also your family, maybe your kids, your wife, your parents. So the box of emotions has been opened. I think we took a big step yesterday and I think we'll take another one today."

"Of course the time until the kickoff will be emotional, and we have to prepare ourselves for that, for entering the stadium again. Getting back to see our great fans. And up to kickoff there'll be a lot of emotions we have to handle, and then prepare ourselves for when the referee whistles his first whistle. We will be ready to go and fight and play well and do everything for Denmark."

Biden looks to ease EU trade tensions ahead of Putin summit

By LORNE COOK, JONATHAN LEMIRE, and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — President Joe Biden appeared to be on the cusp of ending a long-running dispute with the European Union over airline subsidies, a major breakthrough in the U.S-EU relationship could come on the eve of his highly anticipated meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

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After a pair of summits with Group of Seven world leaders in the U.K. and then NATO allies in Brussels, Biden meets Tuesday with European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, where he was expected to discuss U.S.-EU relations and his meeting with Putin.

Early Tuesday, there were signs the two allies were moving to resolve a 17-year dispute over how much of a government subsidy each can provide for its aircraft manufacturing giant — Boeing in the United States and Airbus in the EU.

"I'm very positive and convinced that together we will deliver today," von der Leyen told reporters hours before the Biden meeting in Brussels.

A person familiar with the discussions said the U.S. and EU officials have reached principles of an agreement on airlines subsidies. The person was not authorized to discuss the matter and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The Financial Times was first to report that the sides are ready to secure a deal after two days of intensive negotiations and that it could be announced at the EU-U.S. summit.

The president has sought to marshal widespread European support for his efforts to counter Russia prior to his Wednesday meeting in Geneva with Putin. But the U.S.-EU relationship is not without its own tensions. The continent's leaders are becoming impatient that Biden has not yet addressed Donald Trump's 2018 decision to impose import taxes on foreign steel and aluminum.

Even without action on tariffs, White House officials expressed confidence that they can build more goodwill with Europe ahead of the face-to-face meeting with Putin.

The White House on Tuesday announced the creation of a joint U.S.-EU trade and technology council. The trans-Atlantic council will work on coordinating standards for artificial intelligence, quantum computing and bio-technologies, as well as coordinating efforts on bolstering supply chain resilience. Biden is appointing Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai to co-chair the U.S. side of the effort.

The White House said the two sides will also discuss efforts to stem climate change and launch an expert group to determine how best to reopen travel safely as the coronavirus pandemic ebbs.

Biden started his day by meeting with Belgian King Philippe and Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo.

The U.S.-EU summit is also expected to include a communique that will address concerns about China's provocative behavior.

That statement would follow a NATO summit communique on Monday that declared China a constant security challenge and said the Chinese are working to undermine the global rules-based order. On Sunday, the G-7 called out what it said were China's forced labor practices and other human rights violations against Uyghur Muslims and other ethnic minorities in the western Xinjiang province.

Since taking office in January, Biden has repeatedly pressed Putin to take action to stop Russian-originated cyberattacks on companies and governments in the U.S. and around the globe and decried the imprisonment of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Biden also has publicly aired intelligence that suggests — albeit with low to moderate confidence — that Moscow offered bounties to the Taliban to target U.S. troops stationed in Afghanistan.

Both Biden and Putin have described the U.S.-Russia relationship as being at an all-time low.

The Europeans are keen to set up a "high-level dialogue" on Russia with the United States to counter what they say is Moscow's drift into authoritarianism and anti-Western sentiment.

At the same time, the 27-nation bloc is deeply divided in its approach to Moscow. Russia is the EU's biggest natural gas supplier, and plays a key role in international conflicts and key issues, including the Iran nuclear deal and conflicts in Syria and Libya.

The hope is that Biden's meeting with Putin might pay dividends, and no one in Brussels wants to undermine the show of international unity that has been on display at the G-7 and NATO summits, according to EU officials.

In addition to scolding China, NATO leaders in their communique on Monday took a big swipe at Russia, deploring its aggressive military activities and snap wargames near the borders of NATO countries as well

as the repeated violation of the 30-nations' airspace by Russian planes.

They said Russia has ramped up "hybrid" actions against NATO countries by attempting to interfere in elections, political and economic intimidation, disinformation campaigns and "malicious cyber activities."

"Until Russia demonstrates compliance with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities, there can be no return to 'business as usual,'" the NATO leaders wrote. "We will continue to respond to the deteriorating security environment by enhancing our deterrence and defense posture."

EU, US said to be near deal to end Airbus-Boeing dispute

By The Associated Press undefined

The Latest on U.S. President Joe Biden's trip to Europe:

BRUSSELS — The United States and the European Union appear close to reaching a deal to end a damaging dispute over subsidies to rival plane makers Boeing and Airbus and lift billions of dollars in punitive tariffs.

A person familiar with the discussions said U.S. and EU officials have reached principles of an agreement to end their 17-year dispute over the aircraft subsidies. The person was not authorized to discuss the matter and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The trade dispute skyrocketed under the Trump administration, and saw tit-for-tat duties slapped on a range of companies that have nothing to do with aircraft production, from French winemakers to U.S. spirits producers.

The U.S. imposed \$7.5 billion in tariffs on European exports in 2019 after the World Trade Organization ruled that the EU had not complied with its rulings on subsidies for Airbus, which is based in France. The EU retaliated last November with \$4 billion in punitive duties after the WTO ruled that the U.S. had provided illegal subsidies to Boeing.

In March, weeks after Biden had taken office, the two sides agreed to suspend the tariffs.

— By Amer Madhani

BRUSSELS — President Joe Biden is seeking to tamp down trade tensions with European allies as he spends one last day consulting with Western democracies ahead of his highly anticipated meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

After a pair of summits with Group of Seven world leaders in the U.K. and then NATO allies in Brussels, Biden meets Tuesday with European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

The president has sought to marshal widespread European support for his efforts to counter Russia prior to his Wednesday meeting in Geneva with Putin. But the U.S.-EU relationship is not without some tensions.

Biden will meet with the top EU officials as the continent's leaders are becoming impatient that the American president has not yet addressed Donald Trump's 2018 decision to impose import taxes on foreign steel and aluminum.

There's also a longstanding dispute over how much of a government subsidy each side unfairly provides for its aircraft manufacturing giant — Boeing in the United States and Airbus in the EU.

UK govt urged to extend worker support after reopening delay

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The British government fended off calls Tuesday to provide more financial support to businesses and workers who will suffer financially from its decision to delay the relaxation of coronavirus restrictions in England by four weeks to July 19.

Although many coronavirus restrictions have been eased in recent weeks that's allowed large parts of the U.K. economy to reopen, a number of businesses, particularly those in the hospitality and entertainment sectors, have not been able to do so because it was not financially viable. After months of planning,

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those businesses had been preparing to reopen on June 21, the date the government had earmarked for the possible lifting of restrictions on social contact.

However, the recent spike in new infections as a result of the more contagious delta variant that was first identified in India has upended that plan.

"Now is the time to ease off the accelerator, because by being cautious now we have the chance in the next four weeks to save many thousands of lives by vaccinating millions more people," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Monday when announcing the delay.

Following the announcement, unions joined with business leaders to urge the government to compensate those affected by the delay, particularly those in the arts and hospitality industries.

Frances O'Grady, the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, said the delay means "many workers and businesses will need more help." She said the government should delay asking businesses to make contributions beginning in July to the salary support scheme it has had since March 2020.

"We can't afford for more companies to go the wall, taking good jobs with them," she said.

And the Confederation of British Industry urged the government to hold back on the planned tapering of tax relief for businesses and extend the commercial rent moratorium for the sectors most impacted. It also said a solution must be found for the hard-pressed international travel sector.

"We must acknowledge the pain felt by businesses in hospitality, leisure and live events," the CBI's director-general Tony Danker said. "At best, they're operating with reduced capacity hitting revenues, and at worst, some aren't open at all."

Cabinet Officer minister Michael Gove, a close ally to Johnson, appeared to indicate that no more financial help will be forthcoming, saying that the government's support programs were predicated on the assumption that there could be delays in the road map out of lockdown.

Gove told Sky News the "worst thing for business" would have been to allow them to open up again and then having to reimpose restrictions. He laid out his hope that the government won't have to delay reopening again.

"It would require an unprecedented and remarkable alteration in the progress of the disease," he said.

Rep. Greene apologizes for comparing safety masks, Holocaust

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene apologized Monday for affronting people with recent comments comparing the required wearing of safety masks in the House to the horrors of the Holocaust.

"I'm truly sorry for offending people with remarks about the Holocaust," the Georgia Republican told reporters outside the Capitol, saying she had visited Washington's U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum earlier in the day. "There's no comparison and there never ever will be."

Greene's comments were a rare expression of regret by the conservative agitator, a freshman whose career has included the embrace of violent and offensive conspiracy theories and angry confrontations with progressive colleagues.

Her apology came more than three weeks after appearing on a conservative podcast and comparing COVID-19 safety requirements adopted by Democrats controlling the House to "a time and history where people were told to wear a gold star." She said they were "put in trains and taken to gas chambers in Nazi Germany. This is exactly the type of abuse that Nancy Pelosi is talking about." Pelosi, D-Calif., is House speaker.

Greene's comments were condemned by Republican leaders, including House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., who called the comparison "appalling."

GOP leaders have often been reluctant to castigate Greene, a close ally of former President Donald Trump. After social media posts were unearthed in which Greene suggested support for executing some Democratic leaders, McCarthy and most Republicans stood by her when the House took the unusual step of stripping her of her committee assignments in February.

But as House members returned to the Capitol on Monday after a three-week break, Greene was contrite.

"Anti-Semitism is true hate," she said. "And I saw that today at the Holocaust Museum."

In 2018, two years before her election to Congress, she speculated on Facebook that California wildfires may have been caused by "lasers or blue beams of light" controlled by a left-wing cabal tied to a powerful Jewish family.

On Monday, she told reporters that when she was 19, she visited the site of the Auschwitz concentration camp in what during World War II was Nazi-occupied Poland. "It isn't like I learned about it today," she said of the Holocaust, in which 6 million Jews and huge numbers of other people were killed. "I went today because I thought it was important," she said, and wanted to talk about it as she apologized.

House leaders have recently said vaccinated people no longer must wear masks in the chamber.

Rep. Brad Schneider, D-Ill., said he would introduce a resolution in the House this week to censure Greene.

In addition, Republicans may try forcing a vote to punish Rep. Ilhan Omar. The Minnesota Democrat recently made remarks criticized by top House Democrats and Jewish lawmakers for seeming to compare the U.S. and Israel to Hamas and the Taliban. Omar said she didn't mean to draw that parallel.

The Latest: Israel is no longer requiring masks indoors

By The Associated Press undefined

JERUSALEM — Israel is no longer requiring masks indoors, lifting one of its last coronavirus restrictions following a highly successful vaccination campaign.

The restriction was lifted on Tuesday, though people will still be required to wear masks on airplanes and on their way to quarantine. Unvaccinated individuals must wear masks in nursing homes and other long-term health facilities.

Israel has vaccinated around 85% of its adult population, allowing schools and businesses to fully reopen. There are only a few dozen active patients in the country of more than 9 million.

Authorities have been cautious about welcoming visitors, however, because of concerns over new variants. Israel welcomed its first tour group late last month. All tourists must show proof of vaccination and be tested upon arrival.

MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:

— California, first US state to go under lockdown, is beginning its "Grand Reopening"

— Emirates Air posts \$5.5B loss as virus disrupts travel

— Follow more of AP's pandemic coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic> and <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccine>

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

HONOLULU — Hawaii says a vaccinated Oahu resident who traveled to Nevada last month has tested positive for the delta variant of COVID-19.

The delta variant was first detected in India and is a more transmissible version of the disease. The variant currently makes up 6% of all cases in the U.S.

Hawaii Health Director Dr. Libby Char says this is a "very rare breakthrough" case in which a COVID-19 vaccine didn't prevent infection.

New analysis from researchers in the U.K. shows the Pfizer vaccine is 96% effective against hospitalization from the delta variant.

DECATUR, Georgia — A sheriff says a grocery store cashier has been killed in a shooting and three others wounded followed an argument over wearing face masks at an Atlanta-area supermarket.

DeKalb County Sheriff Melody Maddox said the shooting occurred Monday inside the Big Bear Supermarket in Decatur, a suburb east of Atlanta. Maddox said a man was arguing with a cashier over wearing a face mask when he pulled a weapon and shot the female cashier.

Authorities said a deputy working store security returned fire and shot the man. Maddox says the deputy, the suspected shooter and one other person were wounded. Decatur is a suburban community east of

Atlanta.

US military guns keep vanishing, some used in street crimes

By KRISTIN M. HALL, JAMES LAPORTA, JUSTIN PRITCHARD and JUSTIN MYERS Associated Press

Pulling a pistol from his waistband, the young man spun his human shield toward police.

"Don't do it!" a pursuing officer pleaded. The young man complied, releasing the bystander and tossing the gun, which skittered across the city street and then into the hands of police.

They soon learned that the 9mm Beretta had a rap sheet. Bullet casings linked it to four shootings, all of them in Albany, New York.

And there was something else. The pistol was U.S. Army property, a weapon intended for use against America's enemies, not on its streets.

The Army couldn't say how its Beretta M9 got to New York's capital. Until the June 2018 police foot chase, the Army didn't even realize someone had stolen the gun. Inventory records checked by investigators said the M9 was 600 miles away -- safe inside Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

"It's incredibly alarming," said Albany County District Attorney David Soares. "It raises the other question as to what else is seeping into a community that could pose a clear and present danger."

The armed services and the Pentagon are not eager for the public to know the answer.

In the first public accounting of its kind in decades, an Associated Press investigation has found that at least 1,900 U.S. military firearms were lost or stolen during the 2010s, with some resurfacing in violent crimes. Because some armed services have suppressed the release of basic information, AP's total is a certain undercount.

Government records covering the Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force show pistols, machine guns, shotguns and automatic assault rifles have vanished from armories, supply warehouses, Navy warships, firing ranges and other places where they were used, stored or transported. These weapons of war disappeared because of unlocked doors, sleeping troops, a surveillance system that didn't record, break-ins and other security lapses that, until now, have not been publicly reported.

While AP's focus was firearms, military explosives also were lost or stolen, including armor-piercing grenades that ended up in an Atlanta backyard.

Weapon theft or loss spanned the military's global footprint, touching installations from coast to coast, as well as overseas. In Afghanistan, someone cut the padlock on an Army container and stole 65 Beretta M9s -- the same type of gun recovered in Albany. The theft went undetected for at least two weeks, when empty pistol boxes were discovered in the compound. The weapons were not recovered.

Even elite units are not immune. A former member of a Marines special operations unit was busted with two stolen guns. A Navy SEAL lost his pistol during a fight in a restaurant in Lebanon.

The Pentagon used to share annual updates about stolen weapons with Congress, but the requirement to do so ended years ago and public accountability has slipped. The Army and Air Force, for example, couldn't readily tell AP how many weapons were lost or stolen from 2010 through 2019. So the AP built its own database, using extensive federal Freedom of Information Act requests to review hundreds of military criminal case files or property loss reports, as well as internal military analysis and data from registries of small arms.

Sometimes, weapons disappear without a paper trail. Military investigators regularly close cases without finding the firearms or person responsible because shoddy records lead to dead ends.

The military's weapons are especially vulnerable to corrupt insiders responsible for securing them. They know how to exploit weak points within armories or the military's enormous supply chains. Often from lower ranks, they may see a chance to make a buck from a military that can afford it.

"It's about the money, right?" said Brig. Gen. Duane Miller, who as deputy provost marshal general is the Army's No. 2 law enforcement official.

Theft or loss happens more than the Army has publicly acknowledged. During an initial interview, Miller

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significantly understated the extent to which weapons disappear, citing records that report only a few hundred missing rifles and handguns. But an internal analysis AP obtained, done by the Army's Office of the Provost Marshal General, tallied 1,303 firearms.

In a second interview, Miller said he wasn't aware of the memos, which had been distributed throughout the Army, until AP pointed them out following the first interview. "If I had the information in front of me," Miller said, "I would share it with you." Other Army officials said the internal analysis might overstate some losses.

The AP's investigation began a decade ago. From the start, the Army has given conflicting information on a subject with the potential to embarrass -- and that's when it has provided information at all. A former insider described how Army officials resisted releasing details of missing guns when AP first inquired, and indeed that information was never provided.

Top officials within the Army, Marines and Secretary of Defense's office said that weapon accountability is a high priority, and when the military knows a weapon is missing it does trigger a concerted response to recover it. The officials also said missing weapons are not a widespread problem and noted that the number is a tiny fraction of the military's stockpile.

"We have a very large inventory of several million of these weapons," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said in an interview. "We take this very seriously and we think we do a very good job. That doesn't mean that there aren't losses. It doesn't mean that there aren't mistakes made."

Kirby said those mistakes are few, though, and last year the military could account for 99.999% of its firearms. "Though the numbers are small, one is too many," he said.

In the absence of a regular reporting requirement, the Pentagon is responsible for informing Congress of any "significant" incidents of missing weapons. That hasn't happened since at least 2017. While a missing portable missile such as a Stinger would qualify for notifying lawmakers, a stolen machine gun would not, according to a senior Department of Defense official whom the Pentagon provided for an interview on condition the official not be named.

While AP's analysis covered the 2010s, incidents persist.

In May, an Army trainee who fled Fort Jackson in South Carolina with an M4 rifle hijacked a school bus full of children, pointing his unloaded assault weapon at the driver before eventually letting everyone go.

Last October, police in San Diego were startled to find a military grenade launcher on the front seat of a car they pulled over for expired license plates. The driver and his passenger were middle-aged men with criminal records.

After publicizing the arrest, police got a call from a Marine Corps base up the Pacific coast. The Marines wanted to know if the grenade launcher was one they needed to find. They read off a serial number.

It wasn't a match.

CRIME GUNS

Stolen military guns have been sold to street gang members, recovered on felons and used in violent crimes.

The AP identified eight instances in which five different stolen military firearms were used in a civilian shooting or other violent crime, and others in which felons were caught possessing weapons. To find these cases, AP combed investigative and court records, as well as published reports. Federal restrictions on sharing firearms information publicly mean the case total is certainly an undercount.

The military requires itself to inform civilian law enforcement when a gun is lost or stolen, and the services help in subsequent investigations. The Pentagon does not track crime guns, and spokesman Kirby said his office was unaware of any stolen firearms used in civilian crimes.

The closest AP could find to an independent tally was done by the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services. It said 22 guns issued by the U.S. military were used in a felony during the 2010s. That total could include surplus weapons the military sells to the public or loans to civilian law enforcement.

Those FBI records also appear to be undercount. They say that no military-issue gun was used in a felony in 2018, but at least one was.

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Back in June 2018, Albany police were searching for 21-year-old Alvin Damon. They'd placed him at a shooting which involved the Beretta M9, a workhorse weapon for the military that is similar to a model Beretta produces for the civilian market.

Surveillance video obtained by AP shows another man firing the gun four times at a group of people off camera, taking cover behind a building between shots. Two men walking with him scattered, one dropping his hat in the street. No one was injured.

Two months later, Detective Daniel Seeber spotted Damon on a stoop near the Prince Deli corner store. Damon took off running and, not far into the chase, grabbed a bystander who had just emerged from the deli with juice and a bag of chips.

After Detective Seeber defused the standoff, officers collected the pistol. A check by New York State Police returned leads to four Albany shootings, including one just the day before in which a bullet lodged in a living room wall. In another, someone was shot in the ankle.

At the request of Albany police, the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives traced the gun's story. The ATF contacted Army's Criminal Investigation Command, and a review of Army inventory systems showed the M9 had been listed as "in-transit" between two Fort Bragg units for two years before police recovered it.

And the Army still doesn't know who stole the gun, or when.

