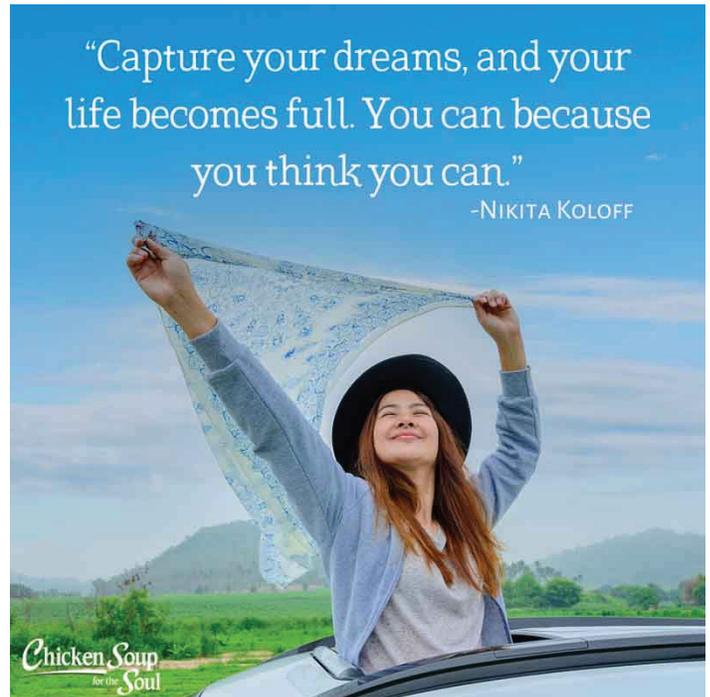


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OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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4-Hit Day For D. Leads Groton Jr Legion Past Frederick

Colby D did the opposing team no favors on Wednesday, picking up four hits over five at bats and leading Groton Jr Legion to a 22-4 win over Frederick. Colby singled in the third, singled in the fourth, singled in the fourth, and doubled in the fifth.

Frederick scored three runs in the second inning, but Groton Jr Legion still managed to pull out the victory. The big inning for Frederick came thanks to a groundout by Micah Kranzler and a fielder's choice by Brayden Sumption .

Groton Jr Legion fired up the offense in the first inning, when Braden A's sac fly scored two runs for Groton Jr Legion.

Groton Jr Legion took the lead for good with five runs in the third inning. In the third Colby singled on a 2-1 count, scoring two runs, an error scored one run for Groton Jr Legion, and Sam Vetter induced Andrew M to hit into a fielder's choice, but one run scored.

Groton Jr Legion put up ten runs in the fourth inning. Groton Jr Legion's big bats in the inning were led by singles by Colby, Andrew, and Colby, a walk by Dillon A, by Tate L, a home run by Tate, an error on a ball put in play by Cade L, and a double by Jordan B.

Dillon took the win for Groton Jr Legion. Dillon allowed one hit and zero runs over two innings, striking out four and walking one. Cole S and Ryan G entered the game out of the bullpen and helped to close out the game in relief.

Vetter took the loss for Frederick. Vetter went three and a third innings, allowing 12 runs on seven hits and striking out three.

Tate started the game for Groton Jr Legion. The righthander lasted one-third of an inning, allowing zero hits and one run

Groton Jr Legion socked one home run on the day. Tate went deep in the fourth inning.

Groton Jr Legion had 14 hits in the game. Colby, Andrew, Dillon, Jordan, and Tate all managed multiple hits for Groton Jr Legion. Colby went 4-for-5 at the plate to lead Groton Jr Legion in hits. Groton Jr Legion was sure-handed and didn't commit a single error. Cade made the most plays with nine. Andrew led Groton Jr Legion with four stolen bases, as they ran wild on the base paths with 15 stolen bases.

With Colby On The Mound, Groton Jr Legion Shuts Out Frederick

Colby D didn't allow a single run as Groton Jr Legion defeated Frederick 12-0 on Wednesday. D. allowed just one hit.

Groton Jr Legion scored six runs in the second inning. The offensive firepower by Groton Jr Legion was led by Andrew M, Tate L, Kaleb A, Braden A, and Jacob L, all driving in runs in the frame.

A single by Kodi Moser in the third inning was a positive for Frederick.

Colby led things off on the hill for Groton Jr Legion. The ace lasted three innings, allowing one hit and zero runs while striking out eight.

Groton Jr Legion had nine hits in the game. Kaleb, Braden, Andrew, and Tate all managed multiple hits for Groton Jr Legion. Tate, Andrew, Braden, and Kaleb each managed two hits to lead Groton Jr Legion.

Moser went 1-for-1 at the plate to lead Frederick in hits.

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Early Lead For Aberdeen 13s Seals Fate For Groton Jr. Teeners

Groton Jr. Teeners watched the game slip away early and couldn't recover in a 15-3 loss to Aberdeen 13s on Wednesday. Aberdeen 13s took the lead on a groundout in the first inning.

The Groton Jr. Teeners struggled to put runs on the board and had a tough time defensively containing Aberdeen 13s, giving up 15 runs.

Aberdeen 13s got things started in the first inning when Becker grounded out, scoring one run.

Groton Jr. Teeners scored three runs in the third inning. Groton Jr. Teeners's big inning was driven by an error on a ball put in play by Jarrett Erdmann and Carter Simon and a single by Nicholas Morris.

Aberdeen 13s scored seven runs in the third inning. Aberdeen 13s's big inning was driven by singles by Mike and Ridley, a sac fly by Karson, by Levi, and a groundout by Brayden.

Becker was the winning pitcher for Aberdeen 13s. The ace lasted four innings, allowing one hit and three runs while striking out five and walking one.

Taylor Diegel took the loss for Groton Jr. Teeners. The righthander went one inning, allowing three runs on zero hits and striking out one.

Morris led Groton Jr. Teeners with one hit in two at bats.

Aberdeen 13s stole 11 bases during the game as two players stole more than one. Mike led the way with three.

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Groton Legion Post #39 Downs Northville (SD), 4-1

Groton Legion Post #39 wins contest against Northville (SD) on Wednesday, 4-1

Northville (SD) fired up the offense in the second inning. Northville (SD) scored one run when Ben Fischbach singled.

Groton Legion Post #39 knotted the game up at one in the bottom of the second inning, when Peyton Johnson grounded out, scoring one run.

Groton Legion Post #39 pulled away for good with one run in the fourth inning. In the fourth Brodyn DeHoet tripled on a 2-1 count, scoring one run.

Chandler Larson pitched Groton Legion Post #39 to victory. The righthander allowed six hits and one run over seven innings, striking out six and walking one.

Ashton Remily took the loss for Northville (SD). The hurler surrendered four runs on eight hits over five innings, striking out two.

Groton Legion Post #39 saw the ball well today, racking up eight hits in the game. Darien Shabazz and DeHoet all collected multiple hits for Groton Legion Post #39. DeHoet and Shabazz all had two hits to lead Groton Legion Post #39.

Northville (SD) racked up six hits in the game. Fischbach and Kyle Stahl each racked up multiple hits for Northville (SD). Northville (SD) didn't commit a single error in the field. Stahl had the most chances in the field with seven.

Groton Legion Post #39 Stymied By Northville (SD), Lose 9-2

Groton Legion Post #39 couldn't keep up with Northville (SD) and fell 9-2 on Wednesday.

Northville (SD) got things started in the first inning. Sawyer Stroschien drove in one when Stroschien singled.

Groton Legion Post #39 knotted the game up at one in the bottom of the first inning, when Jonathan Doeden singled on the first pitch of the at bat, scoring one run.

Northville (SD) pulled away for good with four runs in the second inning. In the second Kade Stahl drew a walk, scoring one run and Kyle Stahl tripled on a 1-1 count, scoring three runs.

Josh McQuerrie was the winning pitcher for Northville (SD). The fireballer allowed five hits and two runs over five innings, striking out ten and walking one.

Pierce Kettering took the loss for Groton Legion Post #39. The pitcher allowed three hits and seven runs over four innings, striking out four.

Darien Shabazz went 2-for-3 at the plate to lead Groton Legion Post #39 in hits. Groton Legion Post #39 was sure-handed in the field and didn't commit a single error. Jackson Cogley had the most chances in the field with four.

Northville (SD) didn't commit a single error in the field. Stahl had ten chances in the field, the most on the team.

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USDA Reminds South Dakota Producers to File Crop Acreage Reports

Huron, SD – June 16, 2021 – Agricultural producers in South Dakota who have not yet completed their crop acreage reports after planting should make an appointment with their U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) office before the applicable deadline.

“Many USDA programs require producers to file an accurate crop acreage report by the applicable deadline,” said Acting SED Joseph Schultz, State Executive Director in South Dakota. “Our FSA staff can assist producers in completing acreage reports, including providing maps.”

An acreage report documents a crop grown on a farm or ranch and its intended uses. Filing an accurate and timely acreage report for all crops and land uses, including failed acreage and prevented planted acreage, can prevent the loss of benefits.

How to File a Report

Acreage Reporting dates vary by crop and by county. Contact your local FSA office for a list of acreage reporting deadlines by crop.

Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email and other digital tools. Because of the pandemic, some USDA Service Centers are open to limited visitors. Contact your Service Center to set up an in-person or phone appointment.

To file a crop acreage report, you will need to provide:

- Crop and crop type or variety.
 - Intended use of the crop.
 - Number of acres of the crop.
 - Map with approximate boundaries for the crop.
 - Planting date(s).
 - Planting pattern, when applicable.
 - Producer shares.
 - Irrigation practice(s).
 - Acreage prevented from planting, when applicable.
 - Other information as required.
- Acreage Reporting Details

The following exceptions apply to acreage reporting dates:

If the crop has not been planted by the acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed.