The case wasn't the first in which police recovered a stolen service pistol before troops at Fort Bragg realized it was missing. AP found a second instance, involving a pistol that was among 21 M9s stolen from an arms room.

Military police learned of the theft in 2010. By then, one of the M9s was sitting in an evidence room in the Hoke County Sheriff's Department, picked up in a North Carolina backyard not far from Bragg. Another M9 was later seized in Durham after it was used in a parking lot shooting.

Another steady North Carolina source of weapons has been Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, where authorities often have an open missing weapons investigation. Detectives in Baltimore found a Beretta M9 stolen from a Lejeune armory during a cocaine bust. The Naval Criminal Investigative Service found in the 2011 case that inventory and security procedures were rarely followed. Three guns were stolen; no one was charged.

Deputies in South Carolina were called in 2017 after a man started wildly shooting an M9 pistol into the air during an argument with his girlfriend. The boyfriend, a convicted felon, then started shooting toward a neighbor's house. The pistol came from a National Guard armory that a thief entered through an unlocked door, hauling off six automatic weapons, a grenade launcher and five M9s.

Meanwhile, authorities in central California are still finding AK-74 assault rifles that were among 26 stolen from Fort Irwin a decade ago. Military police officers stole the guns from the Army base, selling some to the Fresno Bulldogs street gang.

At least nine of the AKs have not been recovered.

INSIDER THREAT

The people with easiest access to military firearms are those who handle and secure them.

In the Army, they are often junior soldiers assigned to armories or arms rooms, according to Col. Kenneth Williams, director of supply under the Army's G-4 Logistics branch.

"This is a young guy or gal," Williams said. "This is a person normally on their first tour of duty. So you can see that we put great responsibility on our soldiers immediately when they come in."

Armorers have access both to firearms and the spare parts kept for repairs. These upper receivers, lower receivers and trigger assemblies can be used to make new guns or enhance existing ones.

"We've seen issues like that in the past where an armorer might build an M16" automatic assault rifle from military parts, said Mark Ridley, a former deputy director of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service. "You have to be really concerned with certain armorers and how they build small arms and small weapons."

In 2014, NCIS began investigating the theft of weapons parts from Special Boat Team Twelve, a Navy unit

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based in Coronado, California. Four M4 trigger assemblies that could make a civilian AR-15 fully automatic were missing. Investigators found an armory inventory manager was manipulating electronic records by moving items or claiming they had been transferred. The parts were never recovered and the case was closed after federal prosecutors declined to file charges.

Weapons accountability is part of military routine. Armorers are supposed to check weapons when they open each day. Sight counts, a visual total of weapons on hand, are drilled into troops whether they are in the field, on patrol or in the arms room. But as long as there have been armories, people have been stealing from them.

Weapons enter the public three main ways: direct sales from thieves to buyers, through pawn shops and surplus stores, and online.

Investigators have found sensitive and restricted parts for military weapons on sites including eBay, which said in a statement it has "zero tolerance" for stolen military gear on its site.

At Fort Campbell, Kentucky, soldiers stole machine gun parts and other items that ended up with online buyers in Russia, China, Mexico and elsewhere. The civilian ringleader, who was found with a warehouse of items, was convicted. Authorities said he made hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Often though, recovering a weapon can prove hard.

When an M203 grenade launcher couldn't be found during a 2019 inventory at a Marine Corps supply base in Albany, Georgia, investigators sought surveillance camera footage. It didn't exist. The warehouse manager said the system couldn't be played back at the time.

An analysis of 45 firearms-only investigations in the Navy and Marines found that in 55% of cases, no suspect could be found and weapons remained missing. In those unresolved cases, investigators found records were destroyed or falsified, armories lacked basic security and inventories weren't completed for weeks or months.

"Gun-decking" is Navy slang for faking work. In the case of the USS Comstock, gun-decking led to the disappearance of three pistols.

Investigators found numerous security lapses in the 2012 case, including one sailor asleep in the armory. The missing pistols weren't properly logged in the ship's inventory when they were received several days before. Investigators couldn't pinpoint what day they disappeared because sailors gun-decked inventory reports by not doing actual counts.

ROOM FOR DISCREPANCY

Military officials shied from discussing how many guns they have, much less how many are missing.

AP learned that the Army, the largest of the armed services, is responsible for about 3.1 million small arms. Across all four branches, the U.S. military has an estimated 4.5 million firearms, according to the nonprofit organization Small Arms Survey.

In its accounting, whenever possible AP eliminated cases in which firearms were lost in combat, during accidents such as aircraft crashes and similar incidents where a weapon's fate was known.

Unlike the Army and Air Force, which could not answer basic questions about missing weapons, the Marines and Navy were able to produce data covering the 2010s.

The Navy data showed that 211 firearms were reported lost or stolen. In addition, 63 firearms previously considered missing were recovered.

According to AP's analysis of data from the Marines, 204 firearms were lost or stolen, with 14 later recovered.

To account for missing weapons, the Pentagon relies on incident reports from the services, which it keeps for only three years.

Pentagon officials said that approximately 100 firearms were unaccounted for in both 2019 and 2018. A majority of those were attributable to accidents or combat losses, they said. Even though AP's total excluded accidents and combat losses whenever known, it was higher than what the services reported to the Pentagon.

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The officials said they could only discuss how many weapons were missing dating to 2018. The reason: They aren't required to keep earlier records. Without providing documentation, the Pentagon said the number of missing weapons was down significantly in 2020, when the pandemic curtailed many military operations.

The Air Force was the only service branch not to release data. It first responded to several Freedom of Information Act requests by saying no records existed. Air Force representatives then said they would not provide details until yet another FOIA request, filed 1.5 years ago, was fully processed.

The Army sought to suppress information on missing weapons and gave misleading numbers that contradict internal memos.

The AP began asking the Army for details on missing weapons in 2011 and filed a formal request a year later for records of guns listed as missing, lost, stolen or recovered in the Department of Defense Small Arms and Light Weapons Registry. Charles Royal, the former Army civilian employee who was in charge of the registry, said that he prepared records for release that higher ups eventually blocked in 2013.

"You're dealing with millions of weapons," Royal said in a recent interview. "But we're supposed to have 100% recon, right. OK, we're not allowed a discrepancy on that. But there's so much room for discrepancy."

Army spokesman Lt. Col. Brandon Kelley said the service's property inventory systems don't readily track how many weapons have been lost or stolen. Army officials said the most accurate count could be found in criminal investigative summaries released under yet another federal records request.

AP's reading of these investigative records showed 230 lost or stolen rifles or handguns between 2010 and 2019 -- a clear undercount. Internal documents show just how much Army officials were downplaying the problem.

The AP obtained two memos covering 2013 through 2019 in which the Army tallied 1,303 stolen or lost rifles and handguns, with theft the primary reason for losses. That number, which Army officials said is imperfect because it includes some combat losses and recoveries, and may include some duplications, was based on criminal investigations and incident reports.

The internal memos are not "an authoritative document," Kelley said, and were not closely checked with public release in mind. As such, he said, the 1,303 total could be inaccurate.

The investigative records Kelley cited show 62 lost or stolen rifles or handguns from 2013 through 2019. Some of those, like the Beretta M9 used in four shootings in Albany, New York, were recovered.

"One gun creates a ton of devastation," Albany County District Attorney Soares said. "And then it puts it on local officials, local law enforcement, to have to work extra hard to try to remove those guns from the community."

Geneva regains diplomatic spotlight with Putin-Biden summit

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — A year ago, Geneva was largely down on its diplomatic luck: The Trump administration had an "America First" policy that shunned the internationalism the Swiss city epitomizes, and blasted some of its top institutions like the World Health Organization, the Human Rights Council and the World Trade Organization.

That's all in the past.

The lakeside city, known as a Cold War crossroads and a hub for Swiss discretion, neutrality and humanitarianism, returns to a spotlight on the world stage Wednesday as U.S. President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin come to town for a summit.

It will mark the third time that Geneva has hosted U.S. and Russian leaders' talks: The first was a multi-lateral meeting involving U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in 1955. The second came 30 years later, when President Ronald Reagan met Mikhail Gorbachev — an important icebreaker that some say paved the way toward the end of the Soviet Union.

Both times, the two sides made progress toward defusing tensions. This time, hopes loom for even a modest improvement on the current U.S.-Russia chill over issues like Ukraine, human rights and cyber

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attacks.

Soviet and Russian studies expert Robert Legvold, a professor emeritus at Columbia University, said Geneva hosted crucial U.S.-Soviet talks on strategic nuclear arms control and has had a relatively good track record as a venue where the two countries can cooperate.

If there's any city "where business has been done ... it has been Geneva," Legvold said of the two rival countries.

Legvold noted how Eisenhower used the 1955 meeting to launch what became known as the "Open Skies" agreement, which called for U.S. and Soviet militaries to exchange maps to boost transparency and defuse tensions.

That eventually led to a treaty in 1992, which let each country carry out surveillance flights over the other's territory. Under Trump, the U.S. pulled out of the Open Skies Treaty, and the Biden administration announced last month that the U.S. would not rejoin it — alleging repeated Russian violations.

Putin has lamented the collapse of the Soviet Union as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century," and has sought to rebuild Russia's Soviet-era global clout and prestige. He often has been critical of Gorbachev's legacy, saying that the U.S. and its Western allies cheated the Soviet Union by pledging not to expand NATO eastward following the reunification of Germany — and then breaking their promise.

Today's Geneva is not the den of Cold War espionage and intrigue that it once was. But while Switzerland has in many ways cleaned up its reputation as a hub for the rich and powerful to squirrel away funds and avoid taxes, experts say many autocrats are still drawn to the discretion and stability of Swiss banking.

Nevertheless, the city has painstakingly built a reputation for diplomacy, humanitarianism and multilateralism. The International Red Cross was founded here in 1863 to help victims of conflict. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson helped set up the League of Nations — the U.N. predecessor that the U.S. Congress shunned — to foster dialogue. The Geneva Conventions set rules about humanitarian conduct in war.

More recently, Geneva has been home to the United Nations' European headquarters, its human rights office and scores of U.N.-affiliated bodies, multilateral institutions and humanitarian and advocacy groups — often with U.S. support.

Still, in this city of about 200,000 people, Trump casts a long shadow. He pulled the U.S. out of the U.N.-backed Human Rights Council. He criticized the WTO and largely stripped it of its ability to settle trade disputes. Just over a year ago, Trump paused U.S. funding for the WHO and threatened to pull the U.S. out over the health agency's alleged missteps and kowtowing to China early in the COVID-19 crisis.

Biden kept the U.S. in the U.N. health agency and restored U.S. funding.

"Certainly, the former situation (under Trump) was threatening ... Geneva as a place for multilateral negotiation" as well as its many technical organizations, said Nicolas Levrat, director of the Global Studies Institute at the University of Geneva.

He differentiated between Geneva's lure as a site for face-to-face power diplomacy and its penchant for multilateralism, which the U.S. hasn't always supported — even before Trump.

"(The) Biden administration is not as unilateral as the Trump administration. And it is a very good thing, I think, for global governance (and) for the place of Geneva," Levrat said. But, he said, the U.S. has "never been a genuine supporter of multilateralism."

Thomas Greminger, a former secretary-general of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which counts both Russia and the U.S. as participating states, said the choice of Geneva for the summit was "highly symbolic" and hoped it will signal "an important U.S. role" in multilateralism.

For Putin and Biden, amid tensions between their two countries, Greminger suggested the summit offers a neutral venue that could help reduce polarization.

"Safe spaces are again becoming very important -- that is, places where people that are not like-minded can meet, discuss and try to establish bridges," said Greminger, now director of the Geneva Center for Security Policy. Geneva "has a track record for this."

New Israel government vows change, but not for Palestinians

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By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

BEITA, West Bank (AP) — Israel's fragile new government has shown little interest in addressing the decades-old conflict with the Palestinians, but it may not have a choice.

Jewish ultranationalists are already staging provocations aimed at splitting the coalition and bringing about a return to right-wing rule. In doing so, they risk escalating tensions with the Palestinians weeks after an 11-day Gaza war was halted by an informal cease-fire.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's best hope for maintaining his ruling coalition — which consists of eight parties from across the political spectrum — will be to manage the conflict, the same approach favored by his predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu, for most of his 12-year rule. But that method failed to prevent three Gaza wars and countless smaller eruptions.

That's because the status quo for Palestinians involves expanding settlements in the occupied West Bank, looming evictions in Jerusalem, home demolitions, deadly shootings and an array of discriminatory measures that two well-known human rights groups say amount to apartheid. In Gaza, which has been under a crippling blockade since the Hamas militant group seized power in 2007, it's even worse.

"They talk about it being a government of change, but it's just going to entrench the status quo," said Waleed Assaf, a Palestinian official who coordinates protests against West Bank settlements. "Bennett is a copy of Netanyahu, and he might even be more radical."

Bennett said little about the Palestinians in a speech before being sworn in on Sunday. "Violence will be met with a firm response," he warned, adding that "security calm will lead to economic moves, which will lead to reducing friction and the conflict."

Environment Minister Tamar Zandberg, a member of the dovish Meretz party, told Israeli television's Channel 12 that she believes the peace process is important, but that the new government has agreed, "at least at this stage, not to deal with it."

The government faces an early challenge on Jabal Sabeeh, a hilltop in the northern West Bank where dozens of Jewish settlers rapidly established an outpost last month, paving roads and setting up living quarters that they say are now home to dozens of families.

The settlement, named Eviatar after an Israeli who was killed in an attack in 2013, was built without the permission of Israeli authorities on land the Palestinians say is privately owned. Israeli troops have evacuated settlers from the site three times before, but they returned after an Israeli was killed in a shooting attack nearby early last month.

Clearing them out again would embarrass Bennett and other right-wing members of the coalition, who already face fierce criticism — and even death threats — for allying with centrist and left-wing factions to oust Netanyahu.

The government faces a similar dilemma over a parade through east Jerusalem organized by ultranationalists that is due to be held Tuesday. The march risks setting off the kind of protests and clashes that helped ignite last month's Gaza war.

Meanwhile, Palestinians from the adjacent village of Beita have held regular protests against the settlement outpost. Demonstrators have thrown stones, and Israeli troops have fired tear gas and live ammunition. Three protesters have been killed, including 17-year-old Mohammed Hamayel, who was shot dead Friday. Initial reports said he was 15.

"I always taught him you should stand up for your rights without infringing on the rights of others," his father, Said, said at a mourning event attended by dozens of villagers. He described his son as a popular teenager who got good grades and was a natural leader.

"Thank God, I'm very proud of my son," he said. "Even in martyrdom he distinguished himself."

The villagers fear that if the outpost remains, it will eventually swallow up even more of their land, growing and merging with some of the more than 130 authorized settlements across the occupied West Bank, where nearly 500,000 settlers live.

"We're not a political game in the hands of Bennett or Netanyahu," said Mohammed Khabeesa, a resident who says he owns land near the settler outpost that he can no longer access without a military permit.

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"The settlements are like a cancer," he said. "Everyone knows they begin small, and then they take root and expand at people's expense until they reach our homes."

A spokeswoman for the settler organization behind the outpost did not respond to a request for comment.

Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza in the 1967 Mideast war, territories the Palestinians want for a future state. The settlements are seen by the Palestinians and much of the international community as a major obstacle to peace because they make it nearly impossible to create a contiguous, viable state of Palestine alongside Israel.

Every Israeli government since 1967 has expanded the settlements, and this one is unlikely to be an exception. Bennett briefly served as head of a major settler organization, and his party is one of three in the coalition that strongly support settlements.

Hagit Ofran, an expert on settlements with the Israeli rights group Peace Now, says the settlers have always used illegal outposts to challenge Israeli authorities, a trend she expects to accelerate under the new government.

"Because the settlers feel this government is not their government, challenging it, psychologically, will be much, much easier," she said.

She hopes the new government will at least put the brakes on larger settlement projects, including massive infrastructure that will pave the way for future growth.

"I think it's more easy politically to stop big budgets and big projects rather than evicting an outpost," she said. "I would rather see that the government is stopping the big projects rather than fighting over every hilltop. The settlers have the opposite interest."

Analysis: Subdued Iran vote will still impact wider Mideast

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's presidential election on Friday, though likely more a coronation for a hard-line candidate long cultivated by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, still carries implications for a wider Middle East already roiled by years of tensions between Tehran and the West.

Khamenei holds final say over Iran's military and its nuclear program, but the presidency does control domestic matters such as the economy, and serves as the public face of the Islamic Republic.

Its decisions, though on a narrow bandwidth, can affect how the rest of the world interacts with Iran. The far different tenures of hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and that of the relative moderate President Hassan Rouhani, whose administration reached the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, are a stark reflection of that.

How an administration overseen by hard-line judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi would behave, remains in question. Raisi — who analysts and polling suggest is the clear front-runner after a panel overseen by Khamenei disqualified his major rivals — already faces strong skepticism from the West. That is in part for running a judicial system in Iran that remains one of the world's top executioners and sees its Revolutionary Courts operate many trials behind closed doors.

In 2019, the U.S. Treasury under President Donald Trump sanctioned Raisi "for his administrative oversight over the executions of individuals who were juveniles at the time of their crime and the torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of prisoners in Iran."

Raisi as the head of the judiciary also oversees a system long criticized by families of detainees and activists as targeting dual nationals and those with Western ties to use them as bargaining chips in negotiations.

The Treasury also noted Raisi's time in the Tehran's prosecutor's office, describing him as being "involved" in the security force crackdown on Iran's 2009 Green Movement protests surrounding Ahmadinejad's disputed re-election at the time. The Treasury said Raisi participated in the so-called "death panels" of 1988, which Amnesty International says oversaw the execution of as many as 5,000 people at the end of the Iran-Iraq war.

President Joe Biden's administration so far has made no move to remove Raisi from the sanctions list. The State Department and the Treasury declined to answer questions about how sanctions on Raisi could

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affect American foreign policy if he's elected.

It probably would not help matters that Raisi in early January threatened Trump — still president at the time — with assassination while speaking at the first anniversary of the U.S. drone strike in Baghdad that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

"The enemy should not think that if someone (who) appeared in the guise of the American president (and) is responsible for the assassination, they will be safe from justice," Raisi said then. "None will be safe anywhere in the world. The resistance is determined to take revenge."

In recent presidential debates, however, Raisi said he would oversee a return to the nuclear deal reached by Rouhani. That accord saw Iran limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. Since Trump's unilateral withdrawal of America from the agreement, Iran has been enriching small amounts of uranium to up to 63% purity — a record high though still below weapons-grade levels of 90%.

Iran's economy has cratered since America's withdrawal from the accord. Rejoining the deal, even though the agreement remains despised by hard-liners, could help ease the economic hardship.

The deal "would not be executed by you," Raisi told his moderate competitor, Rouhani's former Central Bank chief Abdolnasser Hemmati, at the final pre-election debate Saturday. "It needs a powerful government to do this."

Those remarks followed his previous comments during his failed 2017 campaign for president against Rouhani, in which he compared the deal to a "check that has not been cashed" through government inaction.

Raisi has not offered other hints on foreign policy during the campaign, though he's praised the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah in the past and criticized normalization efforts between Israel and Arab nations as undermining the Palestinians. A return to the nuclear deal could have a knock-on effect for Hezbollah as Iran is its main patron, freeing up cash as Lebanon faces what the World Bank has described as the world's worst financial crisis since the 1850s.

Iran's Gulf Arab neighbors meanwhile have sought to improve ties in recent months as they anticipate a return by the Biden administration to the nuclear deal.

Saudi Arabia and Iran held talks in Baghdad in April, with Riyadh likely hoping it can avoid a direct confrontation such as the one it saw in 2019, when a suspected Iranian attack struck the heart of its oil industry. The United Arab Emirates, home to Abu Dhabi and Dubai, similarly held talks after tankers off its coast came under attack in another assault suspected to have been carried out by Tehran. Those attacks, as well as others in a shadow war between Tehran and Israel, can be linked directly back to Trump's withdrawal from the deal.

That doesn't mean a rapprochement with Tehran is immediately in the cards. But that hedging could indicate a possibly easier time for Raisi in managing ties to other countries, especially to the UAE, which had been a crucial economic outlet for Iran.

But for Raisi himself, the immediate danger may be coming from inside Iran itself. Anger over its ailing economy has seen nationwide protests erupt twice in recent years and spin out of control. Polling from the state-linked Iranian Student Polling Agency puts turnout — long viewed by officials as a sign of support for the theocracy — on track to be the lowest since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

With that public disenchanted with the government, Raisi is likely to soon become its face both at home and abroad.

Echoes of Breonna Taylor in shooting of Black man in Georgia

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Johnny Lorenzo Bolton was lying with his eyes closed on a couch in his apartment near Atlanta when police serving a narcotics search warrant burst through the front door with guns drawn and no warning.

Bolton stood up and at least one of the officers fired, sending two bullets into Bolton's chest. The 49-year-old Black man died from his injuries.

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Details of the pre-dawn encounter in December — most of which come from a lawyer representing Bolton's family — resemble a case that is well known nationwide: the killing nine months earlier of Breonna Taylor in Kentucky. The 26-year-old Black woman also died after being shot by officers serving a drug search warrant at her apartment.

But unlike Taylor's, Bolton's name is not painted in large letters on protest signs or mentioned in the ongoing nationwide discussions on racial injustice and police brutality that began after Taylor's death in March 2020 and that of George Floyd, who died under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer in May 2020.

Bolton's relatives and their lawyers wanted to try to get information about the shooting from law enforcement before drawing attention to his killing, they said. Frustrated in those efforts, the attorneys sent a draft of a lawsuit to Cobb County officials in mid-April along with a letter threatening litigation if county officials didn't provide more information and address accountability and compensation for Bolton's death.

"For almost six months, we gave them quiet," Bolton's sister Daphne Bolton said in a recent interview with The Associated Press. "That lets me know that's not what gets a response."

Now, Bolton says, "I want my brother's name to ring beside Breonna Taylor's. When they say Breonna Taylor, I want them to say Breonna Taylor and Johnny Lorenzo Bolton. I want them to be simultaneous."

The specifics of Taylor's killing have been laid out in detail: Police arrived after midnight and used a battering ram to knock open the door. Taylor's boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, said he grabbed his gun and he and Taylor got out of bed and walked toward the door. Police say they knocked and identified themselves. Walker said he didn't hear them say police and feared the officers were intruders. He fired once, hitting an officer in the leg. Three officers returned fire, discharging a total of 32 bullets, five of which hit Taylor.

Far fewer details about Bolton's death have been released.

In a bare-bones news release issued the day he died, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, or GBI, which investigates shootings involving police at the request of local agencies, said officers had executed a narcotics search warrant at a Smyrna apartment around 4:40 a.m. on Dec. 17.

"During entry into the residence, a SWAT team member discharged his firearm and an occupant of the apartment was struck," the release said.

It was a Cobb County Sheriff's Office SWAT team. The agency has said it's cooperating with the investigation.

The GBI said it turned over its investigative file to the Cobb County district attorney's office on March 16.

The district attorney's office has said it's still investigating and — as it does with all cases involving shootings by police — plans to present the case to a grand jury.

In a letter responding to the family's lawyers, an attorney representing Cobb County said officials were reviewing the claims raised by the family's lawyers but they "believe there are several material inaccuracies" in the draft lawsuit and accompanying letter. County officials have declined requests from the AP for documents detailing the shooting, citing an exemption in the state's open records law for material related to an ongoing investigation.

The two-bedroom apartment where Bolton lived served as an unofficial boarding house, according to Zack Greenamyre, one of the family's lawyers. A woman and her teenage daughter lived in one bedroom, another woman rented the other bedroom, and Bolton slept on a couch in the living room, Greenamyre said.

As part of an investigation targeting a suspected drug dealer, police served two warrants at roughly the same time: one at a townhouse where the suspected dealer lived and the second at the apartment where Bolton lived, which police said was paid for by the alleged dealer. The officer who provided sworn statements for both warrant applications said they were based on information from a confidential law enforcement source and surveillance. The officer said the confidential informant bought cocaine at the apartment in September and that drug sales continued there in December.

The officer asked for a "no-knock" warrant, which allows police to enter without announcing themselves. He cited the criminal histories of people who were known to associate with the suspected dealer at the apartment and previous reports of guns seen there.

Greenamyre says the warrant for the apartment was based on false and outdated information and that the apartment was purely residential, with no drug sales taking place there. Bolton's name doesn't appear

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in the paperwork for either warrant.

Greenamyre said witnesses told him Bolton was lying on a couch with his eyes closed, possibly sleeping, when officers crashed through the door. He stood in response to the noise and was shot by police, the witnesses said. They also said that as Bolton lay dying, officers didn't immediately provide first aid but instead handcuffed him.

"The limited information available to the family now does not make this look like a justified shooting," said the letter accompanying the draft lawsuit.

About two weeks after the shooting, police got additional arrest warrants for the alleged dealer, who had already been arrested in the raid on the townhouse, and his brother, saying the pair had access to a locked closet in the apartment where a backpack containing drugs was found.

Police also got arrest warrants for two women and a man who were in the apartment with Bolton when police entered. The warrants charge all three with possession of a gun despite prior felony convictions after one gun was found in the kitchen and another in a bedroom. The man also had a backpack containing cocaine, marijuana and methamphetamines, a warrant says.

Daphne Bolton, who says her brother was a talented singer with a big heart, wants to know why he was shot and wants the officers involved to be fired and charged. She also wants an end to "no-knock" warrants.

Bolton said she was at work at a bank in Charlotte, North Carolina, on Dec. 17 when she got a Facebook message from her brother's daughter saying he'd been shot. The hours that followed are a blur, but she remembers pacing in her home, calling hospitals near Atlanta to try to find him before eventually learning he'd died.

Her anger and grief are still raw.

The two siblings were born about a year apart and grew up, along with an older sister who died five years ago from complications of multiple sclerosis, in a tightknit family in Mississippi. As teenagers, they moved to South Carolina with their mother after their parents divorced.

Johnny Bolton never really liked school, but he was funny and well liked and drew a crowd when he'd sing in public. He began dabbling with drugs in his late teens, possibly as a way to cope with their parents' divorce, his sister said. He moved to the Atlanta area as a young man.

Daphne Bolton saw her brother a couple of times a year, but spoke to him more often. She treasures a memory from one of her birthdays when her brother came to surprise her and the family went bowling. Since his death, she's regretted not going to a family reunion last summer where he was set to sing.

Johnny Bolton loved women and always had a girlfriend, some of whom reached out to his sister for advice about him. He'd been working at a carwash and was popular with customers and staff there, Daphne Bolton said.

Johnny Bolton ran into trouble with the law over the years, mostly drug and misdemeanor offenses, and spent some time locked up. He'd often call his sister to ask for money and she'd send it. Even though she didn't agree with some of her brother's choices, she figured it was safer if he got money from her.

"He always told me, he said, 'Baby Sis, I'm gonna get better.' I said, 'I know you are,'" Daphne Bolton said through tears. "I never gave up hope that he would get better. Now I, unfortunately, will never get to see that day."

Critical entities targeted in suspected Chinese cyber spying

By ALAN SUDERMAN Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — A cyberespionage campaign blamed on China was more sweeping than previously known, with suspected state-backed hackers exploiting a device meant to boost internet security to penetrate the computers of critical U.S. entities.

The hack of Pulse Connect Secure networking devices came to light in April, but its scope is only now starting to become clear. The Associated Press has learned that the hackers targeted telecommunications giant Verizon and the country's largest water agency. News broke earlier this month that the New York City subway system, the country's largest, was also breached.

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Security researchers say dozens of other high-value entities that have not yet been named were also targeted as part of the breach of Pulse Secure, which is used by many companies and governments for secure remote access to their networks.

It's unclear what sensitive information, if any, was accessed. Some of the targets said they did not see any evidence of data being stolen. That uncertainty is common in cyberespionage and it can take months to determine data loss, if it is ever discovered. Ivanti, the Utah-based owner of Pulse Connect Secure, declined to comment on which customers were affected.

But even if sensitive information wasn't compromised, experts say it is worrisome that hackers managed to gain footholds in networks of critical organizations whose secrets could be of interest to China for commercial and national security reasons.

"The threat actors were able to get access to some really high-profile organizations, some really well-protected ones," said Charles Carmakal, the chief technology officer of Mandiant, whose company first publicized the hacking campaign in April.

The Pulse Secure hack has largely gone unnoticed while a series of headline-grabbing ransomware attacks have highlighted the cyber vulnerabilities to U.S. critical infrastructure, including one on a major fuels pipeline that prompted widespread shortages at gas stations. The U.S. government is also still investigating the fallout of the SolarWinds hacking campaign launched by Russian cyber spies, which infiltrated dozens of private sector companies and think tanks as well as at least nine U.S. government agencies and went on for most of 2020.

China has a long history of using the internet to spy on the U.S. and presents a "prolific and effective cyber-espionage threat," the Office of the Director of the National Intelligence said in its most recent annual threat assessment.

Six years ago Chinese hackers stole millions of background check files of federal government employees from the Office of Personnel Management. And last year the Justice Department charged two hackers it said worked with the Chinese government to target firms developing vaccines for the coronavirus and stole hundreds of millions of dollars worth of intellectual property and trade secrets from companies across the world.

The Chinese government has denied any role in the Pulse hacking campaign and the U.S. government has not made any formal attribution.

In the Pulse campaign, security experts said sophisticated hackers exploited never-before-seen vulnerabilities to break in and were hyper diligent in trying to cover their tracks once inside.

"The capability is very strong and difficult to defend against, and the profile of victims is very significant," said Adrian Nish, the head of cyber at BAE Systems Applied Intelligence. "This is a very targeted attack against a few dozen networks that all have national significance in one way or another."

The Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency, or CISA, issued an April alert about the Pulse hack saying it was aware of "compromises affecting a number of U.S. government agencies, critical infrastructure entities, and other private sector organizations." The agency has since said that at least five federal agencies have identified indications of potential unauthorized access, but not said which ones.

Verizon said it found a Pulse-related compromise in one of its labs but it was quickly isolated from its core networks. The company said no data or customer information was accessed or stolen.

"We know that bad actors try to compromise our systems," said Verizon spokesman Rich Young. "That is why internet operators, private companies and all individuals need to be vigilant in this space."

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, which provides water to 19 million people and operates some of the largest treatment plants in the world, said it found a compromised Pulse Secure appliance after CISA issued its alert in April. Spokeswoman Rebecca Kimitch said the appliance was immediately removed from service and no Metropolitan systems or processes were known to have been affected. She said there was "no known data exfiltration."

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York also said they've not found evidence of valuable

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data or customer information was stolen. The breach was first reported by The New York Times.

Nish, the BAE security expert, said the hackers could have broken into networks but not stolen data right away for any number of operational reasons. He compared it to a criminal breaking into a house but stopping in the hallway.

"It's still pretty bad," Nish said.

Mandiant said it found signs of data extraction from some of the targets. The company and BAE have identified targets of the hacking campaign in several fields, including financial, technology and defense firms, as well as municipal governments. Some targets were in Europe, but most in the U.S.

At least one major local government has disputed it was a target of the Pulse Secure hack. Montgomery County, Maryland, said it was advised by CISA that its Pulse Secure devices were attacked. But county spokesman Scott Peterson said the county found no evidence of a compromise and told CISA they had a "false report."

CISA did not directly respond to the county's statement.

The new details of the Pulse Secure hack come at a time of tension between the U.S. and China. Biden has made checking China's growth a top priority, and said the country's ambition of becoming the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world is "not going to happen under my watch."

'We need more': Democrats frustrated as agenda faces hurdles

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

EDWARDSVILLE, Pa. (AP) — They have spent much of the past year fighting for Democrats in this working-class corner of northeastern Pennsylvania, knocking on thousands of doors, giving their evenings to phone banks and devoting weekends to voter registration drives.

But the small group of progressive activists gathered recently at the Edwardsville Pierogi Festival could not contain its frustration with the pace of change in Washington under the party they helped elect.

"We need more," said Alicia Duque, a 35-year-old mother of three and volunteer organizer for the progressive group Action Together. "It's taking too long."

With promises to lift working people with transformative policies on health care, climate change and economic inequality, President Joe Biden won more votes last year than any other presidential candidate in history. But those ambitions have collided with a narrowly divided Congress, where Republicans have largely unified against Biden's agenda and a small group of moderate Democrats are increasingly bucking the White House.

If the broader agenda collapses, Democrats risk alienating voters like Duque, whose help the party will need in the uphill battle to maintain and expand the party's control of Congress next year. That's especially true in Pennsylvania, where Democrats are hoping to flip a Senate seat held by the GOP.

In the five months since Biden took office, Democrats have enacted significant legislation, most notably the \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package that sent \$1,200 checks to millions of Americans. The measure also included billions of dollars more to strengthen local economies and vaccination efforts.

But now, the White House is bogged down in negotiations with Republicans over a scaled-back infrastructure package, which is unlikely to include sweeping investments in "human infrastructure" like child care, education and green energy that progressives demand.

At the moment, there are few signs of outright revolt from the party's base, a diverse coalition that features voters of color, young people, union households and women. But with the window for major legislation shrinking heading into another election season, the risks of inaction are growing.

The tension was evident in this corner of Pennsylvania about 20 miles (32 kilometers) from Biden's hometown of Scranton. As members of the grassroots progressive group Action Together gathered with their families to enjoy a few hours of fun at a weekend festival, they said the daily challenges of life in working-class America have not improved quickly enough with Democrats in charge.

The pandemic may be under control, they said, but they are struggling with child care costs, student loan debt and inflation. And in their free time, they are expected to continue canvassing local neighbor-

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hoods to promote the benefits of the Biden presidency to would-be voters.

"We can talk about the checks, we can talk about the shots, that's great, but the Democrats ran on a lot more than that," said 27-year-old Mark Shaffer, another volunteer organizer. "Biden's big pitch was, 'I was in the Senate so I know how to get things through the Senate.' Well, we're not getting anything through the Senate."

A breaking point for many progressives came late last month when Senate Republicans used a parliamentary rule known as the filibuster to block the creation of an independent commission to investigate the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. In the weeks since, progressive calls for Democrats to abandon negotiations with Republicans on other measures and kill the filibuster have intensified.

While Senate Democrats do not have the votes at the moment to do that, party leaders know they must deliver soon. A coalition of more than 60 national progressive groups signed a letter late last week insisting that Democrats abandon negotiations with Republicans and push through a sweeping infrastructure package on their own.

Pennsylvania Lt. Gov. John Fetterman, who is running to replace retiring Republican Sen. Pat Toomey, says it's past time for Democrats to "employ whatever tactic necessary" — including ending the filibuster — to adopt progressive policies on voting rights, the minimum wage and infrastructure.

"I wouldn't call it frustration. I'd call it disappointment," Fetterman told The Associated Press. "It's kind of gut-check time on the Democratic side."

"These are not normal times," Fetterman continued. "When you have an opportunity to pass transformative policies, you have to, even if it could cost you your political career."

At the same time, Black voters have been especially troubled by the Democrats' inability to block a wave of Republican-backed election reforms in key states that would make it more difficult for people of color to vote in future elections.

NAACP President Derrick Johnson was among a group of civil rights leaders who met last week with Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, who has refused to support calls to end the filibuster and, because of the balance of power in the Senate, can single-handedly preserve the controversial parliamentary rule.

Manchin did not bend in the meeting but agreed to "continue to dialogue," according to Johnson.

The civil rights leader declined to predict a "doomsday scenario" in which Black voters abandon congressional Democrats in the midterms for not taking action, saying, "Congress must act to protect us."

"We're running out of time," Johnson said.

Amid the mounting anxiety, Sen. Bernie Sanders, the Vermont independent who has been the face of the Democrats' far-left wing for a generation, is largely optimistic.

In an interview, the self-described democratic socialist praised Biden for offering "a blueprint for transformative change." Sanders also expressed confidence that the Biden administration would soon abandon negotiations with Republicans in favor of an even bigger budget reconciliation bill he's writing in the Senate Budget Committee.

Sanders described the bill as "the most consequential piece of legislation for working people since 1930s." "You want big and bold? Underline big and bold," Sanders told the AP.

When pressed, however, he acknowledged there is no guarantee that all 50 Senate Democrats would support the measure.

"I did not say there's nothing to worry about," Sanders said, citing the Democrats' razor-thin majorities in the House and Senate. "There's a lot to worry about. There's a lot of work that has to be done."

As some liberals argue the party hasn't done enough with its power, Republicans are hitting Democrats for doing too much to pursue a far-left agenda. Those attacks may be working.

A Fox News poll released late last month found that 46% of registered voters believed Biden's positions on the issues were too liberal, a 10-percentage-point jump from December. At the same time, however, 15% of self-described liberals said the Democratic president's positions were too conservative.

Meanwhile, the mood was somber back at the Edwardsville festival, even as the progressive activists enjoyed 3-for-\$5 pierogis, crispy potato pancakes and fudge.

Claudia Glennan, 66, who described herself as a human rights activist, doesn't blame Democrats for the gridlock in Washington, even though they control the White House and Congress.

Democrats are in control only "in theory" because of the filibuster, she said. "Their hands are tied."
"I know we're supposed to keep positive, but it's hard," Glennan said. "I'm trying not to get depressed."

Syria's last aid crossing in balance as Biden to meet Putin

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

President Joe Biden will seek to stave off another surge of civilian suffering in the devastating war in Syria when he meets President Vladimir Putin this week, appealing to Putin to drop a threat to close the last aid crossing into that country.

Russian forces have helped Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime survive the more than 10-year conflict and Putin hopes to be a broker for Assad in any international reconstruction effort for that country. Russia holds the key veto on July 10 when the U.N. Security Council decides whether to extend authorization for the aid crossing from Turkey.

Putin meets with the American president in Geneva on Wednesday in their first face-to-face since Biden took office. The Russian leader already has pressed successfully for shutting down all other international humanitarian crossings into Syria, and argues that Assad should handle the distribution of any aid.

The aid crossing from Turkey into rebel-held northwest Syria serves up to 4 million people in Syria's last remaining rebel stronghold. A decade of civil war in the Middle East country has killed a half-million people, displaced half of the population, drawn in foreign armies and extremist groups and left the economy in ruins.

Shutting down the international aid corridor and putting Assad's government in charge of any humanitarian distribution would help position Assad as the winner in the war and Syria's rightful ruler in the aftermath, and deepen the regional influence of Assad's ally, Russia, in any rebuilding of Syria.

"Assistance should be given through the central government," Putin told NBC News in an interview ahead of his meeting with Biden.

If there are fears that the assistance would be stolen, aid groups can post observers, the Russian leader said.

Opponents say Assad's regime has not hesitated to use civilian starvation and siege as a weapon in the war, and fear a destabilizing surge of refugees into neighboring Turkey if the crossing shuts down.

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, visited the threatened Bab al-Hawa border crossing between Turkey and rebel-held northwest Syria earlier this month to warn that closing it would bring "senseless cruelty."

Turkey, which already holds close to 4 million Syrian refugees, joins the U.S. in opposing closure of the crossing.

Mona Yacoubian, a senior adviser for the U.S. Institute of Peace think tank, said closing the Bab al-Hawa aid crossing could "precipitate this humanitarian catastrophe" and a destabilizing surge of refugees.

Biden's possible points of leverage with Putin, Yacoubian said, could include stressing the harm that a new round of civilian suffering in Syria could do to Russia's image as it positions itself to oversee hoped-for Arab and other international aid to rebuild Syria.