If a producer acquires additional acreage after the acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 30 calendar days after purchase or acquiring the lease. Appropriate documentation must be provided to the county office.

Producers should also report crop acreage they intended to plant, but due to natural disaster, were unable to plant. Prevented planting acreage must be reported on form CCC-576, Notice of Loss, no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by FSA and USDA's Risk Management Agency.

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Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP-covered crops is the earlier of the dates listed above or 15 calendar days before grazing or harvesting of the crop begins.

More Information

For questions, please contact your local FSA office. To locate your local FSA office visit farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

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#445 in a series Covid-19 Updates: by Marie Miller

It's been a while since I checked in—been busy with family things. There was a lot to catch up. As a result, this is a bit long, so I'll apologize for that up front. I'm trying to get back onto some sort of a routine now, and I hope to settle into more regular Updates from here.

That small uptick of about ten days ago seems to have leveled off; our 14-day new-case average is back where it was when that started. There are some local new-case increases that are getting sort of lost in the overall picture of decline; I'll address some of that—factors and implications—below. Hospitalizations continue to decline. Vaccinations continue to increase, but that work is going slower and slower. We've passed 600,000 deaths in the US; the interval for each new 100,000 deaths has been lengthening until it is now like what we were seeing in the earliest days. Here's the history:

May 27 – 100,000 deaths – 111 days

September 23 – 200,000 deaths – 119 days

December 14 – 300,000 deaths – 82 days

January 19 – 400,000 deaths – 36 days

February 22 – 500,000 deaths – 34 days

June 16 – 600,000 deaths – 114 days

Back up over 100 days. See? That's better, right? But it's hard to dismiss this many lives lost, however long it took to get here. Look at it this way: One in 550 Americans has died from Covid-19. That makes the Covid-19 death rate for being American—not sick, just living here—higher than the death rate for the flu. That is shameful.

On June 16, 2020, one year ago today, we had a total of 2,148,600 cases and 116,977 deaths in the US. Barely off a wave of infections in the spring and with hospitalization numbers lower than they'd been in two months, we were seeing the makings of another surge setting up for the summer, and experts were warning about this possibility. The Moderna vaccine candidate was in phase 2 clinical trials and the simultaneous animal trials (something that usually precedes human trials) were finishing up. We had evidence the candidate was not going to produce the phenomena called antibody-dependent enhancement (ADE), where antibodies actually make you sicker instead of preventing disease, or cytokine storms, those over-reactions by the immune system that can damage tissue. We were thinking this vaccine was going to be effective. The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine was entering phase 3 clinical trials. We were seeing increasing cases in college student-athletes returning to campus for summer camps. The FDA's emergency use authorization (EUA) for hydroxychloroquine was pulled on this day because the agency had concluded the drug carried risk without accompanying benefit.

Evidence of aerosol infection was gathering, as was support for distancing and masking in mitigation. We were projecting some 201,000 deaths by October 1; the actual number turned out to be just about 208,000. We still didn't see what was coming, although we were starting to get a clue. As evidence of the effectiveness of masks accumulated, airlines were moving to require them—and I was strongly suggesting you stay the hell off airplanes. Major League Baseball was still trying to find a way to have a 2020 season. The NBA finalized its plan for one. Churches continued to provide foci of infection. And scientists had solid evidence that a highly transmissible mutation called D614G had taken over from the original wild-type virus that arose in China in late 2019. That transmissibility contributed greatly to the mess we'd been in over the spring months and the mess we were about to enter in the summer, and this variant remained dominant the world over until B.1.1.7 which was first identified in the UK took over from it in late winter.

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Worldwide, we'd passed 8 million cases and were over 435,000 deaths. Latin America was blowing up, and cases were rising again in Europe and the UK. It was clear this wasn't over yet.

Back last June, only a few months into this pandemic, I discussed the nature of scientific discovery and its attendant uncertainty, saying, "something that frequently strikes me as I [look back] is how much we know now that we didn't know even a few weeks ago—and how much we thought we knew that turned out to be wrong, or at least not entirely right. This isn't a sign of anything bad going on; it's just the way science works. We start out with some ideas about a phenomenon, and then we correct and clarify and rethink as more information becomes available. The reason science is effective so much of the time is that scientists never really think anything's settled; they keep trying to understand and explain and learn more, and in the process, they get closer and closer to right as time goes on. That can be frustrating for observers because it sounds like they're always waffling; but what's really going on is they don't like to commit until they know. And knowing sometimes comes slowly." It's important to remember how this works so we don't start falling down the everyone's-lying-to-you rabbit hole.

The big news this week so far is the Novavax vaccine candidate; data are in from its almost 30,000-participant phase 3 clinical trials in the US and Mexico. This is a two-dose protein subunit vaccine, which means, instead of containing genetic information that enables your cells to produce viral spike (S) protein, it contains the actual protein itself in what they're calling recombinant nanoparticles. Because we're not going to see cells producing a supply of protein over time, the candidate also contains a saponin-based adjuvant called Matrix-M to strengthen and prolong the elicited immune response. From the trials, the news is good; the efficacy rate in developing infection at all in the trials ran at 90.4 percent, which is very good indeed. Additionally—and more importantly—its efficacy in preventing moderate or severe disease, which is where the rubber really meets the road, is 100 percent. That is remarkable. Again. I worry that labeling so many vaccines remarkable blunts the importance of this; but honestly, remarkable is the right word. The safety profile was also very good; most participants had no side effects whatsoever, and there were no signals for more serious side effects. Of course, some side effects aren't likely to turn up until many more doses are given, just as we saw with some of the other vaccines; but that would mean those particular side effects are very, very rare.

Now understand the US doesn't really need another effective vaccine; we're knee-deep in effective vaccines no one seems to want at the moment. The company is in no particular hurry to seek an emergency use authorization (EUA) from our FDA; they say they'll probably wait until the end of September. And the agency may tell them to just hold off until they can apply for a Biologics License, that is, full approval, a several-month process; the law does not permit adding more vaccines under an emergency authorization once the supply is sufficient. In fact, Ocugen had been looking for EUA for its candidate, Covaxin, and the FDA recommended they wait until they were ready to request a Biologics License. Because Novavax had been in talks with the FDA before the supply was sufficient, they might have a path to seek EUA at the present time, but we'll see how that plays out in the real world.

Novavax does have applications pending in the UK, the EU, India, and Korea. I see this candidate's potential role in the US more likely as a booster, should we need one as time goes on. A protein vaccine might be a good choice for that purpose, especially another year or so down the road.

Several months ago the candidate showed very high efficacy against D614G, the earlier-predominant variant and slightly lower efficacy against B.1.1.7 (Alpha, the variant first identified in the UK). It was a whole lot less effective against B.1.351 (Beta, the variant first identified in South Africa); but that was a very small trial, and many of the participants had HIV which really seriously complicates assessment of those data. Had the trial been larger, it might have been possible to tease out the differential between

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HIV-infected and noninfected participants; but it wasn't larger, so we're left to wonder. The larger phase 3 trials now being reported out were delayed by manufacturing difficulties, and so we have a candidate that is more likely to be useful in other countries than in the US where other vaccines hit the market first. That's OK: We're not the only place in the world, and more vaccines on the world scene is better. And the company appears to be poised to deliver some 1.1 billion doses to middle- and low-income countries over the next few months—100 million doses per month by the end of the third quarter and 150 million per month by the end of the year. That is a very good thing. And this is a very good vaccine.

On the other hand, the news from the preliminary data read-out in the 40,000-participant CureVac clinical trial in Latin America and Europe is not so great. We talked just a couple of weeks ago about the fact that this read-out was done, but did not have the actual data at that time. We do now, and the efficacy is looking to be just south of 50 percent, which is pretty low. You may recall this is another mRNA candidate, and so in comparison to the two vaccines currently on the market, this one looks particularly weak. There's been some speculation these disappointing results are due to the panoply of variants the candidate faces; there were cases caused by 13 different variants in the trial, only one of which was from the original virus. Without a breakdown of cases and severity, it isn't possible to assess the likelihood variants do explain what we're seeing, and we don't have that yet. Another concern is that the company indicated the vaccine does not perform the same in all age groups, which leads one to wonder whether it is effective in older individuals, a key demographic. Another possible contributor to the difference between these results and what we saw with the other two mRNA vaccines is that CureVac did not modify the RNA; that modification appears to have been important to the immunogenicity of the other two. I'll be interested to see how this one performs in terms of preventing severe disease, hospitalization, and deaths; we've discussed before that there is where the real value in vaccines comes. We'll keep an eye on this one.

Pfizer, whose vaccine is approved for use in those aged 12 and over, is engaged in phase 2/3 trials in younger children with varying dosages. While 30 micrograms has been the standard dose, they are looking at 10 micrograms in children 5 to 11 and 3 micrograms in 6 months to 5 years based on the results of their phase 1 work in these age groups. The phase 2/3 trials will involve 4500 children in the US, Finland, Poland, and Spain.

We're now up to 14 states who have reached the 70 percent vaccination goal; these are Hawaii, *Washington, California, *New Mexico, *Maine, *Vermont, *New Hampshire, *New York, *Massachusetts, *Connecticut, *Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, *New Jersey, and *Maryland, as well as the District of Columbia. Those with asterisks have also fully vaccinated at least 50 percent of residents, as has Oregon which has given at least one dose to just 68 percent. Ten states, all in the South (Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, West Virginia, and Georgia) and the rural West (Idaho, Wyoming, and Utah), have fewer than 35 percent fully immunized. We have 52.6 percent of the overall population, some 174 million people, and 64.4 percent of adults who have received at least one dose of vaccine, and 43.9 percent, almost 145 million, who are fully vaccinated. I do not see us reaching 70 percent of adults by July 4—or maybe ever, really. I know there are some folks who are still trying to figure out how to fit vaccination—and the possible side effects—around jobs that maybe don't allow for sick time or lives that don't allow for running hither and yon after a shot; but I fail to understand why so many others are simply choosing not to protect themselves or anyone else either. I don't expect understanding will come any sooner than full vaccination will. Sigh.