There also could be consideration of granting humanitarian waivers on sanctions that the United States and others have levied on the Assad regime, Yacoubian said.

Russia argues that U.S. support for what started out as a peaceful uprising in Syria, and condemnation of Assad's and other repressive governments during the Arab Spring, fostered instability and violence and boosted Islamic extremist groups.

Many in Biden's administration were also in the Obama administration when it considered, but held back from, military intervention to stop Assad's chemical attacks on civilians. They have since expressed regret that the United States' overall handling of the conflict failed to stop the bloodshed.

Justice Department to tighten rules on seizing Congress data

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By MICHAEL BALSAMO, MARY CLARE JALONICK and MICHAEL LIEDTKE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department will tighten its rules around obtaining records from members of Congress, Attorney General Merrick Garland said, amid revelations the department under former President Donald Trump had secretly seized records from Democrats and members of the media.

“Consistent with our commitment to the rule of law,” Garland said Monday in a statement, “we must ensure that full weight is accorded to separation-of-powers concerns moving forward.”

Garland’s statement came as a Justice Department official said the top national security official, John Demers, planned to leave by the end of next week. Demers, who was sworn in a few weeks after the subpoena for the Democrats’ records, is one of the few Trump appointees who has remained in the Biden administration.

The Justice Department is struggling to contain the fallout over revelations that it had confiscated phone data from House Democrats and reporters as part of an aggressive investigation into leaks. The disclosure is also forcing Biden administration officials to wade back into a fight with their predecessors — something they’ve wished to avoid.

News outlets reported last week that the Justice Department had secretly subpoenaed Cupertino, California-based Apple Inc. in 2018 for metadata from two Democratic members of the House Intelligence Committee — California Rep. Adam Schiff and California Rep. Eric Swalwell — as their committee was investigating Trump’s ties to Russia. Schiff, at the time, was the top Democrat on the panel, which was led by Republicans.

Now the House Intelligence Committee Chair, Schiff said Monday that he had spoken with Garland, who had given his commitment to an independent investigation by the inspector general. Schiff said he had “every confidence” that Garland “will also do the kind of top-to-bottom review of the degree to which the department was politicized during the previous administration and take corrective steps.”

The intelligence panel initially said 12 people connected to the committee — including aides, former aides and family members — had been swept up, but more have since been uncovered, according to a person familiar with the matter who also was not authorized to discuss it publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

Some people might not know they were targeted because the Apple notification was by email and showed up in the spam filters of some of those who were contacted, the person said.

House Judiciary Committee Chair Rep. Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., announced an investigation into the subpoenas on members of Congress and journalists. Senate Judiciary Committee Chair Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., demanded a copy of the subpoena and other records about the decision to obtain the order.

Meanwhile, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., lambasted a demand by Democrats that former attorneys general William Barr and Jeff Sessions testify before a committee on the subpoenas, saying his Democratic colleagues had given into the “urge to pick at the scab of politically-motivated investigations.” He defended Barr, saying the move was a “witch hunt in the making.”

“There is no need for a partisan circus here in Congress,” he said.

The subpoena, issued Feb. 6, 2018, requested information on 73 phone numbers and 36 email addresses, Apple said. It also included a nondisclosure order that prohibited the company from notifying any of the people, and it was renewed three times, the company said in a statement.

Apple said that it couldn’t challenge the warrants because it had so little information available and that “it would have been virtually impossible for Apple to understand the intent of the desired information without digging through users’ accounts.”

Although Apple says it contests legal requests that it believes are unfounded, the company challenged or rejected just 7% of the U.S. demands it received during the 2018 period when it received the subpoena for the information about Schiff and Swalwell. Apple was even less combative during the first half of last year, challenging just 4% of the U.S. legal requests.

Apple has been turning over some customer data in 80% to 90% of the legal requests it has received in the U.S. in recent years, though the information often excludes the content of text, email or photos.

Like other major technology companies, Apple has been dealing with a steadily escalating torrent of le-

gal requests for account and device information from around the world as its products and services have become more deeply ingrained in people's lives.

During the first half of last year, for instance, U.S. law enforcement agencies sought information on 18,609 Apple accounts — nearly seven times the number of accounts requested during the same time in 2015.

The demands are becoming more broad, too. During the first half of 2018, when Apple received the subpoena affecting Schiff and Swalwell, the 2,397 U.S. legal requests that Apple received covered an average of seven accounts, according to the company's disclosures. That was up from an average of roughly three accounts per request during the first half of 2015.

The department's inspector general has launched a probe into the matter after a request from Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco. Inspector General Michael Horowitz said he would examine whether the data subpoenaed by the Justice Department and turned over by Apple followed department policy and "whether any such uses, or the investigations, were based upon improper considerations."

In addition, Monaco has been separately tasked with "surfacing problematic matters deserving high level review," Garland said.

Garland emphasized in his statement Monday that "political or other improper considerations must play no role in any investigative or prosecutorial decisions."

Demers has been in charge of the department's national security division since late February 2018, and his division has played a role in each of the leak investigations. He leaves as questions swirl over his potential involvement in the effort.

He had planned for weeks to leave the department by the end of June, a second person familiar with the matter said. The two could not discuss the matter publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity.

He will be temporarily replaced by Mark Lesko, the acting U.S. attorney in the Eastern District of New York, the official said, until President Joe Biden's official pick, Matthew Olsen, is approved by the Senate.

Olsen is an Uber executive with experience in the Justice Department. He has served as director of the National Counterterrorism Center and as general counsel for the National Security Agency. Demers had remained in place while Olsen awaits a confirmation hearing.

Sherpa guide uses savings to help colleagues during pandemic

By BINAJ GURUBACHARYA Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — The scenic Himalayan mountain trails that normally draw throngs of foreign trekkers to Nepal have been empty for more than a year, with most of the country's tourism industry still shut down by the pandemic.

That means tens of thousands of Sherpa guides have been left without the work they depend on to feed their families. Ang Phurba Sherpa has been trying to help those struggling the most and hoping to inspire others to do the same.

Sherpa has been loading his truck with sacks of rice, lentils, cooking oil and other staples he has bought with his own money and delivering the goods to dozens of families in Kathmandu.

"I am trying to help in any way I can because I thought I should give to our community so that guides who are staying idle are getting some help," Sherpa said, adding that he hopes others will join him.

Nepal normally has two trekking seasons each year — spring and autumn — when the majority of foreigners come to hike the trails that cut through the country's snow-capped peaks.

About 171,000 visitors went trekking in 2019 spending days hiking, eating in cafes, staying in inns and buying gear and equipment. In 2020 and again this year there were hardly any.

While Nepal reopened to tourists in March, only a few hundred foreigners have come and that's is not to trek but to climb the country's famed peaks, such as Mount Everest.

"The guides are facing lots of trouble and they are in they are in pain and I can feel the suffering," Sherpa said. "I am in a difficult situation but I want to help fellow guides and hope they too will come out to help each other."

That has been made worse by a fresh lockdown that started in April amid a new surge in virus cases.

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One of those Sherpa has helped is Kunjun Lama, who has been struggling to feed his family of six. "It has been two years and I have had not had any trekking guide work. And the worst part is there is no other work available at all right now," Lama said.

He said the rice and oil he received would help his family for a month.

As well as helping his fellow guides, for the past three months Sherpa has been taking rations to a shelter caring for 57 disabled children.

Shelter operator Dendi Sherpa said the main source of income for the facility had been his own income from guide work and without it he had been struggling to run the shelter.

"But with help like this we are able to feed the children," he said.

Jane Austen family link to abolition movement comes to light

By LYNN ELBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — While Jane Austen admirers savor the wit and romance of "Pride and Prejudice" and her other enduring novels, scholars ferret out details of Austen's life and times, including a family link to slavery that surfaced 50 years ago.

The effort to place the writer in the social and political context of her day has yielded a new and contrasting discovery: A favorite brother was part of the 19th-century abolition movement.

Devoney Looser, an Arizona State University professor and author of "The Making of Jane Austen," unearthed the Rev. Henry Thomas Austen's attendance at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, which drew some 500 delegates.

"I was stunned to find that fact," Looser said in an interview. She first detailed her research in an essay for The Times Literary Supplement.

"The family's commitments and actions changed profoundly, from known complicity in colonial slavery to previously unnoticed anti-slavery activism," Looser wrote. "Henry became a next-generation Austen publicly supporting a political commitment to abolish slavery across the globe."

Looser's essay also addresses patriarch George Austen's previously revealed ties to another family's West Indian sugar plantation, calling them "very real" but "both under-described and overstated."

The latest research was welcomed by Patricia A. Matthew, an associate professor of English at Montclair State University who focuses on literature of the period that encompasses Austen. Her courses include British abolitionist literature.

"I'm always excited about new information about the authors I teach," Matthew said. While it doesn't change her view of Austen's work — "I don't believe that I'm reading someone who's actively engaged in debates about the slave trade" — it could resound with Austen's most devoted admirers, sometimes called "Janeites."

"I think they are having a kind of reckoning in how they think about not just Austen, but the Regency period," said Matthew, referring to the British era of the early 1800s. "It raises all manner of interesting questions about how they understand this author."

The six major novels that Jane Austen wrote before her death at 41 in July 1817 are sharply observed works about human nature and relationships, not anchored in current events. There is a reference to slavery in "Mansfield Park," and a conversation between two characters in "Emma" includes mentions of abolition and the sale of "human flesh."

As for Austen's own beliefs, Looser said, "we know from her letters that she refers to having loved the writings of a prominent white abolitionist, Thomas Clarkson. So we know that she read and cared about issues of race and racial injustice."

A diary entry from another Austen brother, Francis, called it regrettable that any trace of slavery "should be found to exist in countries dependent on England, or colonised by her subjects." His opinion was not made public until the early 1900s.

Britain outlawed the slave trade in 1807 and made slavery illegal in 1833 with the exception of some territories. Subsequent legislation outlawed it entirely.

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How Looser discovered Henry's abolition activism is a scholarly detective story. In the course of her ongoing research, she found that he had billed himself as the Rev. H.T. Austen for his writing and public work. That pulled her down new paths, including his convention participation.

It was not to be found elsewhere, even in the Austen scholars' bible, "A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family: 1600 to 2000" by Deirdre Le Faye, which Looser describes as nearly 800 pages filled with "thousands and thousands of facts" about the Austens.

Looser's find coincides with a racial reappraisal that is taking place widely, including in the United Kingdom.

In April, a British media squall greeted plans to update the museum at Jane Austen's House in the town of Chawton, where she lived and wrote for about eight years and which is a magnet for Austen fans. A revamped display that will include research on her connections to slavery was denounced as a "revisionist attack" by one newspaper.

"We would like to offer reassurance that we will not, and have never had any intention to, interrogate Jane Austen, her characters or her readers for drinking tea," said a tart statement issued by Jane Austen's House — tea being a vital part of the British colonial empire.

For readers who might balk at bringing what might seem like modern issues and perspectives into consideration of Austen and her work, Looser has a ready answer.

"Issues of race, racism and racial justice are central to Jane Austen's day," she said. "So we're not bringing questions and concerns that weren't there in her time. They were absolutely there."

Biden rallies NATO support ahead of confrontation with Putin

By AAMER MADHANI, JONATHAN LEMIRE and LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — President Joe Biden used his first appearance at a NATO summit since taking office to call on Russian President Vladimir Putin to step back from provocative actions targeting the U.S. and its allies on Monday. NATO leaders joined the United States in formally accusing Moscow and Beijing of malign actions.

Biden's sharp words for Russia and his friendly interactions with NATO allies marked a sharp shift in tone from the past four years and highlighted the renewed U.S. commitment to the 30-country alliance that was frequently maligned by predecessor Donald Trump.

Biden, wearing a NATO lapel pin, said that in his extensive talks with NATO leaders about his planned meeting with Putin on Wednesday, all were supportive of his plans to press the Russian leader to halt Russian-originated cyber attacks against the West, end the violent stifling of political dissidents and stop interfering in elections outside its borders.

"I'm going to make clear to President Putin that there are areas where we can cooperate, if he chooses," Biden told reporters as he ended his day at NATO headquarters. "And if he chooses not to cooperate and acts in a way that he has in the past relative to cybersecurity and other activities, then we will respond, we will respond in kind."

Biden is on an eight-day visit to Europe in which he is seeking to rally allies to speak with a single voice on countering Russia and China.

To that end, NATO leaders on Monday declared China a constant security challenge and said the Chinese are working to undermine global order, a message in sync with Biden's pleas to confront Beijing on China's trade, military and human rights practices.

In a summit statement, the leaders said that China's goals and "assertive behavior present systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to alliance security."

The heads of state and government expressed concern about what they said were China's "coercive policies," the opaque ways it is modernizing its armed forces and its use of disinformation.

The NATO leaders also took a big swipe at Russia in their communique, deploring what they consider its aggressive military activities and its snap wargames near the borders of NATO countries as well as repeated violations of their airspace by Russian planes.

They said that Russia had ramped up "hybrid" actions against member countries by attempts to inter-

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ere in elections, by political and economic intimidation, by disinformation campaigns and "malicious cyber activities."

"Until Russia demonstrates compliance with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities, there can be no return to 'business as usual,'" they said.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is an alliance of European and North American countries formed after World War II as a bulwark against Russian aggression. The new Brussels communique states plainly that the NATO nations "will engage China with a view to defending the security interests of the alliance."

Biden arrived at the NATO summit after three days of consulting with Group of Seven allies in England, where he successfully pushed for a G-7 communique that called out forced labor practices and other human rights violations impacting Uyghur Muslims and other ethnic minorities in China's western Xinjiang province.

However, differences remain among the allies about how forcefully to criticize Beijing.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said NATO's decision to name China as a threat "shouldn't be overstated" because Beijing, like Russia, is also a partner in some areas. China is Germany's top trading partner, and she said it is important to "find the right balance."

France's President Emmanuel Macron urged the alliance not to let China distract it from what he saw as more pressing issues facing NATO, including the fight against terrorism and security issues related to Russia.

"I think it is very important not to scatter our efforts and not to have biases in our relation to China," Macron said.

The Chinese Embassy to the United Kingdom on Monday issued a statement saying the G-7 communique "deliberately slandered China and arbitrarily interfered in China's internal affairs." There was no immediate reaction from the Chinese government to the new NATO statement.

Biden arrived at his first NATO summit as president as leading members declared it a pivotal moment for an alliance beleaguered during the presidency of Trump, who questioned the relevance of the multilateral organization.

Biden sat down with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and underscored the U.S. commitment to Article 5 of the alliance charter, which spells out that an attack on any member is an attack on all and is to be met with a collective response.

"Article 5 we take as a sacred obligation," said Biden. "I want NATO to know America is there."

It was a marked contrast to the days when Trump called the alliance "obsolete" and complained that it allowed for "global freeloading" countries to spend less on military defense at the expense of the U.S.

Biden was greeted by fellow leaders with warmth and even a bit of relief.

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander de Croo said Biden's presence "emphasizes the renewal of the transatlantic partnership." De Croo said NATO allies were looking to get beyond four stormy years with Trump and infighting among member countries.

"I think now we are ready to turn the page," de Croo said.

The alliance also updated Article 5 to offer greater clarity on how the alliance should react to major cyber attacks — a matter of growing concern amid hacks targeting the U.S. government and businesses around the globe by Russia-based hackers.

Beyond extending potential use of the mutual defense clause to apply to space, the leaders also broadened the definition of what might constitute such an attack in cyberspace, in a warning to any adversary that might use constant low-level attacks as a tactic.

The organization declared in 2014 that a cyber attack could be met by a collective response by all 30 member countries, and on Monday they said that "the impact of significant malicious cumulative cyber activities might, in certain circumstances, be considered as amounting to an armed attack."

The president started his day meeting with leaders of the Baltic states on NATO's eastern flank as well as separate meetings with leaders of Poland and Romania to discuss any threat posed by Russia and the recent air piracy in Belarus.

Biden also met with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on the summit sidelines.

Biden has known Erdogan for years, but their relationship has frequently been contentious. Biden, dur-

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ing his campaign, drew ire from Turkish officials when he described Erdogan as an "autocrat." In April, Biden infuriated Ankara by declaring that the Ottoman-era mass killing and deportations of Armenians was "genocide" — a term that U.S. presidents have avoided using.

Gains for some tech giants nudge S&P to another record high

By DAMIAN J. TROISE and ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writers

Technology companies helped lift stocks higher on Wall Street, nudging the S&P 500 to its third straight all-time high, even as other parts of the market faltered.

A burst of buying in the final 10 minutes of trading sent the benchmark index 0.2% higher. The S&P 500 had been down 0.3% earlier amid another bout of choppy trading as Wall Street awaits the latest take from the Federal Reserve on inflation.

Investors are trying to gauge the strength of the economic recovery and whether emerging signs of inflation will be transitory, as the central bank believes. The Fed delivers its interest rate policy update Wednesday afternoon.

"Most of this is just positioning in front of the Fed later this week," said Willie Delwiche, investment strategist at All Star Charts. Investors are "trying to get a sense of not just what the Fed is going to say in terms of announcements, but what they expect in terms of the path of monetary policy and the economy going forward."

The S&P 500 added 7.71 points to 4,255.15. The index has notched a weekly gain three weeks in a row. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 85.85 points, or 0.2%, to 34,393.75. The Nasdaq rose 104.72 points, or 0.7%, to 14,174.14.

Small-company stocks fell. The Russell 2000 index lost 9.66 points, or 0.4%, to 2,326.15.

Among the tech sector winners Monday were Apple, which rose 2.5%, and Adobe, which gained 2.9%. Several large communications companies also made gains. Facebook rose 1.7% and Netflix gained 2.3%. Those gains offset a broad decline in financial, industrial and materials stocks, among others. JPMorgan dropped 1.7%.

Wall Street is trying to gauge the strength of the economic recovery, the impact rising inflation is having on its trajectory, and the Fed's next move.

Investors have been worried that the Fed could ease up on bond purchases and other stimulus measures as the economy recovers. No policy changes are expected immediately, but comments on a shift in policy could jostle an already skittish market.

Fed officials have maintained that any rise in inflation will be temporary as the economy recovers.

"There's still this debate on inflation and, notwithstanding what the Fed does and whether yields move down, there's still some upward pricing pressure," said Tom Martin, senior portfolio manager with Globalt Investments.

A boost in demand for goods has helped fuel a rise in the cost of everything from food to cars and household goods. Shipping costs are also rising and adding to the increase in prices. The uncertainty over inflation has been fueling much of the back-and-forth in the market between stocks that are considered safer value holdings versus those with more potential for sharp growth.

"As you go into the summer and you have uncertainty about inflation, the fed and the stimulus, you'll kind of see people neutralizing bets," Martin said.

Lordstown Motors sank 18.8% after the CEO and CFO resigned as problems mount for the startup electric truck maker.

Novavax gave up an early gain, dropping 0.9%. The vaccine maker said its COVID-19 shot was highly effective against the disease and also protected against variants in a large study in the U.S. and Mexico. The company is facing raw-material shortages, though, and plans to seek authorization for the shots by the end of September.

Bond prices fell, sending yields mostly higher. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note rose to 1.50% from 1.46% late Friday.

"You don't get a message from the bond market that it's worried either about persistent inflation or about the Fed doing something dramatic in terms of not being the buyer of bonds that it has been in recent quarters," Delwiche said.

European markets were mostly higher. Several markets in Asia were closed for a holiday.

Workers push back against hospitals requiring COVID vaccines

By JUAN A. LOZANO and BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Jennifer Bridges, a registered nurse in Houston, is steadfast in her belief that it's wrong for her employer to force hospital workers like her to get vaccinated against COVID-19 or say goodbye to their jobs. But that's a losing legal argument so far.

In a stinging defeat, a federal judge bluntly ruled over the weekend that if employees of the Houston Methodist hospital system don't like it, they can go work elsewhere.

"Methodist is trying to do their business of saving lives without giving them the COVID-19 virus. It is a choice made to keep staff, patients and their families safer. Bridges can freely choose to accept or refuse a COVID-19 vaccine; however, if she refuses, she will simply need to work somewhere else," U.S. District Judge Lynn Hughes wrote in dismissing a lawsuit filed by 117 Houston Methodist workers, including Bridges, over the vaccine requirement.

The ruling Saturday in the closely watched legal case over how far health care institutions can go to protect patients and others against the coronavirus is believed to be the first of its kind in the U.S. But it won't be the end of the debate.

Bridges said she and the others will take their case to the U.S. Supreme Court if they have to: "This is only the beginning. We are going to be fighting for quite a while."

And other hospital systems around the country, including in Washington, D.C., Indiana, Maryland, Pennsylvania and most recently New York, have followed Houston Methodist and have also gotten pushback.

Legal experts say such vaccine requirements, particularly in a public health crisis, will probably continue to be upheld in court as long as employers provide reasonable exemptions, including for medical conditions or religious objections.

The Houston Methodist employees likened their situation to medical experiments performed on unwilling victims in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. The judge called that comparison "reprehensible" and said claims made in the lawsuit that the vaccines are experimental and dangerous are false.

"These folks are not being imprisoned. They're not being strapped down. They're just being asked to receive the vaccination to protect the most vulnerable in hospitals and other health care institutional settings," said Valerie Gutmann Koch, an assistant law professor at the University of Houston Law Center.

Bridges is one of 178 Houston Methodist workers who were suspended without pay on June 8 and will be fired if they don't agree by June 22 to get vaccinated.

The University of Pennsylvania Health System, the largest private employer in Philadelphia, and the NewYork-Presbyterian hospital system have likewise indicated employees who aren't fully vaccinated would lose their jobs.

Houston Methodist's decision in April made it the first major U.S. health care system to require COVID-19 vaccinations for workers. Many hospitals around the country, including Houston Methodist, already require other types of vaccines, including for the flu.

Houston Methodist's president and CEO, Marc Boom, has said nearly 25,000 of the system's more than 26,000 workers have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

"You did the right thing. You protected our patients, your colleagues, your families and our community. The science proves that the vaccines are not only safe but necessary if we are going to turn the corner against COVID-19," Boom said in a statement to employees.

But Bridges, 39, and Kara Shepherd, 38, another nurse who is part of the lawsuit, say they don't have confidence in the vaccine's safety. They say that they have seen patients and co-workers have severe reactions and that there is insufficient knowledge about its long-term effects.

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said that while a small number of health problems have been reported, COVID-19 vaccines are safe and highly effective.

Both Bridges, who has worked 6½ years at the medical-surgical in-patient unit at Houston Methodist's hospital in the suburb of Baytown, and Shepherd, who has worked 7½ years in the labor and delivery unit at a Methodist hospital in Houston, say they are not anti-vaccine, are not conspiracy theorists and are not making a political statement.

"To me, what this ultimately boils down to is freedom," Shepherd said.

Their attorney, Jared Woodfill, said the hospital system is not allowing its workers to make their own health care decisions.

Indiana University Health, Indiana's biggest hospital system, is requiring all its employees be fully vaccinated by Sept. 1. So far, just over 60% of its 34,000 employees have been vaccinated, spokesman Jeff Swiatek said.

Some employees in Indianapolis on Saturday protested the requirement.

Kasey Ladig, an intensive care nurse and outpatient coordinator in the bone marrow transplant unit at IU Health, said she quit the job she loved the day the policy was announced.

"I would love to hear something other than, 'We trust the science,'" Ladig said. "It was a huge red flag. I didn't feel comfortable getting it."

Hospital employees and others have argued that such requirements are illegal because the COVID-19 vaccines are being dispensed under emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration and have not received final FDA approval. But Koch said emergency use does not mean people are being experimented on, and she added that FDA approval is expected.

Allison K. Hoffman, a law professor at the University of Pennsylvania, said claims made by Houston Methodist employees that they are being used as human guinea pigs or that vaccine policy violates the Nuremberg Code, a set of rules for medical experimentation that were developed in the wake of Nazi atrocities, "are bordering on absurd."

To avoid such fights, many employers are offering incentives for vaccinations.

Instead of requiring vaccines, the small health care system in Jackson, Wyoming, offered \$600 bonuses to employees who got vaccinated before the end of May. That boosted vaccinations from 73% to 82% of the 840 employees at St. John's Health, said spokeswoman Karen Connelly.

Bridges and Shepherd said that while the expected loss of their jobs has meant some financial worries, they have no regrets.

"We're all proud of our decision because we stood our ground and we didn't do something against our will just for a paycheck," Bridges said.

Southern Baptists quash expanded sex abuse probe, for now

By TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee on Monday quashed a push for an independent committee to lead a probe of its handling of sex abuse cases, but the proposal is almost certain to resurface when the nation's largest denomination holds its biggest and most contentious annual meeting in decades.

The push for accountability came after leaked letters accused current and former Executive Committee officials of slow-walking efforts to address sexual abuse and trying to intimidate those who advocated for change.

Amid calls for a third-party investigation, Executive Committee president Ronnie Floyd announced Friday that the panel had retained a firm to conduct it. But some pastors demanded an independent task force, saying they don't trust the committee to oversee an investigation of itself.

The committee voted down a proposal for such a task force that was presented Monday by member Jared Wellman during a meeting of the governing body. Wellman also was seeking to expand the scope of the probe to all paid, appointed and elected leaders, past or present.

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Speaking against the motion, member Jim Gregory said Floyd's original proposal is comprehensive enough. Otherwise, he said, "This will never end. Monetarily, where does it end?"

Still, the issue is likely to come up again Tuesday at the meeting in Nashville, which more than 17,000 voting delegates are pre-registered to attend.

"It is hard to imagine that a body of believers of the Lord Jesus would vote to limit in any way an investigation to find the truth when there are serious allegations related to sexual abuse," Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary president Danny Akin tweeted after Monday's committee meeting. "Praying our Convention charts the right course tomorrow."

The Executive Committee takes care of SBC business between annual meetings, but during the gatherings themselves it is voting delegates from the denomination's churches that are in charge. Several people have promised to make motions similar to the one rejected by the committee, and a group of abuse survivors released a joint statement in support of the effort.

Also looming over the meeting is an effort by a group of ultraconservatives to wrest control of the denomination, calling some of its leaders too liberal on issues such as race and the role of women in ministry. Formed last year, the Conservative Baptist Network is backing one of its own as a candidate for SBC president at this year's meeting: Mike Stone, a white pastor from Georgia.

At least one prominent Black pastor has announced that he will leave the denomination if Stone is elected. Several other Black pastors have already left the SBC over what they said was racial insensitivity from the denomination's overwhelmingly white leadership.

Stone is also the immediate past chairman of the Executive Committee, where he worked to place other members of the Conservative Baptist Network in key leadership positions on his way out the door. On Monday current chairman Rolland Slade, a Black pastor from California, pushed back and was able to elect his own candidate to lead a commission on strategic planning.

Floyd alluded to the infighting and controversy surrounding this year's meeting in his address to the Executive Committee.

"We do have challenges in many areas that have led to confusion and division among some of our SBC family," he said. "It really grieves me. At the same time, I have to realize that it's expected in a community of our size and breadth."

Despite claiming 14 million members, the denomination has been shrinking for the past 14 years. Some see the need to appeal to non-white pastors and congregations as a matter of survival. The number of Black, Latino and Asian American congregations has been increasing despite the overall decline, and they now make up about 22% of congregations, Floyd said.

Kelly Miller Smith Jr., a Black pastor who spent 25 years at SBC churches and now leads a Baptist church not affiliated with the denomination, said some in leadership want Black churches but don't want to make room for other cultures.

"They really want to make Black and brown churches accommodate to their way of thinking," he said.

Extra COVID vaccine may help protect transplant patients

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

A small study offers the first hint that an extra dose of COVID-19 vaccines just might give some organ transplant recipients a needed boost in protection.

Even as most vaccinated people celebrate a return to near normalcy, millions who take immune-suppressing medicines because of transplants, cancer or other disorders remain in limbo — uncertain how protected they really are. It's simply harder for vaccines to rev up a weak immune system.

Monday's study tracked just 30 transplant patients but it's an important step toward learning if booster doses could help.

It didn't help everybody. But of the 24 patients who appeared to have no protection after the routine two vaccinations, eight of them — a third — developed some virus-fighting antibodies after an extra shot, researchers from Johns Hopkins University reported in *Annals of Internal Medicine*. And six others who'd

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had only minimal antibodies all got a big boost from the third dose.

"It's very encouraging," said Dr. Dorry Segev, a Hopkins transplant surgeon who helped lead the research. "Just because you're fully negative after two doses doesn't mean that there's no hope."

Next up: Working with the National Institutes of Health, Segev's team hopes to begin a more rigorous test of a third vaccination in 200 transplant recipients this summer.

For transplant patients, powerful immune-suppressing drugs prevent rejection of their new organs but also leave them extremely vulnerable to the coronavirus. They were excluded from initial testing of the COVID-19 vaccines, but doctors urge that they get vaccinated in hopes of at least some protection.

Some do benefit. The Hopkins team recently tested more than 650 transplant recipients and found about 54% harbored virus-fighting antibodies after two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines — although generally less than in otherwise healthy vaccinated people.

It's not just a concern after organ transplants. One study of patients with rheumatoid arthritis, lupus and other autoimmune disorders found 85% developed antibodies, said Dr. Alfred Kim of Washington University in St. Louis. But those who used particular kinds of immune-suppressing drugs produced dramatically lower levels that are a cause for concern.

"We tell our patients to act like the vaccine is not going to work as well as it does for their family and friends," said Kim, who would like to test a third dose in autoimmune patients, too. "This is very frustrating news to them."

Doctors sometimes give extra doses of other vaccines, such as the hepatitis B shot, to people with weak immune systems.

And guidelines issued in France recommend a third COVID-19 shot for certain severely immune-suppressed people, including transplant recipients, Segev noted.

The U.S. hasn't authorized extra COVID-19 vaccinations. But around the country, a growing number of immune-compromised patients are seeking third doses on their own — the people Hopkins sought to test.

In San Francisco, Gillian Ladd agreed to blood tests before and after an extra dose. The recipient of a kidney and pancreas transplant, Ladd, 48, was terrified to leave her house after learning she had no measurable antibodies despite two Pfizer shots.

With the additional dose, "I had gotten what I needed in order to survive," Ladd said, but she's still is sticking with masks and other precautions.

"I am being as careful as I possibly can while acknowledging that I'm coming back into the world of the living," she said.

Further research is needed to tell if a third dose really helps, who's the best candidate and if there are brand differences — plus whether the extra immune stimulation could increase the risk of organ rejection.

But Segev cautions boosters aren't the only possibility. In addition to antibodies, vaccinations normally spur other protections such as T cells that can fend off severe illness. He and several other research groups are testing whether immune-compromised patients get that benefit.

For now, "the best way to protect these people is for others to get vaccinated" so they're less likely to get exposed to the coronavirus, stressed Washington University's Kim.

As US COVID-19 death toll nears 600,000, racial gaps persist

By CARLA K. JOHNSON, OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ and ANGELIKI KASTANIS Associated Press

Jerry Ramos spent his final days in a California hospital, hooked to an oxygen machine with blood clots in his lungs from COVID-19, his 3-year-old daughter in his thoughts.

"I have to be here to watch my princess grow up," the Mexican American restaurant worker wrote on Facebook. "My heart feels broken into pieces."

Ramos didn't live to see it. He died Feb. 15 at age 32, becoming not just one of the nearly 600,000 Americans who have now perished in the coronavirus outbreak but another example of the outbreak's strikingly uneven and ever-shifting toll on the nation's racial and ethnic groups.

The approaching 600,000 mark, as tracked by Johns Hopkins University, is greater than the population

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of Baltimore or Milwaukee. It is about equal to the number of Americans who died of cancer in 2019. And as bad as that is, the true toll is believed to be significantly higher.

President Joe Biden acknowledged the milestone Monday during his visit to Europe, saying that while new cases and deaths are dropping dramatically in the U.S., "there's still too many lives being lost," and "now is not the time to let our guard down."

On the way to the latest round-number milestone, the virus has proved adept at exploiting inequalities in the U.S., according to an Associated Press data analysis.

In the first wave of fatalities, in April 2020, Black people were slammed, dying at rates higher than those of other ethnic or racial groups as the virus rampaged through the urban Northeast and heavily African American cities like Detroit and New Orleans.

Last summer, during a second surge, Hispanics were hit the hardest, suffering an outsize share of deaths, driven by infections in Texas and Florida. By winter, during the third and most lethal stage, the virus had gripped the entire nation, and racial gaps in weekly death rates had narrowed so much that whites were the worst off, followed closely by Hispanics.

Now, even as the outbreak ebbs and more people get vaccinated, a racial gap appears to be emerging again, with Black Americans dying at higher rates than other groups.

Overall, Black and Hispanic Americans have less access to medical care and are in poorer health, with higher rates of conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure. They are also more likely to have jobs deemed essential, less able to work from home and more likely to live in crowded, multigenerational households, where working family members are apt to expose others to the virus.

Black people account for 15% of all COVID-19 deaths where race is known, while Hispanics represent 19%, whites 61% and Asian Americans 4%. Those figures are close to the groups' share of the U.S. population — Black people at 12%, Hispanics 18%, whites 60% and Asians 6% — but adjusting for age yields a clearer picture of the unequal burden.

Because Blacks and Hispanics are younger on average than whites, it would stand to reason that they would be less likely to die from a disease that has been brutal to the elderly. But that's not what is happening.

Instead, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, adjusting for population age differences, estimates that Native Americans, Latinos and Blacks are two to three times more likely than white people to die of COVID-19.

Also, the AP analysis found that Latinos are dying at much younger ages than other groups.

Thirty-seven percent of Hispanic deaths were of those under 65, versus 12% for white Americans and 30% for Black people. Hispanic people between 30 and 39 — like Ramos — have died at five times the rate of white people in the same age group.

Public health experts see these disparities as a loud message that the nation needs to address deep-rooted inequities.

"If we want to respect the dear price that 600,000 people have paid, don't return to normal. Return to something that is better than what was," said Dr. Clyde Yancy, vice dean for diversity and inclusion at Northwestern University's medical school in Chicago.

He added: "It will be an epic fail if we simply go back to whatever we call normal."

Ramos had asthma and diabetes and had quit his job as a chef at Red Lobster before the pandemic because of diabetes-related trouble with his feet.

He died during the devastating winter surge that hit Latinos hard, and the rest of his household of seven in Watsonville, an agricultural city of around 54,000 people about 90 miles south of San Francisco, also got sick.

That included his toddler daughter; the family matriarch, 70-year-old Mercedes Ramos; and his girlfriend, who was the only one in the household working and the first to get infected, bringing home the virus from her job managing a marijuana dispensary, according to family members.

Mother and son were admitted to the same hospital, their rooms nearby. They would video chat or call each other every day.

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"He would tell me he loved me very much and that he wanted me to get better and that he was doing fine, but he was telling me that so I wouldn't worry," Mercedes Ramos said in Spanish, her voice breaking. She has since returned to her job picking strawberries.

Gaps in vaccination rates in the U.S. also persist, with Blacks and Hispanics lagging behind, said Samantha Artiga of the Kaiser Family Foundation, a nonpartisan health-policy research organization.

Experts say several factors could be at work, including deep distrust of the medical establishment among Black Americans because of a history of discriminatory treatment, and fears of deportation among Latinos, as well as a language barrier in many cases.

The U.S. was averaging about 870,000 injections per day in early June, down sharply from a high of about 3.3 million a day on average in mid-April, according to the CDC.

Initial vaccine eligibility policies, set by states, favored older Americans, a group more likely to be white. Now, everyone over 12 is eligible, but obstacles remain, such as concerns about missing work because of side effects from the shot.

"Eligibility certainly does not equal access," Artiga said. "Losing a day or two of wages can have real consequences for your family. People are facing tough decisions like that."

The AP's analysis of the outbreak's racial and ethnic patterns was based on National Center for Health Statistics data on COVID-19 deaths and 2019 Census Bureau population estimates.

It's less clear who is dying now, but the still-incomplete data suggests a gap has emerged again. In Michigan, Black people are 14% of the population but accounted for 25% of the 1,064 deaths reported in the past four weeks, according to the most recent available state data. Similar gaps were seen in Florida and Pennsylvania.

"For people of color like myself, we've had deep personal experiences during the pandemic" of caring for loved ones and sometimes losing them, said Yolanda Ogbolu, a nurse researcher at the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

Ogbolu, who is Black, made herself an advocate for two relatives during their COVID-19 hospital stays: her 50-year-old police officer brother — she persuaded his doctors to treat him with the drug remdesivir — and her 59-year-old repairman uncle. She called the hospital daily during his 100-day stay.

Both survived. But Ogbolu wonders whether they would have lived if they hadn't had a nurse in the family.

"What happens when people don't have that person to push for them? What happens when you don't even speak the language?" Ogbolu said. "What happens when they don't know how to navigate the health system or what questions to ask?"

Panic attacks highlight stress at shelters for migrant kids

By JULIE WATSON, AMY TAXIN and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

Paramedics were called regularly to treat children suffering from panic attacks so severe their hands would constrict into balls and their bodies would shake. The outbursts often occurred after other children were taken away to be reunited with families, dashing the hopes of those left behind at the largest emergency shelter set up by the Biden administration to hold minors who had crossed the U.S.-Mexico border alone.

The conditions described by a federal volunteer who spent two weeks in May at the shelter at Fort Bliss Army Base in El Paso, Texas, highlight the desperation and stress of thousands of children held at unlicensed facilities, waiting to reunite with relatives.

Some had marks on their arms indicating self-harm, and federal volunteers were ordered to keep out scissors, pencils or even toothbrushes that could be used as a weapon. While girls made origami and braided friendship bracelets, a large number of the children spent the day sleeping, the volunteer said. Some had been there nearly two months.

The volunteer spoke on condition of anonymity because she was not authorized to talk publicly about what she witnessed on the base from May 12 to May 25. She said she was compelled to speak out because of the despair she observed. Much of what she described mirrored what advocates who visited the shelter recently recounted to The Associated Press and what children there told them.

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The conditions raise concerns about why it is taking more than a month on average to release the children when most have family in the United States. More staffing has been added since the emergency shelters were opened this spring amid an unprecedented arrival of migrant children, and the flows have subsided.

"I think there is a general consensus that no child should be in these emergency shelters for more than two weeks," said Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, policy counsel for the advocacy group American Immigration Council.

Lawyers and advocates question why most of the children are at unlicensed shelters.

As of May 31, nearly 9,000 children were kept at unlicensed sites, compared with 7,200 at licensed shelters, court filings by the U.S. government said. While the unlicensed facilities were running at near capacity in May, the licensed facilities were only about half full, according to a report filed by the agency tasked with the children's care.

Advocates say the government should be pouring more resources into the safe release of children, and those without relatives or a family friend, known as a sponsor, should be immediately going to licensed facilities that are required to have a care worker for every eight children during the day and a mental health clinician per every 12 children.

The volunteer was one of more than 700 at the time, when Fort Bliss housed more than 4,600 children in giant, air-conditioned military tents filled with cot-style bunkbeds. The number of children there is now down by nearly half, at fewer than 2,500.

The volunteer said she met children who had been there 54 days. She saw bubbly girls grow angry and quiet and sleep so much they had to be woken to eat.

Several had panic attacks after seeing friends leave to join their families. One day, ambulances were called four times, the volunteer said.

"Paramedics would come into the tent and take them away on a stretcher because their hands would constrict up, their heads would sometimes go to one side, and their limbs would shake and it was obvious that it was very uncontrolled," she said.