We have a study published last week in Nature from a team at Technion-Israel Institute of Technology and KSM, the Maccabi Research and Innovation Center, in Israel which looked at vaccination and Covid-19 case reporting between December 6, 2020, and March 9, 2021. For each of 177 communities, they looked at the proportion of adults from 16 to 50 who were vaccinated and the percentage of Covid-19 tests in

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children under 16 which were positive. There was a relationship: The more adults who were vaccinated in a community, the smaller the share of children tested positive. This provides further support for the value of vaccines in reducing transmission in vaccinated individuals. The New York Times described the findings this way: "For every 20 percentage point increase in the share of 16- to 50-year-olds who were vaccinated in a community, the researchers found, the share of unvaccinated under 16s who tested positive for the virus fell by half." That's a pretty big deal.

Public Health England (PHE) has published a study of the effectiveness of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine against variant B.1.617.2 or Delta, the variant first identified in India. We know Delta is a great deal more transmissible than B.1.1.7 or Alpha, the variant first identified in the UK, which is a great deal more transmissible than D614G, the variant Alpha replaced across the world. In addition to the enhanced transmissibility, new Scottish study involving 5.4 million cases shows this variant approximately doubles your risk of hospitalization. Further evidence from China leads us to think this variant makes people sicker and does it faster than prior variants; they may also stay sick longer. That's a very worrisome situation. The PHE study shows vaccine works against it very well, showing 96 percent effectiveness against hospitalization with Delta in the 14,019 cases studied. The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is 92 percent effective against hospitalization with the same variant. Good news for sure.

And it's good news we're likely to need because the variant's incidence is growing by leaps and bounds here in the US, and it has now been reclassified as a variant of concern by the CDC, a step up from its previous variant-of-interest label. The only states which have not yet reported cases are Hawaii and South Dakota; but I don't expect that will hold. Delta now accounts for around 10 percent of infections here and is doubling every two weeks, so we're going to have the opportunity to check out real world effectiveness of our vaccines against it in this country very soon. Experts are quite sure it will take over here as B.1.1.7 did this spring. Note that we've followed the UK pretty closely in terms of variant prevalence, and right now something like 91 percent of the UK's cases are from Delta.

We're also going to have the opportunity in the US to see the difference between vaccinated parts of the country and unvaccinated ones; something this easily transmitted will certainly find its way to an unvaccinated person near you. Letting virus circulate will also prime the pump for the emergence of even more new variants, and one of these days, we may well be reporting that the vaccines do not cover the latest one, thanks to the refuseniks.

This isn't just crazy talk either: A Washington Post analysis has given us the unsurprising news that "[s]tates with higher vaccination rates now have markedly fewer coronavirus cases, as infections are dropping in places where most residents have been immunized and are rising in many places where people have not." Remember above that I mentioned local increases are being masked by the overall decline in new-case numbers? Well, here it is.

The report also points out that "[s]tates with lower vaccination rates also have significantly higher hospitalization rates." The finding held when looking at local levels within a state as well as when comparing states. No one's being overwhelmed with cases at the moment, but the introduction of a dangerous new variant might just change that, especially as we abandon mitigation measures. If unvaccinated people continue to operate as if they were vaccinated (spoiler: They will) and the hot summer weather takes hold, we could see summer surges; but the surge risk is unevenly distributed across the country. I expect local hot-spots to start popping up; there have been some of these upticks in both infection rates and hospitalizations already. Stay tuned for developments.

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On the who-cares side of the ledger, we should note once again that dying isn't the only bad thing that can happen to you if you're infected. A recent study from FAIR Health, looking at close to two million people who were diagnosed with Covid-19, found almost a quarter of them had at least one post-Covid condition a month after their diagnosis. We should further note that these post-Covid conditions were found in a "substantial" number of asymptomatic cases, that is, people who never felt sick at all from the initial infection. These conditions were seen in half of patients who were hospitalized, almost 28 percent of those who were not hospitalized, and 19 percent of those with no symptoms. The most common conditions seen post-Covid included pain, breathing difficulties, high blood lipid levels, malaise and fatigue, and high blood pressure. There were a number of other symptoms reported, including some mental health conditions.

There is growing evidence there were a small number of cases of Covid-19 in the US as early as December, 2019. Nine out of 24,000 frozen blood specimens collected from early January through early March in five states show antibodies, which could mean at least some of these infections would have occurred in December; the states were Wisconsin, Illinois, Mississippi, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania. We should note that the tests used are not perfectly accurate, so there is some possibility one or more are false positives due to other coronavirus infections. The specimens are anonymized, but the participants can check a website to see the results coming from their specimens and respond to requests for further information as they wish. We know from the existing record that two of them had illnesses whose symptoms correspond to mild Covid-19; there was no information indicating the other seven had accessed health care in the relevant time period. There are plans to follow up with willing volunteers among those whose blood has been tested to discover whether they had a travel history at that time.

The earliest known cases in the US had symptom onset starting on January 14, and all of these cases had recently returned from China or were close contacts of returned travelers. We can add these new data to some other work showing antibodies in blood collected mid-December and further existing evidence we had virus circulating yet in 2019. It is becoming clearer that the policy of testing only travelers and their contacts may well have missed early cases whose detection might have changed our response.

We talked back in April about the manufacturing problems in an Emergent BioSolutions plant in Baltimore which was producing both Janssen/Johnson & Johnson and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines. Millions of doses were potentially contaminated and were pulled from the production line for testing. Apparently, that testing is concluding, and over the past week, the FDA has been releasing batches of bulk vaccine from that sequestered product, good news for the world supply. We're still looking at some 60 million doses which will be discarded. The plant itself has still not been cleared to resume production; if that ever happens, they'll be producing only the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine; the Oxford/AstraZeneca production has been moved to another site to avoid future contamination issues.

That's where things stand. Stay well. I'll be back in a few days.

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
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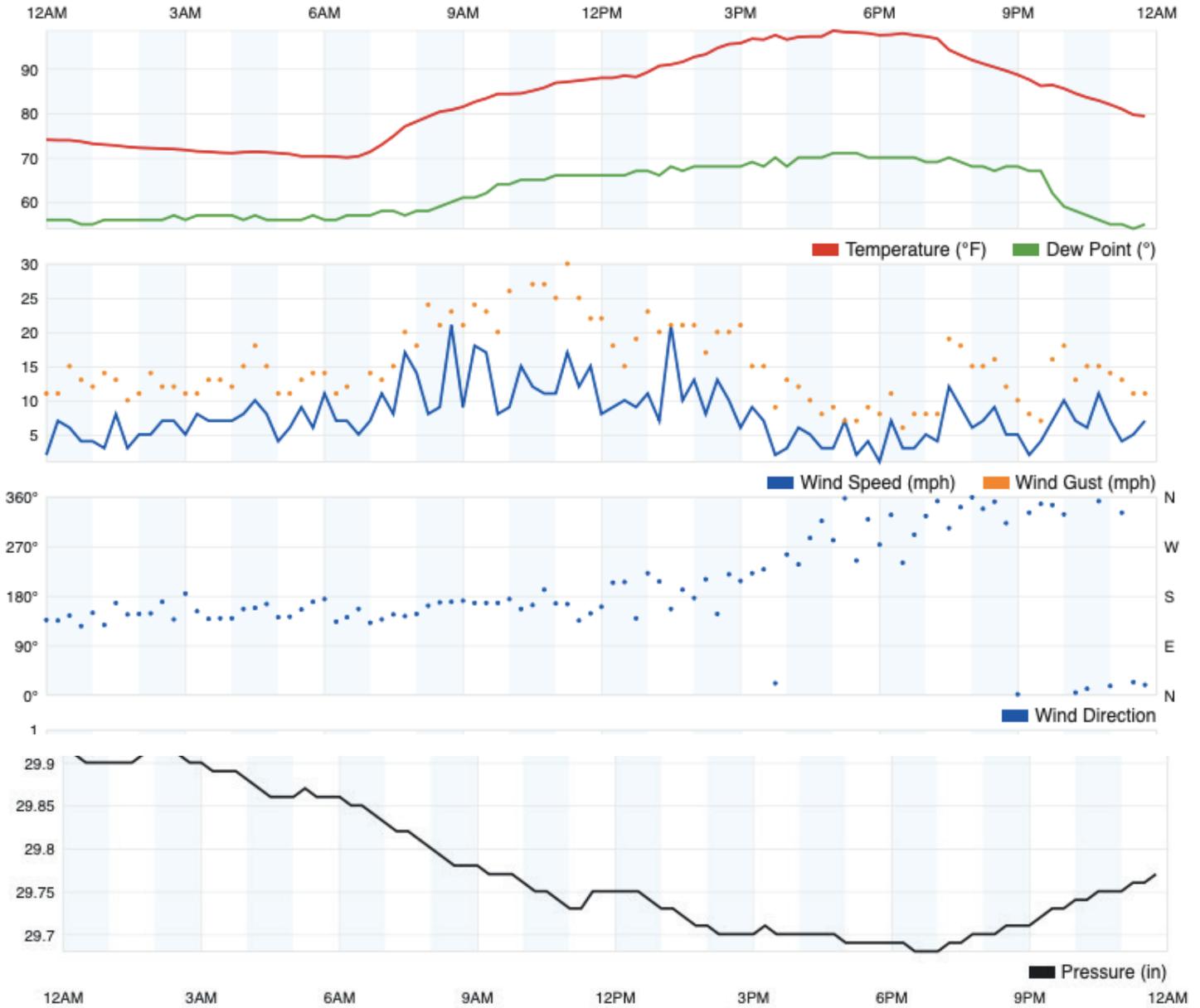
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
Hot	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny then Slight Chance Showers
High: 90 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 89 °F	Low: 51 °F	High: 87 °F

Another Warm Day Today



Though cooler than yesterday, temperatures will be very warm again today with highs topping out in the mid-80s to around 90 degrees. A cooling trend will continue through the weekend and highs by Monday may be as low as the mid-60s to low 70s. A few showers are possible this morning, mainly in far northern South Dakota. Not a lot of rain is expected with these showers, however, better chances of precipitation are possible this weekend.