The children could call their families twice a week.

An official from the Department of Health and Human Services did not comment specifically on the allegations regarding first responders treating children suffering from panic attacks and other concerns about the minors' safety, but said the administration was working on expanding indoor recreation space, mental health support, wellness activities and educational services. The official said mental health services and counseling are available to everyone at the emergency facilities.

The record arrivals of migrant children have tested the Biden administration, with the U.S. government picking up nearly 60,000 children traveling without their parents across the Mexican border from February to May.

The government's goal is to unite every child safely and swiftly with their parents or sponsors, but it takes time to do the extensive screening that includes interviews, background checks and sometimes home visits, the government official said.

The administration has maintained it followed best practices when it opened 14 emergency intake sites this spring to respond quickly to overcrowding at Customs and Border Protection facilities, and said improvements are being made constantly.

They include the addition of virtual case managers to assist staff on the ground to expedite the release of children, and efforts to identify complicated cases or children without relatives or sponsors to move them to licensed facilities.

The number of children in the shelters has dropped from a high of more than 23,000 to 16,000. Four emergency shelters have closed, while two more are slated to close soon.

The government is no longer anticipating Fort Bliss will need to expand to 10,000 beds, the official said.

Attorneys and advocates say the Fort Bliss shelter should be shuttered as soon as possible.

Advocates say better options are being underutilized like the convention center in Long Beach, California, where immigration attorneys meet with children regularly, and musical performers and yoga instructors have been invited in.

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A Pomona, California, facility is housing about 500 children but has space for more than 2,000. It has consistently met its goal of reunifying 20% of the children by the end of each week, said Lindsay Toczykowski, executive director of Immigrant Defenders Law Center in California.

"One of the questions I have is why are children continuing to be held in places like Fort Bliss, where conditions are being reported as so dire, when there are places like Pomona?" she said.

The government said every shelter offers mental health care, and it has added more behavioral health, spiritual and educational services, including at Fort Bliss, which also opened more indoor recreational space.

Even so, none of the emergency shelters can properly care for children with the trauma of fleeing violent homelands, said Leecia Welch, an attorney at the nonprofit National Center for Youth Law who monitors the care of immigrant children in U.S. custody to ensure the facilities adhere to conditions set out by a long-standing court settlement.

"There is not enough focus on releasing children to their families," said Welch, whose team visited Fort Bliss on June 3 and 4.

Releasing children in U.S. custody has become more critical since Texas Gov. Greg Abbott this month directed a state agency to discontinue licenses for facilities sheltering migrant children.

Advocates fear shelters could close and result in more minors in unlicensed shelters like Fort Bliss.

The volunteer said she could see the toll it was taking.

With more than 900 girls there at the time, the volunteers divided them into pods to better care for them. Her pod watched over 25 girls. Some required one-on-one supervision 24 hours a day after showing a tendency to harm themselves, she said.

Weeks after she was admitted to Fort Bliss, a shy 13-year-old girl was finally given a new pair of shoes to replace the tattered ones she wore when she left Guatemala and walked for days, the volunteer said.

When she got them, she held them to her chest, she said.

The government notified the volunteers on May 24 that they were no longer needed because the contractor had hired enough staff to have one worker for every 15 children.

"I know that this is very upsetting news to many of us and that we all have concerns about the children being treated humanely after we leave," the email stated, assuring the volunteers they would be let go gradually.

The contractor, Rapid Deployment Inc., declined to comment, referring questions to the administration.

'Freedom Day' for England pushed back 4 weeks to July 19

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson confirmed Monday that the next planned relaxation of coronavirus restrictions in England will be delayed by four weeks, until July 19, a decision he said will save thousands of lives as the government speeds up its vaccination drive.

In a press briefing, Johnson voiced his confidence that the new date for the lifting of restrictions on social contact will be the final one as the vaccination drive is accelerated to counter the delta variant that scientists reckon is between 40% and 80% more transmissible than the previous dominant strain in the U.K.

"I think it is sensible to wait just a little longer," he said. "Now is the time to ease off the accelerator, because by being cautious now we have the chance in the next four weeks to save many thousands of lives by vaccinating millions more people."

He said that by July 19, two-thirds of the adult population will have been double-vaccinated, including everyone over the age of 50, and that everyone over the age of 18 will have been offered a jab, earlier than the previous target of the month's end. The gap between the two doses for over 40s is also being reduced to eight weeks from 12 to provide the maximum protection against the variant sooner.

New analysis Monday from Public Health England showed that two doses of the main vaccines in the U.K.'s rollout are highly effective against hospitalization from the delta variant, which was first identified in India. It said the Pfizer vaccine is 96% effective against hospitalization after 2 doses while the Astra-Zeneca jab is 92% effective.

"It's unmistakably clear the vaccines are working and the sheer scale of the vaccine rollout has made

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our position incomparably better than in previous waves," Johnson said.

Under the government's plan for coming out of lockdown, all restrictions on social contact were set to be lifted next Monday. Many businesses, particularly those in hospitality and entertainment, voiced their disappointment about the delay to what had been dubbed by the British media as "Freedom Day." Composer Andrew Lloyd Webber has been particularly upset at the prospect of a delay and has said he will reopen his theaters regardless, a move that would risk him being arrested.

A delay is particularly bitter pill for nightclubs, as they have not been allowed to reopen since March 2020.

It will also likely impact how many fans are allowed into the Wimbledon tennis tournament and the European Championship soccer matches at Wembley Stadium, which will host the tournament's semi-finals and final. However, actual numbers may be higher at certain events as Johnson said the government will carry on with its test program to allow more fans into stadiums.

The Confederation of British Industry said the delay is "regrettable" but "understandable" and urged the government to provide more support to those businesses affected.

"But we must acknowledge the pain felt by businesses in hospitality, leisure and live events," said the CBI's director-general Tony Danker. "At best they're operating with reduced capacity hitting revenues, and at worst, some aren't open at all."

When Johnson first outlined the government's four-stage plan for lifting the lockdown in England in February, he set June 21 as the earliest date by which restrictions on people gathering would be lifted. However, he stressed at the time that the timetable was not carved in stone and that all the steps would be driven by "data not dates" and would seek to be "irreversible."

Though daily infections have increased threefold over the past few weeks they are still way down from the nearly 70,000 daily cases recorded in January. On Monday, the British government reported 7,742 new confirmed cases, one of the highest daily numbers since the end of February. The delta variant accounts for around 90% of all new infections. The number of people being hospitalized with the virus has edged up over recent days.

Many blame the Conservative government for the spike, saying it acted too slowly to impose the strictest quarantine requirements on everyone arriving from India, which has endured a catastrophic resurgence of the virus.

Despite the government having faced criticism for that decision, it has won plaudits for the speedy and coherent rollout of vaccines. As of Monday, around 62% of the British population had received one shot, while about 45% had got two jabs.

The rapid rollout of vaccines and a strict months-long lockdown helped drive down the number of virus-related deaths in the U.K. in recent months. Despite that, the country has recorded nearly 128,000 virus-related deaths, more than any other nation in Europe.

But infections are now going the wrong way, upending the government's plans as well as those of many businesses.

"The reality is we have marched the troops up the hill," said Howard Panter, joint CEO and creative director at theater operator Trafalgar Entertainment.

Israel OKs contentious Jerusalem march, weeks after war

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's new government on Monday approved a contentious parade by Israeli nationalists through Palestinian areas around Jerusalem's Old City, setting the stage for possible renewed confrontations just weeks after an 11-day war with Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip. Hamas called on Palestinians to "resist" the march.

The parade, scheduled for Tuesday, creates an early test for the fledgling government led by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett — a patchwork of parties that includes hard-line nationalists as well as the first Arab party to sit in a governing coalition.

Every year, Israeli ultranationalists hold the boisterous march, waving blue-and-white flags and chanting

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slogans as they march through the Old City's Damascus Gate and into the heart of the Muslim Quarter to celebrate Israel's capture of east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians consider the march a provocation.

The parade was originally scheduled for May 10. At the time, tensions already were high following weeks of clashes between Israeli police and Palestinian demonstrators around the Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of Islam's holiest sites, as well as attempts by Jewish settlers to evict dozens of Palestinians from their homes in a nearby neighborhood.

As thousands of Jewish activists began the procession, police ordered a change in the route to avoid the Damascus Gate. Hamas militants in Gaza then fired a barrage of rockets toward Jerusalem, igniting the war that took over 250 Palestinian lives and killed 13 people in Israel.

U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said U.N. officials have made clear "the need for all sides to refrain from unilateral steps and provocations, for them to exercise restraint and allow for the necessary work to be done to solidify the current cease-fire."

Omer Bar-Lev, the new Cabinet minister who oversees police, said he met with police, military and top security officials to review the plan.

"I got the impression that the police are well-prepared and a great effort is being made to preserve the delicate fabric of life and public security," Bar-Lev said.

His statement gave no details on the parade route. But Israeli media said the crowd would walk past the Damascus Gate but not enter the Muslim Quarter.

A police official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media, said about 2,000 police would be deployed.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem after the 1967 war and considers the area, home to the city's most sensitive religious sites, to be part of its capital. The competing claims to the holy city by Palestinians and Israelis lie at the heart of the conflict and have sparked many rounds of violence.

Hamas issued a statement calling on Palestinians to show "valiant resistance" to the march. It urged people to gather in the streets of the Old City and at the Al-Aqsa Mosque to "rise up in the face of the occupier and resist it by all means to stop its crimes and arrogance."

Israeli Channel 13 TV said the military was on heightened alert in the occupied West Bank and along the Gaza front to prepare for possible violence.

The military said it was "conducting ongoing situational assessments and is prepared for a variety of developments and scenarios." It said, however, there were no reinforcements of troops.

Israeli lawmakers on Sunday narrowly approved Bennett's new governing coalition, ousting Benjamin Netanyahu after 12 years in power.

On Monday, Bennett held a brief handover meeting with his predecessor, but without the formal ceremony that traditionally accompanies a change in government — a sign of Netanyahu's lingering anger and hostility toward the new government.

Bennett presides over a diverse and fragile coalition comprised of eight small and midsize parties with deep ideological differences — but promised to try to heal the divided nation. Netanyahu serves as the opposition leader.

David Bitan, a Likud lawmaker, told Kan public radio that Netanyahu did not hold a formal handover ceremony with Bennett because he feels "cheated" by the formation of the Bennett-Lapid government and "doesn't want to give even the slightest legitimacy to this matter."

The coalition includes three parties that are headed by politicians who used to be Netanyahu allies, including Bennett. Although they share Netanyahu's hard-line ideology on many issues, the three leaders clashed with the divisive former prime minister over his personality and leadership style.

Under a coalition agreement, Bennett will hold the office of premier for the first two years of the term, and then Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, the architect of the coalition, will become prime minister.

Bennett, 49, became prime minister after Sunday's 60-59 vote in Knesset, capping a chaotic parliamentary session. The motion passed after a member of the coalition was taken by ambulance from hospital

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to the parliament building to cast her vote, and despite an abstention by a coalition member from the Islamist Raam party.

Bennett faces a challenge of holding the tenuous coalition together and said he is prioritizing mending the many rifts dividing Israeli society.

US, Russia envoys discuss Iran nuclear deal ahead of summit

By DEREK GATOPOULOS Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — Delegations from Russia and the United States involved in nuclear negotiations with Iran held talks in Vienna on Monday, two days ahead of a summit meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The United States is not directly involved in the Vienna negotiations but has regular contacts with participating diplomats.

Efforts to revive a 2015 nuclear containment deal for Iran are a rare topic of collaboration between the two global adversaries.

Mikhail Ulyanov, a senior diplomat who headed the Russian delegation at the meeting in Vienna, called the talks with U.S. counterparts "fruitful."

"Our dialogue in Vienna seems to be proof that the two countries can maintain businesslike cooperation on issues of common interest, non-proliferation in this particular case," Ulyanov wrote in a tweet.

The nuclear agreement was scuppered in 2018 when the Trump administration pulled the United States out of the accord, arguing that it handed Iran too many concessions.

Diplomats from China, Germany, France, Russia, and Britain held joint talks with Iran Saturday and multiple bilateral meetings afterward at a hotel in the center of the Austrian capital.

Matthew Rojansky, director of the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute in Washington, said Russia was keen to curb some of Iran's ambitions.

"Moscow still prefers to see Tehran checked in its aspiration to develop a weapon, but is much less motivated when it comes to checking Iran's regional ambitions and its broader global misbehavior," he told the AP.

"At the same time, Russia has a balancing act to perform in Syria, where Iran's force of arms on the ground could become a problem for Russian ambitions."

The 2015 agreement was designed to keep Iran's nuclear program peaceful, imposing strict controls on uranium enrichment levels as well as the technology and facilities used for the process.

Iran stopped abiding by those limits after the U.S. withdrawal but insists it has no plan to build nuclear weapons — a claim that the U.S. and its western allies dispute. ____

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Myanmar puts Suu Kyi on trial on charges critics call bogus

By GRANT PECK Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi went on trial Monday on charges that many observers say are an attempt by the junta that deposed her to eliminate her as a political force, erase the country's democratic gains and cement the military's power.

Suu Kyi's prosecution poses yet another major setback for Myanmar, which had been making slow progress toward democracy when a February coup prevented elected lawmakers from her National League for Democracy party from taking office following last year's landslide victory.

Human Rights Watch said that the allegations being heard in a special court in the capital, Naypyitaw, are "bogus and politically motivated" with the intention of nullifying the victory and preventing Suu Kyi from running for office again.

"This trial is clearly the opening salvo in an overall strategy to neuter Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy party as a force that can challenge military rule in the future," said Phil Robertson, the organization's deputy Asia director.

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U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq, responding to a question on Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' reaction to the trial, said the U.N. position is clear: "We want her and all of the senior members of her administration to be freed."

"The secretary-general has called for and continues to call for a reversal of the Feb. 1 coup and the restoration of the legitimate government of Myanmar, of whom Aung San Suu Kyi is a member," Haq said.

The army seized power on Feb. 1 before the new lawmakers could be seated, and arrested Suu Kyi, who held the post of special counsellor, President Win Myint and other members of her government and ruling party. The Southeast Asian country went seemingly overnight from an emerging democracy to the international pariah it had been for decades while under military rule.

The army justified its coup by alleging the government failed to properly investigate accusations of voting irregularities. Since then it has said it has found evidence of fraud — an assertion contested by the independent Asian Network for Free Elections and many others. Junta officials have threatened to dissolve the National League for Democracy and any conviction for Suu Kyi could see her barred from politics.

The junta has claimed it will hold new elections within the next year or two, but the country's military has a long history of promising elections and not following through. The military ruled Myanmar for 50 years after a coup in 1962, and kept Suu Kyi under house arrest for 15 years after a failed 1988 popular uprising.

The military's latest takeover sparked nationwide protests that continue despite a violent crackdown that has killed hundreds of people. Although street demonstrations have shrunk in number and scale, the junta now faces a low-level armed insurrection by opponents in both rural and urban areas.

The trial against the 75-year-old Suu Kyi is closed, but her lawyers said at the end of the day's hearing that the prosecution began presenting its case.

Suu Kyi has been charged with illegally importing walkie-talkies for her bodyguards' use, unlicensed use of the radios and spreading information that could cause public alarm or unrest, as well as for two counts of violating the Natural Disaster Management Law for allegedly breaking pandemic restrictions during the 2020 election campaign, her lawyers said Sunday.

"All these charges should be dropped, resulting in her immediate and unconditional release," said Human Rights Watch's Robertson. "But sadly, with the restrictions on access to her lawyers, and the case being heard in front of a court that is wholly beholden to the military junta, there is little likelihood she will receive a fair trial."

Government prosecutors will have until June 28 to finish their presentation, after which Suu Kyi's defense team will have until July 26 to present its case, Khin Maung Zaw, the team's senior member, said last week. Court sessions are due to be held on Monday and Tuesday each week.

Two other more serious charges against Suu Kyi are being handled separately: one for breaching the colonial-era Official Secrets Act, which carries a maximum 14-year prison term, and another for bribery, which has a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison and a fine.

Although Suu Kyi faced her first charge just days after the February coup, she not allowed her first face-to-face meeting with her lawyers until May 24, when she made her first actual appearance in court for a pre-trial hearing. Since then, she had another brief meeting with them before seeing them in court Monday.

A photo of her May 24 appearance released by state media showed her sitting straight-backed in a small courtroom, wearing a pink face-mask, her hands folded in her lap. Alongside her were her two co-defendants, the former president as well as the former mayor of Naypyitaw, Myo Aung.

More than four months since the coup, members of the U.N. team on the ground "remain deeply concerned over the security forces' use of violence, with reports of deaths and injuries on a daily basis," deputy spokesman Haq said.

The team reports at least 861 women, children and men killed since Feb. 1, thousands more injured and 4,800 people in detention including politicians, authors, human rights defenders, teachers, health care workers, civil servants, journalists, monks, celebrities and ordinary citizens, Haq said.

The U.N. calls on security forces again "to protect civilians as widespread and systematic breaches of human rights law — such as extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, torture and ill treatment, and enforced

disappearance – continue,” Haq said.

Reality Winner, NSA contractor in leak case, out of prison

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A former government contractor who was given the longest federal prison sentence imposed for leaks to the news media has been released from prison to home confinement, a person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press on Monday.

Reality Winner, 29, has been moved to home confinement and remains in the custody of the federal Bureau of Prisons, the person said. The person could not discuss the matter publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

She pleaded guilty in 2018 to a single count of transmitting national security information. Winner was sentenced to five years and three months in prison, which prosecutors said at the time was the longest ever imposed for leaking government information to the news media.

Her release was hailed as a cause for celebration after advocates had spent years fighting for her release or a pardon. Her lawyer, Alison Grinter Allen, said in a statement that Winner and her family are working to “heal the trauma of incarceration and build back the years lost.”

She said they are “relieved and hopeful” after her release from prison.

The former Air Force translator worked as a contractor at a National Security Agency office in Augusta, Georgia, when she printed a classified report and left the building with it tucked into her pantyhose. Winner told the FBI she mailed the document to an online news outlet.

Authorities never identified the news organization. But the Justice Department announced Winner’s June 2017 arrest the same day The Intercept reported on a secret NSA document. It detailed Russian government efforts to penetrate a Florida-based supplier of voting software and the accounts of election officials ahead of the 2016 presidential election. The NSA report was dated May 5, the same as the document Winner had leaked.

At the time of her sentencing, Winner was given credit for more than a year she spent in jail while the case was pending in U.S. District Court. She was sent to home confinement just a few months ahead of her release date of Nov. 23, according to the Bureau of Prisons.

“My actions were a cruel betrayal of my nation’s trust in me,” Winner told the judge at her sentencing in August, 2018.

Previously, Winner had unsuccessfully tried to shorten her sentence by seeking a pardon from President Donald Trump — whom she had once mocked on social media as a “soulless ginger orangutan” — and by arguing she had health conditions that made her more vulnerable to COVID-19 infection. Her sister said last July that Winner tested positive for the coronavirus but didn’t show symptoms.

Lochte fails to advance in 200 free prelims at US trials

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Olympic champion Ryan Lochte failed to advance from the preliminaries of the 200-meter freestyle on Monday, his first event of the U.S. Olympic swimming trials.

The 36-year-old Lochte, attempting to make his fifth Olympic team, posted a time of 1 minute, 49.23 seconds — only good enough for 25th place overall.

The top 16 advanced to the evening semifinals, led by Kieran Smith at 1:46.54. Caeleb Dressel was second in 1:46.63.

Smith won the 400 free on Sunday to earn his first trip to the Olympics.

Lochte was also entered Monday in the 100 backstroke, but he scratched that event. Defending Olympic champion Ryan Murphy easily advanced from the preliminaries, as did 36-year-old Matt Grevers, the 2012 gold medalist.

Even though Lochte initially entered six events at the trials, it appears the 200 individual medley is the only race in which he has any realistic shot of earning a trip to Tokyo. He scratched the 400 IM on Sunday.

Lochte has won 12 Olympic medals, including six golds. Now married with two children, he hopes to

make it to one more Olympics to erase the stigma of an incident at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, where he lied about being robbed at gunpoint.

Lithuania marks 80th anniversary of Soviet mass deportations

VILNIUS, Lithuania (AP) — Flowers were laid on rusty railway tracks Monday as Lithuania marked the start of a mass deportation 80 years ago by the Soviet Union that was occupying the Baltic nation.

People who were considered opposed to Moscow or deemed counter-revolutionary elements were sent to Siberia from Lithuania and few returned. Others who owned land or houses were evicted and sent there too.

Some 280,000 people were eventually deported to the Siberian gulags, a year after Soviet troops had occupied Lithuania. Many of those sent away never returned from the long journey in the cattle wagons.

"Two evil forces — Nazi Germany and the Soviet Communist regime — had entered a secret agreement to divide Europe," President Gitanas Nausėda said during a solemn ceremony in Vilnius, on a day considered one of the darkest pages in the Baltic nation's recent history. These "regimes caused unspeakable pain and suffering."

One of those attending the ceremony Monday was deported and spent almost 11 years in Siberia. Aurelija Staponkute and her family were deported only because they had a small farm that was seized.

"We do not know what the future might bring. Whatever happens, we must protect our freedom. After all, we fought for it so hard," the 83-year-old said.

Only one-third of those deported ever returned, according to historians, and the mass deportation affected all walks of life in the Baltic nation, where it's considered a genocide by an occupying power.

The Soviet occupation of Lithuania lasted for five decades. After regaining its independence in 1991, Lithuania joined the European Union and NATO in 2004.

Novavax: Large study finds COVID-19 shot about 90% effective

By LINDA A. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

Vaccine maker Novavax said Monday its COVID-19 shot was highly effective against the disease and also protected against variants in a large study in the U.S. and Mexico, potentially offering the world yet another weapon against the virus at a time when developing countries are desperate for doses.

The two-shot vaccine was about 90% effective overall, and preliminary data showed it was safe, the American company said. That would put the vaccine about on par with Pfizer's and Moderna's.

While demand for COVID-19 shots in the U.S. has dropped off dramatically and the country has more than enough doses to go around, the need for more vaccines around the world remains critical. The Novavax vaccine, which is easy to store and transport, is expected to play an important role in boosting supplies in poor parts of the world.

That help is still months away, however. The company, which has been plagued by raw-material shortages that have hampered production, said it plans to seek authorization for the shots in the U.S., Europe and elsewhere by the end of September and will be able to produce up to 100 million doses a month by then.

"Many of our first doses will go to ... low- and middle-income countries, and that was the goal to begin with," Novavax CEO Stanley Erck said.

While more than half of the U.S. population has had at least one vaccine dose, less than 1% of people in the developing world have had one shot, according to a data collection effort run in part by the University of Oxford.

The Novavax shot stands to become the fifth Western-developed COVID-19 vaccine to win clearance. The Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines are already authorized for use in the U.S. and Europe. Europe also uses AstraZeneca's formula.

Novavax's study involved nearly 30,000 people ages 18 and up. Two-thirds received two doses of the vaccine, three weeks apart, and the rest got dummy shots. Nearly half the volunteers were Black, Hispanic,

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Asian American or Native American, and 6% of participants were in Mexico. Altogether, 37% had health problems that made them high risk, and 13% were 65 or older.

There were 77 cases of COVID-19 — 14 in the group that got the vaccine, the rest in volunteers who received the dummy shots. None in the vaccine group had moderate or severe disease, compared with 14 in the placebo group. One person in that group died.

The vaccine was similarly effective against several variants, including the one first detected in Britain that is now dominant in the U.S., and in high-risk populations, including the elderly, people with other health problems and front-line workers in hospitals and meatpacking plants.

"These consistent results provide much confidence in the use of this vaccine for the global population," said Dr. Paul Heath, director of the Vaccine Institute at the University of London and St. George's Hospital.

Side effects were mostly mild — tenderness and pain at the injection site. There were no reports of unusual blood clots or heart problems, Erck said.

A study underway in Britain is testing which of several vaccines, including Novavax's, works best as a booster shot for people who received the Pfizer or AstraZeneca formula. Industry analyst Kelechi Chikere said the Novavax shot could become a "universal booster" because of its high effectiveness and mild side effects.

Novavax reported the results in a news release and plans to publish them in a medical journal, where they will be vetted by independent experts. The Gaithersburg, Maryland-based company previously released findings from smaller studies in Britain and South Africa.

COVID-19 vaccines train the body to recognize the coronavirus, especially the spike protein that coats it, and get ready to fight the virus off. The Novavax vaccine is made with lab-grown copies of that protein. That's different from some of the other vaccines now widely used, which include genetic instructions for the body to make its own spike protein.

The Novavax vaccine can be stored in standard refrigerators, making it easier to distribute.

As for the shortages that delayed manufacturing, Erck said those were due to restrictions on shipments from other countries.

"That's opening up," he said, adding that Novavax now has weeks' worth of needed materials in its factories, up from just one week.

The company has committed to supplying 110 million doses to the U.S. over the next year and a total of 1.1 billion doses to developing countries.

In May, vaccines alliance Gavi, a leader of the U.N.-backed COVAX project to supply shots to poorer countries, announced it signed an agreement to buy 350 million doses of Novavax's formula. COVAX is facing a critical shortage of vaccines after its biggest supplier in India suspended exports until the end of the year.

Novavax has been working on developing vaccines for more than three decades but hasn't brought one to market. Its coronavirus vaccine work is partly funded by the U.S. government.

Dr. Peter English, a vaccine expert previously with the British Medical Association, called the Novavax results "excellent news." English said that because vaccine production is complicated, it's crucial to have as many shots as possible.

"Any minor imperfection in the production plant can shut down the production for days or weeks," he said in a statement. "The more different manufacturers we have producing vaccine, the more likely it is we will have availability of vaccines."

He said it was also encouraging news that Novavax would be able to adapt its vaccine to any potentially worrying variants in the future if necessary.

Ukraine leader fears US-Russia summit won't produce results

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's president says he's concerned that this week's US-Russia summit will not produce concrete results and will leave his country in an uncertain position.

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In an interview Monday with The Associated Press and other foreign news agencies, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he was disappointed that he was not able to have a meeting with President Joe Biden before Biden's Wednesday summit in Geneva with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"I believe that this would only have been a plus in the negotiating position of the U.S. President," Zelenskyy said Monday.

Ukraine is eager for strong support from the West as it faces Russia-backed separatist rebels who have taken control of a large section of the country's east.

"The No. 1 concern is that there will be no specifics," Zelenskyy said of the Geneva summit. "And the situation in Ukraine depends on this very, very much ... Everyone is afraid of solutions to the most difficult issues, final solutions."

Russia denies that it has troops in eastern Ukraine, but it sparked high anxiety this spring with exercises that placed thousands of Russian troops near the border with Ukraine's rebel-held region. Zelenskyy said although some of those forces have been pulled back, about 95,000 remain.

"The likelihood of an escalation remains," he said, claiming without proof that Russia is planning offensives to take the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, the second-largest city of Kharkiv and the major Black Sea port of Odessa.

Zelenskyy also said he wants to get a clear statement from Biden about whether he supports eventual NATO membership for Ukraine.

"I would really like to get specific — yes or no," Zelenskyy said. "I understand that this should be the agreed position of the alliance countries. Nevertheless, we must get clear dates and the likelihood of this for Ukraine."

Russia strongly opposes NATO membership for Ukraine, which would bring the alliance close to western Russia.

Biden has invited Zelenskyy to meet with him in Washington in July and the Ukrainian president said he intends to talk there about U.S. military and economic support, which Ukraine relies on.

"The United States has the opportunity to really support Ukraine economically. It's not only about money, but about investments, about the opening of various enterprises," Zelenskyy said.

ICC seeks to probe Philippines' crackdown on drug crime

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court said Monday that she has sought authorization to open an investigation into the Philippine government's deadly crackdown on drug crime.

Fatou Bensouda said that a preliminary probe she opened in February 2018 "determined that there is a reasonable basis to believe that the crime against humanity of murder has been committed" in the Philippines between July 1, 2016 and March 16, 2019, the date the Philippines withdrew from the court.

The suspected crimes happened "in the context of the government of Philippines 'war on drugs' campaign," Bensouda said in a statement.

President Rodrigo Duterte announced in March 2018 that the Philippines was withdrawing its ratification of the treaty that created the ICC. The decision came into force a year later.

But Bensouda stressed that the court still has jurisdiction over crimes that allegedly happened while the country was still a member of the court.

Bensouda, whose nine-year term as the court's chief prosecutor ends this week, said that information gathered in the preliminary probe "indicates that members of the Philippine National Police, and others acting in concert with them, have unlawfully killed between several thousand and tens of thousands of civilians during that time."

She said prosecutors also reviewed allegations of "torture and other inhumane acts, and related events" dating back to Nov. 1, 2011, "all of which we believe require investigation."

When he announced he was going to withdraw from the court, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte defended his drug crackdown, saying in a 15-page statement that it is "lawfully directed against drug lords

and pushers who have for many years destroyed the present generation, specially the youth.”
Judges at the global court have 120 days to issue a decision on the prosecutor’s request.

US Catholic bishops meet amid divisions on Communion policy

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

When U.S. Catholic bishops convene virtually for a national meeting Wednesday, they will be divided ideologically as well as physically. They’re split over whether to press ahead with an initiative that could — at least implicitly — rebuke President Joe Biden for receiving Communion while supporting abortion rights.

For a body that strives to appear unified and fraternal, it’s a highly contentious issue, testing the extent to which the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops can work constructively with the Biden administration and whether bishops heed appeals for restraint from Pope Francis and the Vatican.

“If this vote proceeds despite warnings from the Vatican and opposition from many American bishops, it will only underscore how conference leadership puts its own political priorities before church unity and the pastoral model of Pope Francis,” said John Gehring, Catholic program director at the Washington-based clergy network Faith in Public Life.

At stake during the three-day meeting is a proposal that the USCCB’s doctrine committee draft a statement on the meaning of Communion in the life of the Church that would be submitted for a vote at a future meeting. Conservative bishops pushing for such a statement want it to signal to Biden and other Catholic politicians that support of abortion rights should disqualify them from receiving Communion.

“There is danger to one’s soul if he or she receives the body and blood of our Lord in an unworthy manner,” Archbishop Samuel Aquila of Denver, one of those advocating for action, asserted recently. He targeted his warning at “those in prominent positions who reject fundamental teachings of the Church and insist that they be allowed to receive Communion.”

Yet among the 273 active bishops in the U.S., there are scores who oppose any swift or aggressive action on the issue.

Nearly 70 of them, including several cardinals, last month signed a letter to USCCB president and Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez urging him to delay the discussion until the bishops may convene in person. Citing an appeal from the Vatican to proceed carefully and collegially, the letter said bishops should first hold discussions in regional gatherings.

However, Gomez confirmed in a memo May 22 that the topic would be on the national meeting’s agenda.

The bishops requesting a delay included Cardinal Wilton Gregory, the archbishop of Washington, who has made clear that Biden is welcome to receive Communion at his archdiocese’s churches. Even bishops pushing for a sternly worded document say they’re not seeking to overrule the authority of individual bishops to set their own policies on Communion.

But the broader divide has fueled heated remarks from both sides of the issue. San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy has warned against what he called the “weaponization of the Eucharist,” while San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone has accused opponents of seeking to derail the Communion discussion with “behind-closed-doors maneuvers.”

Thomas Groome, a professor at Boston College’s School of Theology and Ministry, said some conservative bishops seem to be using Communion to score points even if they can’t impose a new national policy.

“They’re trying to embarrass President Biden, and the only person who benefits from that is Donald Trump,” Groome said. “They will contribute nothing to the faith life of their own Catholic people.”

In theory any bishop could make a motion Wednesday to remove the Communion item from the agenda, and a simple majority of votes would suffice for it to pass. But there’s been no public indication yet that such a tactic will be tried.

“All signs are the bishops won’t even pause,” said Steven Millies, associate professor of public theology at Catholic Theological Union, who views the upcoming meeting as a crossroads for the U.S. church.

“Clearly the votes are there to proceed with drafting a document,” he said via email. “Even the cautions of a (Vatican) congregation with authority over church discipline and doctrine will not stop the bishops

who prefer a culture war over Pope Francis's leadership."

Charles Camosy, a professor of theological and social ethics at Fordham University, empathized with the desire of some bishops to clarify Catholic teaching on Communion.

"If one persists in mortal sin, without confession, then one is not sufficiently united to the Church in order to take the sacrament," Camosy said via email. He predicted that any eventual USCCB document would encourage local pastors and bishops to enforce this rule, but not seek to make it mandatory.

He also suggested some bishops might want to expand the discussion beyond abortion — for example, citing acts of racism as possible grounds for exclusion from Communion.

The debate is overshadowing the rest of this week's agenda, which has been criticized by some Catholic commentators for failing to address such issues as racism, economic inequality, voting rights and climate change.

One item up for consideration is adoption of a pastoral framework for youth and young adult ministry — a timely topic given the U.S. church's struggles to ease a priest shortage by drawing more young men into seminary.

"This should seem like the most important thing in a church that has visibly lost its grip on the imaginations of most Americans, most Catholics, and practically all young people," Millies wrote. "But the U.S. bishops seem determined to keep abortion and partisan divisions front-and-center, inevitably squelching any focus on ways the church can appeal more broadly to young people."

The bishops will also vote on supporting possible sainthood for two Americans admired for wartime heroism.

Joseph Verbis Lafleur, a priest from Louisiana who served as a military chaplain during World War II, became a war prisoner and died saving fellow service members on a Japanese ship torpedoed near the Philippines.

And U.S. Merchant Marine Capt. Leonard LaRue was the commander of a ship that saved thousands of Korean refugees fleeing Chinese and North Korean forces as the Korean War began in 1950.

Biden, unlike predecessors, has maintained Putin skepticism

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — President Joe Biden frequently talks about what he sees as central in executing effective foreign policy: building personal relationships.

But unlike his four most recent White House predecessors, who made an effort to build a measure of rapport with Vladimir Putin, Biden has made clear that the virtue of fusing a personal connection might have its limits when it comes to the Russian leader.

The American president, who is set to meet with Putin face to face on Wednesday in Geneva, is mindful of Putin's ability to survive even as his country has diminished as a world economic power.

Biden has repeated an anecdote about his last meeting with Putin, 10 years ago when he was vice president and Putin was serving as prime minister. Putin had taken a break from the presidency because the Russian constitution at the time prohibited a third consecutive term, but he was still seen as Russia's most powerful leader.

Biden told biographer Evan Osnos that during that meeting in 2011, Putin showed him his ornate office in Moscow. Biden recalled poking Putin — a former KGB officer — that "it's amazing what capitalism will do."

Biden said he then turned around and standing inches from Putin said, "Mr. Prime Minister, I'm looking into your eyes, and I don't think you have a soul." Biden said Putin smiled and responded: "We understand one another."

Putin, for his part, said in an NBC News interview aired Monday that he didn't remember such an exchange. "I do not remember this particular part of our conversations," Putin said.

Biden's comment was in part a dig at former President George W. Bush, who faced ridicule after his first meeting with Putin when he claimed that he had "looked the man in the eye" and "was able to get a sense of his soul." But in replaying his decade-old exchange with Putin, Biden also has attempted to demonstrate he is clear-eyed about the Russian leader in a way his predecessors weren't.

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Biden and Putin are now meeting again, at a moment when the U.S.-Russia relationship seems to get more complicated by the day. Biden has repeatedly taken Putin to task — and levied sanctions against Russian entities and individuals in Putin's orbit — over allegations of Russian interference in the 2020 election and the hacking of federal agencies in what is known as the SolarWinds breach.

Despite the sanctions, Putin has been unmoved. Cyber attacks in the U.S. originating from Russian-based hackers in recent weeks have also impacted a major oil pipeline and the largest meat supplier in the world. Putin has denied Kremlin involvement.

Michael McFaul, a former U.S. ambassador to Russia who was with Biden for the 2011 meeting with Putin, said in an interview that Biden might have a deeper skepticism and perhaps more informed view of Putin than any of his White House predecessors.

"Biden's knowledge of the region may be better than anybody that's held the job," McFaul said. "Biden has spent time in Georgia. He spent a lot of time in Ukraine. I traveled with him to Moldova, and he's spent a lot of time in the eastern parts of the NATO alliance. He has been in those places and heard firsthand about Russian aggression and Russian threat. ... It has created a unique component of his analysis of Putin that other presidents have not had."

Indeed, as president, Biden has said he would take a far different tack in his relationship with Putin than former President Donald Trump, who showed unusual deference to Putin, and the three other past U.S. presidents, whose political lives overlapped Putin's time in power.

During his first visit of his presidency to the State Department, in February, Biden told agency employees that the days of "rolling over" for Putin were over — a not-so-thinly veiled shot at Trump. Later, in an ABC News interview, Biden answered affirmatively that Putin was "a killer."

Trump's tendency to genuflect to Putin had many in Washington openly questioning whether the Russians had something embarrassing on the real estate mogul. Both Trump and Putin publicly denied the speculation.

Trump repeatedly tried to scotch the widespread contention — underscored by U.S. intelligence findings — that Russia interfered in the 2016 U.S. election. Asked at their joint news conference at the end of their 2018 summit in Helsinki, Finland, whom he believed — U.S. intelligence or Putin — Trump demurred.

The White House said that Biden would not hold a joint news conference with Putin, but would speak to media on his own after Wednesday's meeting. Administration officials say that Biden doesn't want to elevate Putin. Asked Sunday why years of U.S. sanctions haven't changed Putin's behavior, Biden laughed and responded: "He's Vladimir Putin."

Barack Obama came into office seeking a reset of the U.S.-Russia relationship, an effort to improve relations with Russian leadership and find areas of common interest.

Before his visit to Moscow early in his first term Obama spoke dismissively of Putin, saying the then-prime minister had "one foot in the old ways of doing business and one foot in the new." But after meeting face-to-face during the trip, Obama pronounced he was "very convinced the prime minister is a man of today and he's got his eyes firmly on the future."

That feeling didn't last.

By the time Obama and Putin met on the sidelines of the 2013 Group of Eight summit in Northern Ireland, the reset effort was on life support.

At the time, G-8 leaders were unsuccessfully pressing Putin to join a call for Syrian President Bashar Assad to step down. Former U.S. National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden had been allowed to stay in Russia after releasing highly classified American intelligence.

Obama and Putin's disdain for each other was palpable. During a photo opportunity before the press in Northern Ireland, they sat grim faced and avoided looking at each other.

In 2014, after Russia invaded neighboring Ukraine, any vapor of hope for a reset had evaporated.

George W. Bush tried mightily to charm Putin, hosting him at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, and bringing him to his father's estate in Kennebunkport, Maine, where the 43rd and 41st presidents took the Russian president fishing.

But Putin ultimately flummoxed Bush and the relationship was badly damaged after Russia's 2008 invasion

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of its neighbor Georgia after Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili ordered his troops into the breakaway region of South Ossetia.

Bill Clinton was the first U.S. president to deal with Putin, meeting him for the first time in 1999 at the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation gathering months. That was months before Putin would succeed Boris Yeltsin as president and a little over a year before the end of Clinton's presidency.

In a phone call with Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair in November 2000, Clinton called Putin "a guy with a lot of ambition for the Russians" but also expressed concern that Putin "could get squishy on democracy," according to a transcript of the call published by the Clinton Presidential Archives.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters last week that Biden has known Putin for a long time and "never held back" on voicing his concerns.