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Today in Weather History

June 17, 1944: On this date, six estimated F2 or greater tornadoes were tracked across Faulk, Codington, Brown, Day, Grant, and Roberts County in South Dakota as well as Big Stone in Minnesota. The first tornado touched down at approximately 3:30 pm CST in Faulk County. This estimated F2 tornado destroyed all buildings except the house on a farm 7 miles northeast of Faulkton. The next tornado occurred at 4:00 pm CST in Codington County, where barns were destroyed. Cattle and a truck were thrown into Grass Lake, near Wallace. About the same time, in Brown County, a tornado moved northeast from just northeast of Warner and crossed the town of Bath. This storm killed two people and injured another twelve. A couple was killed in the destruction of their home. Twenty homes in Bath were damaged. A brick school had its upper story torn off. Another tornado moved through Codington County at 4:45 pm CST, killing three and injuring twenty-five. This F4 strength tornado moved northeast from two miles northeast of Henry, passing over Long Lake and ending 2 miles northwest of Florence. The funnel was described as snake-like over Long Lake and massive as it swept through five farms southwest of Florence. Over 100 head of cattle were killed, and about a dozen homes were destroyed. In Day County an estimated F2 moved due north from 4 miles south of Webster, ending 2 miles northeast of Roslyn. This storm passed two miles east of Webster where barns were destroyed, and livestock was killed on a half dozen farms. At 5:15 pm CST a monster of a storm moved northeast from 5 miles south of Summit, passing 3 miles south of Wilmot and ending about 3 miles east of Beardsley, Minnesota. This massive tornado had an estimated width of 1500 yards and traveled 30 miles. Along the path, eight people were killed, and another forty-three were injured. Farm devastation southwest and south of Wilmot was as complete as it could be with some farms reportedly left without even debris on the property. About 15 farms in South Dakota reported F3-F5 damage. From this day, the Red Cross counted 13 dead and 560 people injured across the state.

June 17, 2010: This day will go down as the day with the greatest single-day tornado total in Minnesota history. The 3 EF4 tornadoes in Minnesota were the first tornadoes EF4 or stronger in this state since the Granite Falls tornado on July 25, 2000. This outbreak produced the highest number of tornadoes rated EF4 or greater in one day in Minnesota since the Black Sunday tornado outbreak on April 30, 1967. This was the first EF4 tornado in Freeborn County since the Black Sunday outbreak. The four total EF4 tornadoes across the Upper Midwest on June 17, 2010 (3 in MN, and 1 in ND) were the most in an outbreak in the U.S. since the "Super Tuesday Outbreak" on February 5-6, 2008. The number of tornado fatalities (4) on this day was the highest in Minnesota since July 5, 1978.

1946: The third deadliest tornado in Canadian history struck southwestern Ontario from Windsor to Tecumseh. 17 people were killed and hundreds injured. Damage was conservatively estimated at \$1.5 million.

2009: A tornado leveled a house, knocked down power poles and overturned about a dozen railroad cars in Aurora, Nebraska. The tornado is rated EF2, with winds between 111 and 135 mph.

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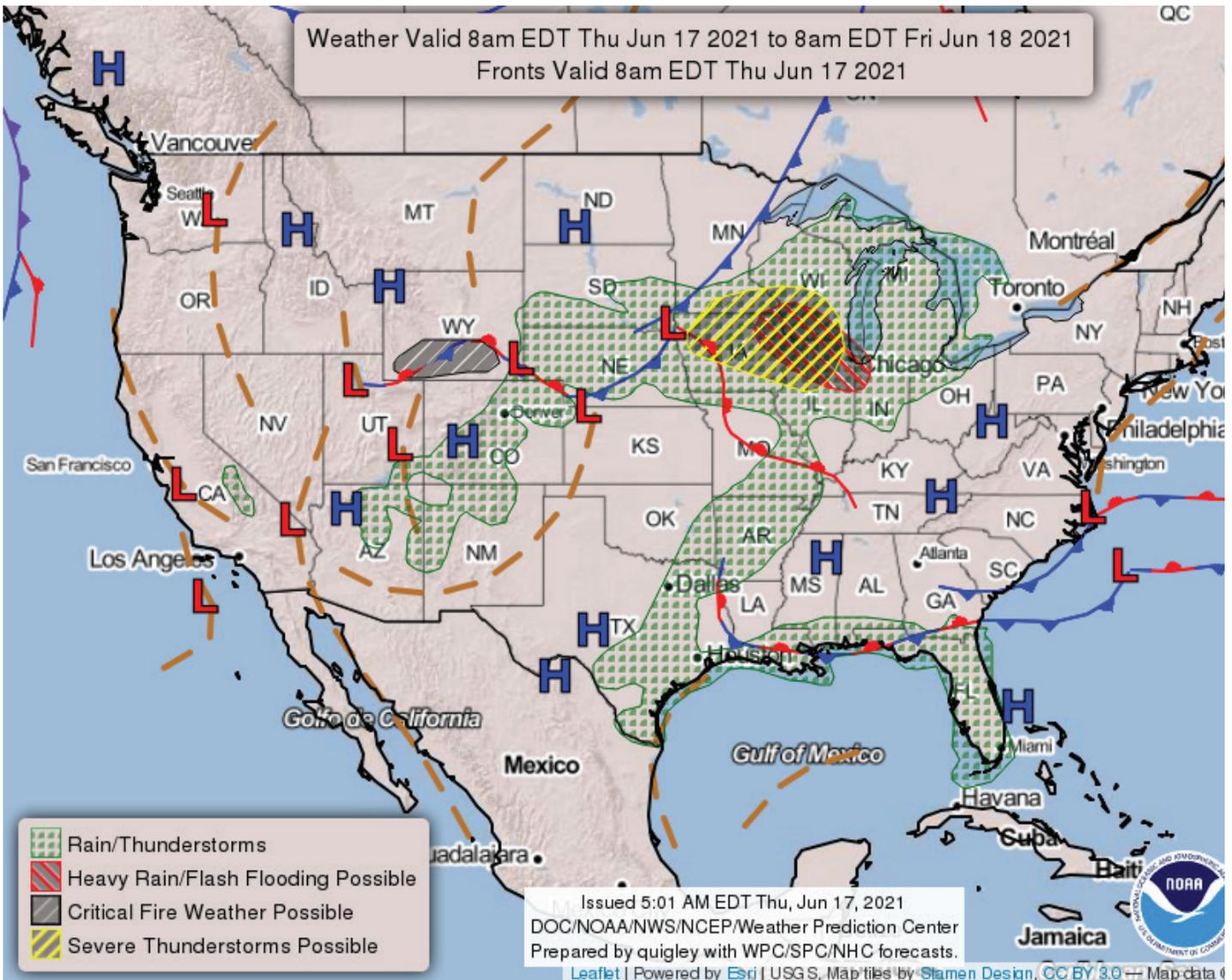
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 98 °F at 5:01 PM
Low Temp: 70 °F at 5:50 AM
Wind: 30 mph at 11:08 AM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 105° in 1933
Record Low: 40° in 1912, 1915
Average High: 81°F
Average Low: 56°F
Average Precip in June.: 1.90
Precip to date in June.: 0.53
Average Precip to date: 9.15
Precip Year to Date: 4.50
Sunset Tonight: 9:25 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:45 a.m.



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EVIDENCE AND FACTS!

"Take nothing on its looks. Take everything on evidence. There's no better rule!" wrote Charles Dickens in *Great Expectations*.

Years later, a fictional detective, Sgt. Joe Friday became famous for the phrase, "Just the facts, Ma'am. All I want are the facts." If there were no facts, there could be no reliable evidence.

"Shout for joy to God, all the earth...Say to God, 'How awesome are Your deeds! So great is Your power... All the earth bows down to You,'" wrote David.

Everywhere David looked, he could see God's "awesome deeds." And these "deeds" provided all the "evidence" he, and those who met with him in worship, needed to have to believe in the God of Israel.

These "awesome deeds" can be seen in His story: God judging and punishing those who were disobedient to Him; those who broke His laws and disregarded and disobeyed His commandments. They paid the price. His story also includes examples of His countless blessings and unending love, mercy and grace that He graciously, lavishly, and lovingly blest those who trusted and obeyed Him. He protected them and provided for their every need as long as they were obedient to His Word. And He still does that today.

The Bible contains all of the evidence that is needed for us to see the "awesome deeds" of God. In His story He gives us "evidence" and "facts" that are undeniable.

Christian faith is a faith established on facts that cannot be denied. With David we can "Shout for joy!"

Prayer: Lord, open our eyes to see Your mighty acts of strength and power, Your gifts and goodness, and shout for joy as we worship You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! Your enemies cringe before your mighty power. Psalm 66:3

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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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

05-17-22-27-34

(five, seventeen, twenty-two, twenty-seven, thirty-four)

Estimated jackpot: \$54,000

Lotto America

01-14-22-28-41, Star Ball: 9, ASB: 4

(one, fourteen, twenty-two, twenty-eight, forty-one; Star Ball: nine; ASB: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$7.14 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$30 million

Powerball

19-29-34-44-50, Powerball: 25, Power Play: 2

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

Estimated jackpot: \$40 million

Senators would stop 'micropolitan' label for 144 US cities

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

Some lawmakers are trying to stop 144 U.S. cities from losing their designations as "metropolitan areas" as the federal government updates its standards, doubling the minimum number of residents required in a city's urban core to 100,000 people.

Sens. John Thune, a Republican from South Dakota, and Mark Kelly, a Democrat from Arizona, introduced legislation Tuesday that would stop the Office of Budget and Management from making the change.

Under the federal government's proposal, a metro area would need double the 50,000-person threshold that has been in place for the past 70 years to count as a metropolitan statistical area. Cities losing this status, with core populations of 50,000 to 99,000 people, would become "micropolitan" statistical areas instead.

The lawmakers said the downgrade would cause real harm, preventing urban areas from getting designated federal funding and making them less attractive for economic development.

"I've heard concerns from mayors across Arizona about how this policy change could impact their ability to support their communities by qualifying for federal transportation, housing, and other funds," Kelly said.

More than a third of the current 392 metro areas would become micro areas, including state capitals such as Bismarck, N.D.; Carson City, Nevada; Cheyenne, Wyoming; and Santa Fe, New Mexico; as well as the college towns of Ames, Iowa; Auburn, Alabama; Charlottesville, Virginia; Lawrence, Kansas; and State College, Pennsylvania

"Increasing the population threshold that is needed to be considered a 'metropolitan statistical area' would adversely affect communities in nearly every state, including South Dakota," Thune said.

Federal statisticians recommending the change say it's long overdue, given that the U.S. population has more than doubled since the 50,000-person threshold was introduced in 1950. Back then, about half of U.S. residents lived in metros; now, 86% do.

The Office of Budget and Management hasn't said when it will make a final decision. If approved, it wouldn't take effect until 2023.

An agency spokesman didn't return an email or a phone call Wednesday. The office has said the designation is purely for statistical purposes and not to be used for funding formulas, though as a practical

matter, that is how it's often used.

Augustana University to add Division I men's ice hockey

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Augustana University is adding Division I men's ice hockey, becoming the first in South Dakota to offer the sport at the top collegiate level.

The school announced the move Wednesday. It will be one of more than 60 Division I schools to offer hockey in the country

Augustana spokeswoman Jill Wilson called it a "game-changing" move for the university.

Sioux Falls businessman and philanthropist T. Denny Sanford donated money to kickstart the program. Wilson would not give details about the contribution other than to say it would "facilitate this extraordinary opportunity."

Details about an arena, coach, conference and program start have not been announced. The Sanford Premier Center, home to a United States Hockey League team, seats more than 10,000 for hockey, Augustana has said it wants to move all of its programs to Division I by 2030.

Virus cases drop, health officials warn of fall resurgence

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials warned Wednesday that despite coronavirus cases declining to the lowest rates since the early days of the pandemic, the state could see a resurgence of the virus in the fall if not enough people are vaccinated against COVID-19.

State epidemiologist Josh Clayton explained the coronavirus is a respiratory virus, meaning there is a risk of a resurgence when people gather indoors as the weather cools. Currently, with the weather hot and virus cases dropping, it's easy to see why many would let their guard down: South Dakota reported just 10 new cases Wednesday, meaning there are 170 active cases statewide.

But last year, the state saw virus infections decrease going into the summer, only to surge throughout the fall and peak in November with intensive care units brimming with COVID-19 patients. Clayton hopes that scenario will be avoided this year with the arrival of vaccinations.

However, vaccination rates have stagnated in recent weeks. About 56% of South Dakotans eligible for the vaccine have received at least one shot — well short of the Department of Health's goal of reaching 70%. People are not getting vaccinated fast enough to reach that goal before the fall. Roughly 90,000 more people would need to get shots to reach 70%, but over the last four weeks, about 10,000 people have received their first shot.

Clayton acknowledged that the health department had "a hill to climb" but said he was confident people would continue to get the vaccine. The Department of Health is launching campaigns aimed at certain demographics in a bid to counteract misinformation. Officials said the ads will feature people like health care workers and tribal leaders addressing concerns from women who are pregnant or may become pregnant, the Latino community and Native American people.

Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon said the Department of Health has received many questions about the safety of the vaccine for pregnant women and wants to make it clear the vaccine is safe.

"We will directly counter misinformation with accurate information and facts," she said.

People who indicated they are Hispanic have lagged behind other races in vaccination rates. According to the Department of Health, just 0.4% of people vaccinated have been Hispanic, despite the group making up 4.2% of the state's population.

However, nationwide polling last month found that many Latinos are forgoing COVID-19 shots not because of vaccine hesitancy, but instead over concerns about losing work hours, getting a bill, and for some, immigration worries. In fact, a Kaiser Family Foundation Vaccine Monitor poll released in May found that many Hispanics reported far less vaccine hesitancy than their white or Black counterparts.

Meanwhile, some of the people most hesitant to get the vaccine have been Republicans and white evangelical Christians. Malsam-Rysdon didn't list any ad campaigns aimed at those groups, but said the

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Department of Health is working with religious leaders to address concerns people have about the virus. "We've got a lot of work going on with partners across the state, just to help get the accurate information out to people and hopefully help them have the information to decide to become vaccinated," she said.

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined
Yankton Press & Dakotan. June 14, 2021.

Editorial: As COVID Recedes, Opioids Back On Radar

As we (hopefully) emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are stepping out of that darkness to rediscover — or remember — some of the issues we faced prior to the onslaught of the coronavirus.

One of them is the impact of opioids on our society.

This remains a hot-button issue festering in America. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the age-adjusted rate of opioid deaths in their country jumped nearly 5% between 2018 and 2019, which is the last time frame in which full statistics are available. That rate has quadrupled since 1999. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, two out of every three drug overdose deaths in 2018 were connected to opioids.

Thus, a story in Saturday's Press & Dakotan involving drug deaths in South Dakota could be viewed as a cold reminder of this pre-COVID reality.

A report from the group Well Being Trust showed that South Dakota drug-related deaths jumped an alarming 56% between 2018 and 2019, and that included a 29% rise in opioid deaths during that same period.

Bear in mind, however, that South Dakota and neighboring Nebraska have the nation's lowest rates of drug-induced deaths per 100,000 people in the country — but the trend is clearly moving in a very tragic direction.

"Unfortunately, the 56% increase in drug-induced deaths was the largest in the nation," Ben Miller, chief strategy officer for Well Being Trust, told the Press & Dakotan. "And so while South Dakota has smaller numbers, the percentage of increase based on those numbers was substantially higher than other states."

This impact is felt in every corner of our society, and that includes the Yankton area. While no local numbers were immediately available, anecdotal evidence suggests the opioid crisis is not diminishing. Also, a report released in late 2019 showed that Yankton County was among 13 counties in the state at higher risk for HIV and Hepatitis C infections, which is tied to opioid deaths and related overdoses.

As stated earlier, the most recent statistics only run through 2019 and don't even factor in the extraordinary stresses imposed by the pandemic. While we can't draw definitive conclusions without seeing that data, it's not unreasonable to assume that opioid abuse and its fallout may have flourished during those dark days.

"If you look at the available data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we can intimate or suggest that the trends that we saw in 2019 are likely to be worse in 2020 because of COVID," Miller said.

Thus, we must begin to focus again on this problem, which impacts all ages, especially an older population that is far more familiar with opioid use for various health issues.

In some ways, this fight is more difficult than battling COVID.

With the coronavirus, you could wear masks, social distance, wash your hands and, then, get a vaccination to battle this societal problem. But none of that applies to opioids' grip on our society.

It's a completely different, entirely manmade battlefield, but it's a war that must be won.

END

Prioritizing infrastructure spending taking shape in SD

CHAMBERLAIN, S.D. (AP) — Infrastructure spending in the next year was a priority in this year's South Dakota legislative session.

Now months later, Gov. Kristi Noem along with Schools and Public Lands Commissioner Ryan Brunner and a number of local officials on Tuesday visited the sites of infrastructure improvements already be-

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ing made in and around Chamberlain. Those improvements include making major improvements to Lake Wanalain Dam and dredging a marina in the city, KSFY-TV reported.

"What you see here is the city of Chamberlain is spending a million dollars to dredge the marina," Brunner explained. "If our state dam were to break, it would damage their marina and would undo all their work with the sediment coming downstream."

Governor Noem signed at least five infrastructure bills into law this past year, amounting to millions of dollars in spending across the state.

"My conversation with the legislature was let's make sure we put money into the reserves, and then invest into long term infrastructure," said Noem. "Railroads, dams, roads, and bridges so that we make a difference not just for the next year or two, but over the next thirty or forty years. That is exactly what these projects are doing."

Congress approves bill to make Juneteenth a federal holiday

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States will soon have a new federal holiday commemorating the end of slavery.

The House voted 415-14 on Wednesday to make Juneteenth, or June 19th, the 12th federal holiday. President Joe Biden is scheduled to sign the bill into law Thursday afternoon.

Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865, when Union soldiers brought the news of freedom to enslaved Black people in Galveston, Texas — two months after the Confederacy had surrendered. That was also about 2 1/2 years after the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in the Southern states.