"This is not about friendship. It's not about trust," Psaki said. "It's about what's in the interest of the United States. And, in our view, that is moving toward a more stable and predictable relationship."

Biden has managed several complicated relationships with foreign leaders during his nearly 50 years in national politics. He's developed a rapport with China's Xi Jinping — spending days traveling with Xi in the U.S. and China. Biden in recent days has told aides that his relationship with Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan has remained strong despite differences over U.S. support for Kurds in northwest Syria and Biden disparaging Erdogan as an autocrat.

But Putin has left Biden with fundamentally more difficult problems that personal diplomacy can't fix, said Rachel Ellehuus, deputy director of the Europe, Russia and Eurasia Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"With someone like Erdogan, Xi or the North Korean (Kim Jong Un), Biden has had this sense that we have something they want," Ellehuus said. "Biden has long recognized that the only thing Putin really wants is to undermine the U.S., to divide NATO, to divide the EU. Biden knows there's little common ground to work from with Putin."

Justices defer Harvard case on race in college admissions

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With abortion and guns already on the agenda, the conservative-dominated Supreme Court is considering adding a third blockbuster issue — whether to ban consideration of race in college admissions.

The justices on Monday put off a decision about whether they will hear an appeal claiming that Harvard discriminates against Asian American applicants, in a case that could have nationwide repercussions. The court asked the Justice Department to weigh in on the case, a process that typically takes several months.

"It would be a big deal because of the nature of college admissions across the country and because of the stakes of having this issue before the Supreme Court," said Gregory Garre, who twice defended the University of Texas' admissions program before the justices.

The presence of three appointees of former President Donald Trump could prompt the court to take up the case, even though it's been only five years since its last decision in a case about affirmative action in higher education.

In that Texas case, the court reaffirmed in a 4-3 decision that colleges and universities may consider race in admissions decisions. But they must do so in a narrowly tailored way to promote diversity, the court said in a decision that rejected the discrimination claims of a white applicant. Schools also bear the burden of showing why their consideration of race is appropriate.

Two members of that four-justice majority are gone from the court. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died in September. Justice Anthony Kennedy retired in 2018.

The three dissenters in the case, Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, remain on the court. Roberts, a moderating influence on some issues, has been a steadfast vote to limit the use of race in public programs, once writing, "It is a sordid business, this divvying us up by race."

The court's willingness to jump into major cases over abortion and gun rights also appear to turn on the

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new, more conservative composition of the court because similar appeals had been turned away in the past. Like the abortion case, the Harvard case lacks a split among appellate courts that often piques the high court's interest in a case.

The Supreme Court has weighed in on college admissions several times over more than 40 years. The current dispute harks back to its first big affirmative action case in 1978, when Justice Lewis Powell set out the rationale for taking account of race even as the court barred the use of racial quotas in admissions.

In the Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, Powell approvingly cited Harvard as "an illuminating example" of a college that takes "race into account in achieving the educational diversity valued by the First Amendment."

Twenty-five years later, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor likewise invoked the Harvard plan in her opinion upholding the University of Michigan's law school admissions program.

Now it's Harvard program in the crosshairs of opponents of race-based affirmative action.

The challenge to Harvard is led by Edward Blum and his Students for Fair Admissions. Blum has worked for years to rid college admissions of racial considerations.

The group claims that Harvard imposes a "racial penalty" on Asian American applicants by systematically scoring them lower in some categories than other applicants and awarding "massive preferences" to Black and Hispanic applicants.

Harvard flatly denies that it discriminates against Asian American applicants and says its consideration of race is limited, pointing out that lower courts agreed with the university.

In November, the federal appeals court in Boston ruled that Harvard looked at race in a limited way in line with Supreme Court precedents.

The class that just finished its freshman year is roughly one-quarter Asian American, 15% Black and 13% Hispanic, Harvard says on its website. "If Harvard were to abandon race-conscious admissions, African-American and Hispanic representation would decline by nearly half," the school told the court in urging it to stay out of the case.

The Trump administration backed Blum's case against Harvard and also filed its own lawsuit alleging discrimination against Asian Americans and whites at Yale.

The Biden administration already has dropped the Yale suit and almost certainly will take Harvard's side at the Supreme Court if the case goes forward.

The lead attorney on the appeal is William Consovoy, who also represented Trump in his unsuccessful bid to shield his tax returns from the Manhattan district attorney.

When the court upheld the Michigan's law school program in Grutter v. Bollinger in 2003, O'Connor took note of the quarter-century that had passed since the Bakke decision.

"We expect that 25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest approved today," O'Connor wrote.

O'Connor's timeline set 2028 as a potential endpoint for racial preferences. A more conservative court than the one on which she served could advance that expiration date by several years.

Thinner Mints: Girl Scouts have millions of unsold cookies

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

The Girl Scouts have an unusual problem this year: 15 million boxes of unsold cookies.

The 109-year-old organization says the coronavirus — not thinner demand for Thin Mints — is the main culprit. As the pandemic wore into the spring selling season, many troops nixed their traditional cookie booths for safety reasons.

"This is unfortunate, but given this is a girl-driven program and the majority of cookies are sold in-person, it was to be expected," said Kelly Parisi, a spokeswoman for Girl Scouts of the USA.

The impact will be felt by local councils and troops, who depend on the cookie sales to fund programming, travel, camps and other activities. The Girl Scouts normally sell around 200 million boxes of cookies per year, or around \$800 million worth.

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Rebecca Latham, the CEO of Girl Scouts of New Mexico Trails, said her council had 22,000 boxes left over at the end of the selling season in late spring, even though girls tried innovative selling methods like drive-thru booths and contact-free delivery.

Latham said troops in her area sold 805,000 boxes of cookies last year; this year, they sold just under 600,000. That shortfall means the council may not be able to invest in infrastructure improvements at its camps or fill some staff positions, she said.

The council is now encouraging people to buy boxes online through its Hometown Heroes program, which distributes cookies to health care workers, firefighters and others. It also organized one-day sales with organizations like the New Mexico United soccer team, to whittle the total down further.

Parisi said Girl Scouts of the USA did forecast lower sales this year due to the pandemic. But coronavirus restrictions were constantly shifting, and the cookie orders placed by its 111 local councils with bakers last fall were still too optimistic.

By early spring, when troops usually set up booths to sell cookies in person, U.S. coronavirus cases were still near their peak. Hundreds of girls opted not to sell cookies in person. Online sales and even a delivery partnership with Grubhub failed to make up the difference.

As a result, around 15 million boxes of cookies were left over as the cookie season wound down. Most — around 12 million boxes — remain with the two bakers, Louisville, Kentucky-based Little Brownie Bakers and Brownsburg, Indiana-based ABC Bakers. Another 3 million boxes are in the hands of the Girl Scout councils, which are scrambling to sell or donate them. The cookies have a 12-month shelf life.

It's unclear how much of a financial hit the Girl Scouts suffered because of the decline in sales since the organization won't reveal those figures. And it isn't the biggest blow the cookie program has ever faced. That likely came during World War II, when the Girl Scouts were forced to shift from selling cookies to calendars because of wartime shortages of sugar, butter and flour.

But the glut of cookies has laid bare some simmering issues within the Girl Scouts' ranks. Some local leaders say this year's slower sales should have been better predicted because falling membership was threatening cookie sales even before the pandemic began. Around 1.7 million girls were enrolled in Girl Scouts in 2019, down almost 30% from 2009.

"Without girls, there is no cookie program. Unfortunately, it took a global pandemic to bring all the problems to the surface," said Agenia Clark, president and CEO of Girl Scouts of Middle Tennessee, a local council.

Clark and some other local leaders were able to avert a cookie stockpile because they calculated their own sales projections instead of relying on guidance from the national office. Clark believes a new technology platform adopted by the Girl Scouts isn't adequately forecasting membership declines and their impact. In April, she sued the Girl Scouts of the USA because she doesn't want to her council to be forced to use that platform.

Parisi acknowledged that membership fell during the pandemic as troops struggled to figure out ways to meet safely. But those numbers are already rebounding, she said.

There were other reasons for the declining sales. Some local leaders say they might have sold cookies this year but chose not to because of an Associated Press story linking child labor to the palm oil that is used to make Girl Scout cookies.

Gina Verdibello, a troop leader in Jersey City, New Jersey, said her 21-member troop, which has girls ranging in age from 10 to 15, decided to boycott this year's cookie program and held a protest at their city hall. Verdibello said she knows of at least a dozen other troops that opted not to sell because of the palm oil issue.

"We want to sell cookies. It's part of our thing. But this is putting kind of a damper on it," said Verdibello, whose troop has continued to fund activities with donations from people who heard about their boycott.

Parisi said such boycotts weren't widespread. But she said the Girl Scouts are working with the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, a nonprofit group that sets environmental and social standards for the industry, to ensure farmers are meeting those standards.

In the end, local councils won't be held financially responsible for the 12 million boxes that remain at

the two bakers. Little Brownie Bakers and ABC Bakers said they are working with the Girl Scouts to sell or donate cookies to places like food banks and the military. The bakers can't sell directly to grocers because that might diminish the importance of the annual cookie sales. But they may sell to institutional buyers like prisons.

Parisi said bakers and councils have occasionally dealt with excess inventory before because of weather events like ice storms or tornadoes. But this level is unprecedented.

She said some pivots, like the partnership with Grubhub, are likely here to stay. But girls are also eager to get back to their booths next year.

"Girl Scout cookie season isn't just when you get to buy cookies," she said. "It's interacting with the girls. It's Americana."

High court rejects 2 Virginia white nationalist rally cases

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is leaving in place the convictions of two men who as members of a white supremacist group participated in a white nationalist rally in Virginia in 2017 that turned violent.

The high court said Monday that it would not take the case of Michael Miselis or Benjamin Daley, who participated in the rally as members of the "Rise Above Movement," or "RAM." Both pleaded guilty to federal rioting charges in connection with the Virginia rally.

As is typical, the high court didn't comment in turning away their cases.

Miselis and Daley admitted they punched and kicked demonstrators who showed up to protest against white nationalists during the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville in August 2017. One person died after a car plowed into a crowd of people peacefully protesting the rally. Shortly after, a Virginia State Police helicopter that officials said was assisting with the rally crashed, killing the pilot and a trooper.

Miselis and Daley had challenged their convictions by arguing that the Anti-Riot Act, a law they pleaded guilty to violating, is overbroad under the First Amendment's free speech clause. A federal appeals court had ruled against them.

Daley was sentenced to 37 months in prison. Miselis was sentenced to 27 months.

Many Iranians fear vote will underscore their powerlessness

By MOHAMMAD NASIRI Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iranians this week are preparing to vote in — or perhaps to boycott — a presidential election that many fear will only underscore their powerlessness to shape the country's fate.

Hopefuls are running to replace the term-limited President Hassan Rouhani, whose promises of a bright economic future withered as Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers collapsed. The backlash of disappointment in Rouhani's relatively moderate administration has given hard-liners an edge this time, analysts say, even as the U.S. and Iran now negotiate a return to the landmark accord.

Iran's clerical vetting committee has allowed just seven candidates on Friday's ballot, nixing prominent reformists and key Rouhani allies. The presumed front-runner has become Ebrahim Raisi, the country's hard-line judiciary chief who's closely aligned with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

As Iran reels from the coronavirus pandemic, global isolation, sweeping U.S. sanctions and runaway inflation, the mood among potential voters appears to be one of apathy. Tehran, the vast and churning capital, has been eerily quiet in the days leading up to the poll, with some Raisi campaign posters scattered around the city and none of the huge rallies that drew roaring crowds to the streets during past election seasons.

With just a few days to go until the vote, The Associated Press spoke to Tehran residents about their hopes and fears. Few expect the vote to ease the nation's sense of crisis. Some say they'll vote for Raisi, known for his televised anti-corruption campaign, to protest Rouhani's failures. Others are undecided or plan to boycott the vote, saying they have no trust in the government to improve their lives.

"I've watched the presidential debates but didn't see any of them offer real solutions," said 30-year-old Masoumeh Eftekhari, six months pregnant and strolling through the shop-lined promenades of Tehran's

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jam-packed Grand Bazaar. She pointed with astonishment to the skyrocketing prices of baby clothes. "It disappoints me, so I cannot say which candidate is my favorite. At the moment, none."

Consumed by fear of future economic decline, Fatemeh Rekabi, a 29-year-old accountant, also believes there's no candidate worth voting for.

"I don't have any trust in the candidates because I don't know what is going to happen next. What if the situation gets worse?" she asked. "Our people wouldn't survive."

Sasan Ghafouri, a 29-year-old who studied to become a lab technician but is now grinding out a living selling clothes at a Tehran mall, said he's exhausted from work and disillusioned with electoral politics that deliver nothing.

"I come here at 9 in the morning and work until 9-10 p.m., day in, day out. When I don't have any time left to have fun or study, continue my education and pursue my dreams, what is the meaning of life?" he said. "At the moment, I can't think about my dreams."

Those staking their hopes on Raisi say they're desperate for any change in their fortunes after watching their savings evaporate as the national currency, the Iranian rial, collapsed under Rouhani.

"Rouhani's administration was full of disappointment and incompetence. I deal with finances because of my job and have witnessed the adversity facing our citizens everyday," said Ali Momeni, a 37-year-old accountant at an upscale mall in west Tehran. He said he'll throw his vote behind Raisi, who he hopes will "hire a powerful team of economic advisers (to) ... improve the country's situation."

Loqman Karimi, a 50-year-old porter pushing laden carts through the narrow alleys of Tehran's Grand Bazaar, also said he'll support Raisi — not for his airy promises but for concrete things he'd already done as judiciary chief.

"Raisi reopened many bankrupt factories ... which of the previous judiciary chiefs have done such a thing? None of them had done such a good job," said Karimi. "Why should Iranian people be caught up in high prices? Why should they stand in lines to buy eggs and chicken meat?"

Although Iranians may disagree over whether and how to vote, they share a deep disenchantment with Iran's status quo — but also vast aspirations for a somehow better future.

For some, that means longing for a return to the nuclear deal, the years of optimism when Iran was a prospect for foreign investors before then-President Donald Trump withdrew America from the accord and re-imposed sweeping sanctions.

"We have reached a point now that we wish we could return to where we were five and six years ago ... even if we can't have things improved," said Nasrin Hassani, a 34-year-old dressmaker at a Tehran mall. Others regretted the disqualification of former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose tenure, although marked by sanctions, violent upheaval and economic decline, now conjures nostalgia, they said.

Regardless of the election's outcome, many said their dream was for Iran to become "a normal country," free from sanctions, fear of war and the feeling of siege. Past elections in Iran have laid the ground for diplomatic negotiations and cultural openings, but moderate politicians say that's unlikely if Raisi wins.

"I just want the next president not to mess with other countries and the other way around," said Rekabi, the young accountant. "We are really fed up. ... We don't deserve to live this difficult, listless and awful life."

Such a grim assessment already has prompted hundreds of thousands to leave the troubled country and try their luck abroad.

"Those who have the means are leaving here. Many of my friends are leaving Iran," said Hassani, the dressmaker, who's still undecided about the vote. "I just hope things will become easier so that people will want to stay."

Follow Mohammad Nasiri on Twitter at www.twitter.com/moenasiri.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined
Today in History

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Today is Tuesday, June 15, the 166th day of 2021. There are 199 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 15, 1215, England's King John put his seal to Magna Carta ("the Great Charter") at Runnymede.

On this date:

In 1775, the Second Continental Congress voted unanimously to appoint George Washington head of the Continental Army.

In 1864, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton signed an order establishing a military burial ground which became Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

In 1902, the 20th Century Limited, an express passenger train between New York and Chicago, began service. (The Limited made its last run in December 1967.)

In 1904, more than 1,000 people died when fire erupted aboard the steamboat General Slocum in New York's East River.

In 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an act making the National Guard part of the U.S. Army in the event of war or national emergency.

In 1944, American forces began their successful invasion of Saipan (sy-PAN') during World War II. B-29 Superfortresses carried out their first raids on Japan.

In 1955, the United States and Britain signed a cooperation agreement concerning atomic information for "mutual defence purposes."

In 1985, the Shiite Muslim hijackers of a TWA Boeing 727 beat and shot one of their hostages, U.S. Navy diver Robert Stethem (STEE'-them), 23, throwing him out of the plane to die on the tarmac at Beirut airport.

In 1988, the baseball romantic comedy "Bull Durham," starring Kevin Costner and Susan Sarandon, was released by Orion Pictures.

In 1991, Mount Pinatubo in the northern Philippines exploded in one of the biggest volcanic eruptions of the 20th century, killing about 800 people.

In 1996, Ella Fitzgerald, the "first lady of song," died in Beverly Hills, California, at age 79.

In 2003, with a deadline passed for Iraqis to hand in heavy weapons, U.S. forces fanned out across Iraq to seize arms and put down potential foes.

Ten years ago: Pushing back against congressional criticism, the White House said that President Barack Obama had the authority to continue U.S. military action in Libya even without authorization from lawmakers on Capitol Hill. Arizona Rep. Gabrielle Giffords was released from a Houston hospital, five months after being shot in the head during a Tucson political event. The Boston Bruins won the Stanley Cup for the first time since 1972, beating the Vancouver Canucks 4-0 in Game 7 of the finals; angry, drunken Vancouver fans ran wild, setting cars on fire and looting stores.

Five years ago: The interim police chief in Oakland, California, Ben Fairow, was abruptly removed after six days on the job by Mayor Libby Schaaf, who said she had lost confidence in Fairow's ability to lead the department amid a widening sex scandal in which a number of officers allegedly had sex with a teenage prostitute. A public funeral was held in Detroit for hockey legend Gordie Howe, who had died five days earlier at age 88.

One year ago: The Supreme Court, in a 6-3 decision, ruled that a landmark civil rights law protects gay, lesbian and transgender people from discrimination in employment. European countries reopened borders after a three-month coronavirus shutdown; international visitors were still kept away. U.S. regulators revoked emergency authorization for malaria drugs promoted by President Donald Trump for treating COVID-19 amid evidence that they didn't work and could cause serious side effects. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said death rates for coronavirus patients with chronic illnesses were 12 times higher than for others who became infected. The Seattle City Council voted unanimously to bar police from using tear gas, pepper spray and several other crowd control devices after officers repeatedly used them on mostly peaceful demonstrators protesting racism and police brutality.

Today's Birthdays: R&B singer Ruby Nash Garnett (Ruby and the Romantics) is 87. Funk musician Leo Nocentelli (The Meters) is 75. Actor Simon Callow is 72. Singer Russell Hitchcock (Air Supply) is 72. Rock

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singer Steve Walsh is 70. Chinese President Xi Jinping (shee jihn-peeng) is 68. Actor-comedian Jim Belushi is 67. Country singer Terri Gibbs is 67. Actor Julie Hagerty is 66. Actor Polly Draper is 66. Rock musician Brad Gillis (Night Ranger) is 64. Baseball Hall of Famer Wade Boggs is 63. Actor Eileen Davidson is 62. Actor Helen Hunt is 58. Rock musician Scott Rockenfield (Queensryche) is 58. Actor Courteney Cox is 57. Country musician Tony Ardoin is 57. Country musician Michael Britt (Lonestar) is 55. Actor-rapper Ice Cube is 52. Actor Leah Remini is 51. Actor Jake Busey is 50. Actor Neil Patrick Harris is 48. Actor Greg Vaughan is 48. Actor Elizabeth Reaser is 46. Rock singer Dryden Mitchell (Alien Ant Farm) is 45. Former child actor Christopher Castile is 41. Rock musician Billy Martin (Good Charlotte) is 40. Actor Jordi Vilasuso is 40. Rock musician Wayne Sermon (Imagine Dragons) is 37. Actor Denzel Whitaker is 31. Olympic gold medal gymnast Madison Kocian is 24. Actor Sterling Jerins is 17.