It's the first new federal holiday since Martin Luther King Jr. Day was created in 1983.

"Our federal holidays are purposely few in number and recognize the most important milestones," said Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y. "I cannot think of a more important milestone to commemorate than the end of slavery in the United States."

Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Texas, speaking next to a large poster of a Black man whose back bore massive scarring from being whipped, said she would be in Galveston this Saturday to celebrate along with Republican Sen. John Cornyn of Texas.

"Can you imagine?" said the rather short Jackson Lee. "I will be standing maybe taller than Sen. Cornyn, forgive me for that, because it will be such an elevation of joy."

The Senate passed the bill a day earlier under a unanimous consent agreement that expedites the process for considering legislation. It takes just one senator's objection to block such agreements.

"Please, let us do as the Senate. Vote unanimously for passage," Rep. David Scott, D-Ga., pleaded with his colleagues.

The vote comes as lawmakers struggle to overcome divisions on police reform legislation following the killing of George Floyd by police and as Republican state legislators push what experts say is an unprecedented number of bills aimed at restricting access to the ballot box. While Republicans say the goal is to prevent voter fraud, Democrats contend that the measures are aimed at undermining minority voting rights.

Several members of the Congressional Black Caucus took to the floor to speak in favor of the bill. Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman, D-N.J., said she viewed Juneteenth as a commemoration rather than a celebration because it represented something that was delayed in happening.

"It also reminds me of what we don't have today," she said. "And that is full access to justice, freedom and equality. All these are often in short supply as it relates to the Black community."

The bill was sponsored by Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., and had 60 co-sponsors. Democratic leaders moved quickly to bring the bill to the House floor after the Senate's vote the day before.

Some Republican lawmakers opposed the effort. Rep. Matt Rosendale, R-Mont., said creating the federal holiday was an effort to celebrate "identity politics."

"Since I believe in treating everyone equally, regardless of race, and that we should be focused on what unites us rather than our differences, I will vote no," he said in a press release.

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The vast majority of states recognize Juneteenth as a holiday or have an official observance of the day, and most states hold celebrations. Juneteenth is a paid holiday for state employees in Texas, New York, Virginia and Washington.

Under the legislation, the federal holiday would be known as Juneteenth National Independence Day.

Rep. Clay Higgins, R-La., said that he would vote for the bill and that he supported the establishment of a federal holiday, but he was upset that the name of the holiday included the word "independence" rather than "emancipation."

"Why would the Democrats want to politicize this by coopting the name of our sacred holiday of Independence Day?" Higgins asked.

Rep. Brenda Lawrence, D-Mich., replied, "I want to say to my white colleagues on the other side: Getting your independence from being enslaved in a country is different from a country getting independence to rule themselves."

She added, "We have a responsibility to teach every generation of Black and white Americans the pride of a people who have survived, endured and succeeded in these United States of America despite slavery."

The 14 House Republicans who voted against the bill were Andy Biggs of Arizona, Mo Brooks of Alabama, Andrew Clyde of Georgia, Scott DesJarlais of Tennessee, Paul Gosar of Arizona, Ronny Jackson of Texas, Doug LaMalfa of California, Thomas Massie of Kentucky, Tom McClintock of California, Ralph Norman of South Carolina, Mike Rogers of Alabama, Rosendale of Montana, Chip Roy of Texas and Tom Tiffany of Wisconsin.

Chinese crewed spaceship docks with new space station

By SAM McNEIL Associated Press

JIUQUAN, China (AP) — A Chinese spaceship carrying a three-person crew docked with China's new space station at the start of three-month mission Thursday, marking a milestone in the country's ambitious space program.

The Shenzhou-12 craft connected with the Tianhe space station module about six hours after takeoff from the Jiuquan launch center on the edge of the Gobi Desert.

The three astronauts are the first to take up residency in the main living module and will carry out experiments, test equipment, conduct maintenance and prepare the station for receiving two laboratory modules next year.

The mission brings to 14 the number of astronauts China has launched into space since 2003, becoming only the third country after the former Soviet Union and the United States to do so on its own.

The astronauts were seen off by space officials, other uniformed military personnel and a crowd of children waving flowers and flags and singing patriotic songs.

The rocket dropped its boosters about two minutes into the flight followed by the cowlings surrounding Shenzhou-12 at the top of the rocket. After about 10 minutes it separated from the rocket's upper section, extended its solar panels and shortly afterward entered orbit.

About a half-dozen adjustments took place over the following six hours to line up the spaceship for docking with the Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, module at about 4 p.m. (0800 GMT).

The travel time is down from the two days it took to reach China's earlier experimental space stations, a result of a "great many breakthroughs and innovations," the mission's deputy chief designer, Gao Xu, told state broadcaster CCTV.

"So the astronauts can have a good rest in space which should make them less tired," Gao said.

Other improvements include an increase in the number of automated and remote-controlled systems that should "significantly lessen the pressure on the astronauts," Gao said.

Two astronauts on those past missions were women, and while this first station crew is all male, women are expected to be part of future station crews.

The mission is the third of 11 planned through next year to add the additional sections to the station and send up crews and supplies. A fresh three-member crew and a cargo ship with supplies will be sent

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in three months.

China is not a participant in the International Space Station, largely as a result of U.S. objections to the Chinese programs secrecy and close military ties. However, China has been stepping up cooperation with Russia and a host of other countries, and its station may continue operating beyond the International Space Station, which is reaching the end of its functional life.

China landed a probe on Mars last month that carried a rover, the Zhurong, and earlier landed a probe and rover on the moon's less explored far side and brought back the first lunar samples by any country's space program since the 1970s.

China and Russia this week also unveiled an ambitious plan for a joint International Lunar Research Station running through 2036. That could compete and possibly conflict with the multinational Artemis Accords, a blueprint for space cooperation that supports NASA's plans to return humans to the moon by 2024 and to launch an historic human mission to Mars.

After the Tianhe was launched in April, the rocket that carried it into space made an uncontrolled reentry to Earth, though China dismissed criticism of the potential safety hazard. Usually, discarded rocket stages reenter the atmosphere soon after liftoff, normally over water, and don't go into orbit.

The rocket used Thursday is of a different type and the components that will reenter are expected to burn up long before they could be a danger, said Ji Qiming, assistant director of the China Manned Space Agency.

Editors of Hong Kong newspaper arrested under security law

By ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong police used a sweeping national security law Thursday to arrest five editors and executives of a pro-democracy newspaper on charges of colluding with foreign powers — the first time the legislation has been used against the press in yet another sign of an intensifying crackdown by Chinese authorities in the city long known for its freedoms.

Police said they had evidence that more than 30 articles published by Apple Daily played a "crucial part" in what they called a conspiracy with foreign countries to impose sanctions against China and Hong Kong.

Apple Daily said in a statement that the move left it "speechless" but vowed to continue its reporting. The newspaper has long been one of the most outspoken defenders of Hong Kong's freedoms and in recent years has often criticized the Chinese and Hong Kong governments for walking back promises that the territory could retain those freedoms for 50 years after the former British colony was handed over to China in 1997.

The newspaper has thus found itself a frequent target. Apple Daily founder Jimmy Lai is currently serving a 20-month prison sentence after being convicted of playing a role in unauthorized protests in 2019, when Hongkongers took the streets in massive antigovernment demonstrations in response to a proposed extradition law that would have allowed suspects to stand trial in China. Protests grew to include calls for broader democratic freedoms, but the movement only appeared to harden Beijing's resolve to limit civil liberties in the territory, including by imposing the national security law used in Thursday's arrests.

The legislation outlaws secession, subversion, terrorism and foreign collusion and has been used to arrest over 100 pro-democracy figures since it was first implemented a year ago, with many others fleeing abroad. The result is that it has virtually silenced opposition voices in the city — and drawn sanctions from the U.S. against Hong Kong and Chinese government officials.

Those arrested Thursday included Apple Daily's chief editor Ryan Law; the CEO of its publisher Next Digital, Cheung Kim-hung; the publisher's chief operating officer; and two other top editors, according to the newspaper.

Police also froze 18 million Hong Kong dollars (\$2.3 million) in assets belonging to three companies linked to Apple Daily, said Li Kwai-wah, a senior superintendent at Hong Kong's National Security Department.

Trading in shares of Next Digital was halted Thursday morning at the request of the company, according to filings with the Hong Kong stock exchange.

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In an apparent show of force, more than 200 police officers were involved in the search of Apple Daily's offices, and the government said a warrant was obtained to look for evidence of a suspected violation of the national security law.

Apple Daily published a letter to its readers, saying that police had confiscated many items during the search, including 38 computers that contained "considerable" journalistic material.

"Today's Hong Kong feels unfamiliar and leaves us speechless. It feels as though we are powerless to stop the regime from exercising its power as it pleases," the letter read. "Nevertheless, the staff of Apple Daily is standing firm. We will continue to persist as Hongkongers and live up to the expectations so that we have no regrets to our readers and the times we are in."

Hong Kong Security Minister John Lee told a news conference that police will investigate those arrested and others to establish if they have assisted in instigating or funding the offenses.

He alleged that the police action against the Apple Daily editors and executives is not related to "normal journalistic work."

"The action targeted the use of journalistic work as a tool to endanger national security," he said.

In a chilling warning, he said that anyone working with the "perpetrators" would "pay a hefty price." He added: "Distance yourself from them, otherwise all you will be left with are regrets."

The Chinese government's liaison office in Hong Kong said in a statement Thursday that it supported police action, noting that while the city's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, guarantees the freedoms of speech and press, those rights cannot undermine the "bottom line of national security."

"Freedom of the press is not a 'shield' for illegal activities," the liaison office said.

Hong Kong Journalists Association Chairman Chris Yeung criticized the arrests and raid in an online news conference, warning that the the national security law was being used as a "weapon to prosecute media executives and journalists for publishing reports and articles that are deemed as a threat to national security."

He said that the court warrant that allowed police to search the offices of Apple Daily had undermined journalists' ability to protect their materials, a vital part of upholding press freedom.

"Self censorship will get worse if journalists are not sure whether they are able to protect their sources of information," said Yeung.

Internet outages briefly disrupt access to websites, apps

By The Associated Press undefined

A wave of brief internet outages hit the websites and apps of dozens of financial institutions, airlines and other companies across the globe Thursday.

The Hong Kong Stock Exchange said in a post on Twitter Thursday afternoon Hong Kong time that its site was facing technical issues and that it was investigating. It said in another post 17 minutes later that its websites were back to normal.

Internet monitoring websites including ThousandEyes, Downtetector.com and fmg.com showed dozens of disruptions, including to U.S.-based airlines.

Many of the outages were reported by people in Australia trying to do banking, book flights and access postal services.

Australia Post, the country's postal service, said on Twitter that an "external outage" had impacted a number of its services, and that while most services had come back online, they were continuing to monitor and investigate.

Many services were up and running after an hour or so but the affected companies said they were working overtime to prevent further problems.

Banking services were severely disrupted, with Westpac, the Commonwealth, ANZ and St George all down, along with the website of the Reserve Bank of Australia, the country's central bank. The Reserve Bank cancelled a bond-buying operation due to technical difficulties facing several banks that were to participate.

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Services have mostly been restored.

Virgin Australia said flights were largely operating as scheduled after it restored access to its website and guest contact center.

"Virgin Australia was one of many organizations to experience an outage with the Akamai content delivery system today," it said. "We are working with them to ensure that necessary measures are taken to prevent these outages from reoccurring."

Akamai, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, counts some of the world's biggest companies and banks as customers. The company said in a statement Thursday that it was aware of the issue and working to restore services as soon as possible.

The disruptions came just days after many of the world's top websites went offline briefly due to a problem with software at Fastly, another major web services company. The company blamed the problem on a software bug that was triggered when a customer changed a setting.

Brief internet service outages are not uncommon and are only rarely the result of hacking or other mischief. But the outages have underscored how vital a small number of behind-the-scenes companies have become to running the internet.

House poised to repeal 2002 Iraq War authorization

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Democratic-led House, with the backing of President Joe Biden, is expected to approve legislation to repeal the 2002 authorization for use of military force in Iraq, a step supporters say is necessary to constrain presidential war powers even though it is unlikely to affect U.S. military operations around the world.

A vote on Thursday would come one day after Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said he intends to bring repeal legislation to the Senate floor this year.

"The Iraq War has been over for nearly a decade," Schumer said. "The authorization passed in 2002 is no longer necessary in 2021."

The White House said in a statement that it supports the House bill and stressed that no ongoing military activities are reliant upon the 2002 authorization.

The growing momentum behind the repeal measure follows years of debate over whether Congress has ceded too much of its war-making authority to the White House. Many lawmakers, particularly Democrats, say passage of the 2002 authorization, or AUMF, was a mistake, and some Republicans agree the authority should be taken off the books. Some lawmakers say the 2001 resolution to fight terrorism, passed after the Sept. 11 attacks, should be reexamined as well.

"Once we pass a repeal of the 2002 AUMF, we must keep up our fight to repeal the 2001 AUMF so that no future president has the unilateral power to plunge us into endless wars," said the House bill's sponsor, Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif.

Schumer said he wanted to be clear that legislation terminating the use of force in Iraq does not mean the U.S. is abandoning the country and the shared fight against the Islamic State group. He said the measure would eliminate the possibility of a future administration "reaching backing into the legal dustbin to use it as a justification for military adventurism."

He cited the Washington-directed drone strike that killed Iranian Gen. Qassim Soleimani in January 2020 as an example.

The Trump administration said Soleimani was plotting a series of attacks that endangered many American troops and officials across the Middle East. The national security adviser at the time, Robert O'Brien, told reporters that President Donald Trump exercised America's right to self-defense and that the strike was a fully authorized action under the 2002 authorization to use military force.

"There is no good reason to allow this legal authority to persist in case another reckless commander in chief tries the same trick in the future," Schumer said.

Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said Wednesday

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in a joint statement with Sens. Tim Kaine, D-Va., and Todd Young, R-Ind., that the committee would take up legislation to repeal not only the 2002 authorization, but also the 1991 authorization for use of force in Iraq, which remains on the books.

The 1991 authorization gave President George H.W. Bush the authority to use force against Iraq to enforce a series of U.N. Security Council resolutions passed in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. The 2002 authorization was directed against the Saddam Hussein regime as "necessary and appropriate" to "defend U.S. national security against the continuing threat posed by Iraq" and to "enforce all relevant Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq."

"Repealing the 1991 and 2002 AUMFs will also send a clear diplomatic signal that the United States is no longer an adversary of Iraq, but a partner," Young said.

The Senate and House would have to work out any differences in their bills and vote on a final product before it can go to Biden's desk to be signed into law.

In the end, legislation terminating the 2002 authorization will need 60 votes in an evenly divided Senate to overcome any procedural hurdles. Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., the ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said he opposes the effort to terminate the authorization.

"We used it to get Soleimani and there might be another Soleimani out there," Inhofe said.

Republican Rep. Michael McCaul of Texas will speak against the House bill Thursday. He said a serious reform effort, "which we all agree is needed," would have included discussions with national security leaders and a replacement to address the evolving war on terrorism.

"Democrats are playing politics with national security in an effort to taint one of President Trump's biggest national security successes," said McCaul, the lead Republican on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Biden abroad: Pitching America to welcoming if wary allies

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden spent his first trip overseas highlighting a sharp break from his disruptive predecessor, selling that the United States was once more a reliable ally with a steady hand at the wheel. European allies welcomed the pitch — and even a longtime foe acknowledged it.

But while Biden returned Wednesday night to Washington after a week across the Atlantic that was a mix of messaging and deliverables, questions remained as to whether those allies would trust that Biden truly represents a long-lasting reset or whether Russian President Vladimir Putin would curb his nation's misbehaviors.

Biden's mantra, which he uttered in Geneva and Brussels and on the craggy coast of Cornwall, England, was that "America was back." It was Putin, of all people, on the trip's final moments, who may have best defined Biden's initial voyage overseas.

"President Biden is an experienced statesman," Putin told reporters. "He is very different from President Trump."

But the summit with Putin in Geneva, which shadowed the entire trip and brought it to its close, also underscored the fragility of Biden's declarations that the global order had returned.

Though both men declared the talks constructive, Putin's rhetoric did not change, as he refused to accept any responsibility for his nation's election interference, cyberhacking or crackdown on domestic political opponents. At the summit's conclusion Biden acknowledged that he could not be confident that Putin would change his behavior even with newly threatened consequences.

Biden's multilateral summits with fellow democracies — the Group of Seven wealthy nations and NATO — were largely punctuated by sighs of relief from European leaders who had been rattled by President Donald Trump over four years. Yet there were still closed-door disagreement on just how the Western powers should deal with Russia or Biden's declaration that an economic competition with China would define the 21st century.

"Everyone at the table understood and understands both the seriousness and the challenges that we're

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up against, and the responsibility of our proud democracies to step up and deliver for the rest of the world," Biden said Sunday in England.

As vice president and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Biden had trotted the globe for more than four decades before he stepped off Air Force One and onto foreign soil for the first time as commander in chief. His initial stop, after a speech to thank U.S. troops stationed in England, was for a gathering with the other G-7 leaders.

The leaders staked their claim to bringing the world out of the coronavirus pandemic and crisis, pledging more than 1 billion coronavirus vaccine doses to poorer nations, vowing to help developing countries grow while fighting climate change and backing a minimum tax on multinational firms.

At the group's first face-to-face meeting in two years because of the pandemic, the leaders dangled promises of support for global health, green energy, infrastructure and education — all to demonstrate that international cooperation is back after the upheavals caused by the pandemic and Trump's unpredictability. There were concerns, though, that not enough was done to combat climate change and that 1 billion doses were not nearly sufficient to meet the stated goal of ending the COVID-19 pandemic globally by the end of 2022.

The seven nations met in Cornwall and largely adhered to Biden's hope that they rally together to declare they would be a better friend to poorer nations than authoritarian rivals such as China. A massive infrastructure plan for the developing world, meant to compete with Beijing's efforts, was commissioned, and China was called out for human rights abuses, prompting an angry response from the Asian power.

But even then, there were strains, with Germany, Italy and the representatives for the European Union reluctant to call out China, a valuable trading partner, too harshly. And there a wariness in some European capitals that it was Biden, rather than Trump, who was the aberration to American foreign policy and that the United States could soon fall back into a transactional, largely inward-looking approach.

After Cornwall, the scene shifted to Brussels where many of the same faces met for a gathering at NATO. Biden used the moment to highlight the renewed U.S. commitment to the 30-country alliance that was formed as a bulwark to Moscow's aggression but frequently maligned by his predecessor.

He also underscored the U.S. commitment to Article 5 of the alliance charter, which spells out that an attack — including, as of this summit, some cyberattacks — on any member is an assault on all and is to be met with a collective response. Trump had refused to commit to the pact and had threatened to pull the U.S. out of the alliance.

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

When Air Force One touched back down in Washington, Biden again faced an uncertain future for his legislative agenda, the clock ticking on a deadline to land a bipartisan infrastructure deal as the president was confronted with growing intransigence from Republicans and mounting impatience from fellow Democrats. But Biden and his aides believe he accomplished what he set out to do in Europe.

The most tactile of politicians, Biden reveled in the face-to-face diplomacy, having grown frustrated with trying to negotiate with world leaders over Zoom. Even amid some disagreements, he was greeted warmly by most of his peers, other presidents and prime ministers eager to exchange awkward elbow bumps and adopt his "build back better" catchphrase.

At the end of each day, Biden would huddle with aides, including Secretary of State Tony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan, eagerly going over a play-by-play of the day's meetings and preparing for the next. Aides padded his schedule with some down time to pace the 78-year-old president, though there were still a few missteps, including some verbal flubs and when he simply neglected to announce a Boeing-Airbus deal in front of the European Council.

His summit with Putin, coming three years after Trump sided with the Russian leader over U.S. intelligence agencies when those two men met in Helsinki, loomed over the trip, with the cable networks giving it Super Bowl levels of hype. Aides wanted to confront Putin early in the presidency, with some hope of reining in Moscow and reaching some stability so the administration could more squarely focus on China.

There were no fireworks in their summit near the Swiss Alps, and the nations agreed to return ambassadors to each other's capitals and took some small steps toward strategic stability.

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But while Biden was able to deliver stern warnings to Putin behind closed doors, he also extracted few promises. In the Russian president's post-summit remarks, he engaged in classic Putin misdirection and what-about-ism to undermine any of the United States' moral high ground.

In his own Geneva news conference, Biden stood against a postcard-perfect backdrop of a tree-lined lake, taking off his suit jacket as the sun beat down from behind, so bright that reporters had trouble looking directly at the president.

Once more, Biden declared that America was back, but he also soberly made clear that it was impossible to immediately know if any progress with Russia had, in fact, been made.

"What will change their behavior is if the rest of world reacts to them and it diminishes their standing in the world," Biden said. "I'm not confident of anything; I'm just stating a fact."

Why are Olympics going on despite public, medical warnings?

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Public sentiment in Japan has been generally opposed to holding the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, partly based on fears the coronavirus will spike as almost 100,000 people — athletes and others — enter for both events.

The Japanese medical community is largely against it. The government's main medical adviser Dr. Shigeru Omi has said it's "abnormal" to hold the Olympics during a pandemic. So far, only 5% of Japanese are fully vaccinated.

The medical journal *The Lancet* has raised questions about the health risks and criticized the World Health Organization and other health bodies for not taking a clear stand. The *New England Journal of Medicine* has said the IOC's decision to proceed "is not informed by the best scientific evidence."

The second-largest selling newspaper in Japan, the *Asahi Shimbun*, has called for the Olympics to be canceled. So have other regional newspapers.

Still, they are going ahead. How have the International Olympic Committee and the Japanese government of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga been able to bypass strong opposition?

At the core is the Host City Contract that gives the IOC the sole authority to cancel. If Japan cancels, it would have to compensate the IOC. Of course, the IOC is unlikely to sue a host city. So any deal would be worked out behind the scenes.

And there are billions at stake. Japan has officially spent \$15.4 billion but government audits suggest it's twice that much. Japanese advertising giant Dentsu Inc., a key player in landing the corruption-tainted bid in 2013, has raised more than \$3 billion from local sponsors.

Estimates suggest a cancellation could cost the IOC \$3 billion-\$4 billion in lost broadcast rights income. Broadcast income and sponsors account for 91% of the IOC income, and American network NBCUniversal provides about 40% of the IOC's total income.

Fans from abroad have been banned already, and a decision on local fans attending Olympic venues should come as early as next week.

Associated Press sought perspectives from inside and outside Japan with the Olympics set to open on July 23.

"It's a bit like a gambler who already has lost too much. Pulling out of it now will only confirm the huge losses made, but carrying on you can still cling to the hope of winning big and taking it all back. It's true that public opinion is unlikely to be kind even if Suga decides to cancel at the last minute. He might as well take the chance and hope for the best by going ahead with it. At least there is some chance that he can claim the games to be a success — just by doing it — and saturating the media with pride and glory might help him turn the negative opinion around."

—Koichi Nakano, political scientist, Sophia University

"The IOC carries a brand that is powerful. Athletes from around the world coming together to compete

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in peace is a heart-tugging draw. It takes an entertainment event and infuses it with a certain level of piety and awe. Who is against peace? With this "Olympism" as a goal, it has snagged corporate sponsors willing to pay lots of money. Therefore, the IOC has the leverage to exact contract terms very favorable to it and it certainly has done that in this case. The fact that only the IOC can formally decide to pull the plug on the games — even in the case of unforeseeable health events — is testament to this."

—Mark Conrad, lawyer, Gabelli School of Business, Fordham University

"The host city contract hands over all the power to the IOC. The Olympic industry has had 120-plus years to win hearts and minds around the globe, with obvious success. In the age of the internet, their PR controls the message and protects the brand 24/7. The IOC is also beyond the reach of any oversight agency, including the governments of host countries. It can violate a country's human rights protections with immunity, including athletes' right to access domestic courts of law."

—Helen Jefferson Lenskyj, sociologist, author "The Olympic Games: A Critical Approach"

"Based on what I am hearing, people within the government have been given their instructions to make the games happen, and that is their singular focus right now — for better or for worse. Their hope is to get through the games with as few missteps as possible. Politicians may well be aware of the risk they are taking but hope that once the games begin the Japanese public will persevere 'for the good of Japan' and forget how we got there."

—Aki Tonami, political scientist, University of Tsukuba

"The IOC is an elitist club that garners support from other elites and people — and countries — that aspire to joining the elite. From a sports perspective, the IOC represents the custodian of the exclusive medals that athletes in numerous sports aspire to, acts as the chief promoter of the mythology of the healing power of sport, and the organization that most international sports federations and national Olympic committees are reliant on for funding."

—John Horne, sociologist, Waseda University, author with Garry Whannel of "Understanding the Olympics"

"Politically, the opposition is so weak, the government can do pretty much anything it wants. Although a disastrous Olympics would damage the LDP's credibility, the party likely feels safe because a majority of the public doubts the capability of the opposition to govern. The government may be hoping that once the games start, public opinion will turn. At the very least, producing a distraction, and at most, perhaps a rally round the flag effect."

—Gill Steel, political scientist, Doshisha University

"You notice how nobody seems to be in charge. You have all these different entities: the Tokyo organizing committee, the Japanese Olympic Committee, the Prime Minister's office, the Governor of Tokyo Yuriko Koike, the Japan Sports Agency, the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Suga is asked in the Diet about canceling the games and says it's not his responsibility. Nobody wants to lose face. You saw the same in the run up to the 1964 Games. In fact, it wasn't until Feb. 11, 1963 — some 600 days before the opening ceremony — that Japan finally found somebody willing to accept the presidency of the local organizing committee."

EXPLAINER: The significance of China's new space station

By SAM McNEIL Associated Press

JIUQUAN, China (AP) — Adding a crew to China's new orbiting space station is another major advance for the burgeoning space power.

Here's a look at key developments:

WHAT'S THE MISSION'S PURPOSE?

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The three-member crew is due to stay for three months in the station's main living module, named Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony. They will be carrying out science experiments and maintenance, space walks and preparing the facility to receive two additional modules next year.

While China concedes it arrived late at the space station game, it says its facility is cutting-edge. It could also outlast the International Space Station, which is nearing the end of its functional lifespan.

The launch Thursday also revives China's crewed space program after a five-year hiatus. With Thursday's launch, China has now sent 14 astronauts into space since it first achieved the feat in 2003, becoming the third country after the former Soviet Union and the U.S. to do so.

WHY IS CHINA BUILDING THE STATION?

As the Chinese economy was beginning to gather steam in the early 1990s, China formulated a plan for space exploration, which it has carried out at a steady, cautious cadence. While China has been barred from participation in the International Space Station, mainly over U.S. objections to the Chinese program's secretive nature and close military connections, it's likely the country would have built its own station anyway as it sought the status of a great space power.

At a news conference Wednesday, China Manned Space Agency Assistant Director Ji Qiming told reporters at the Jiuquan launch center that the construction and operation of the space station will raise China's technologies and "accumulate experience for all the people."

The space program is part of an overall drive to put China on track for even more ambitious missions and provide opportunities for cooperation with Russia and other, mostly European, countries along with the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs.

POLITICS AND SECURITY

China's space program has been a massive source of national pride, embodying its rise from poverty to the world's second-largest economy over the past four decades. That has helped shore up the power of the Communist Party, whose authoritarian rule and strict limits on political activity have been tolerated by most Chinese as long as the economy is growing.

President and head of the party Xi Jinping has associated himself closely with that success, and Ji in his remarks cited Xi as setting the updated agenda for China's rise to prominence in space. The first mission to the station also coincides with the celebration of the party centenary next month, an important political milestone.

At the same time, China is modernizing its military at a rapid pace, raising concerns from neighbors, the U.S. and its NATO allies. While China espouses the peaceful development of space on the basis of equality and mutual respect, many recall that China in January 2007 sent a ballistic missile into space to destroy an inactive weather satellite, creating a debris field that continues to be a threat.

WHO ARE THE ASTRONAUTS?

Mission commander Nie Haisheng, 56, and fellow astronauts Liu Boming, 54, and Tang Hongbo, 45, are former People's Liberation Army Air Force pilots with graduate degrees and strong scientific backgrounds. All Chinese astronauts so far have been recruited from the military, underscoring its close ties to the space program.

For Nie, it is his third trip to space, and for Liu, his second following a mission in 2008 that included China's first space walk. Tang, who was recruited as one of the second batch of candidates in 2010, is flying in space for the first time.

Future missions to the station will include women, according to officials, with stays extended to as long as six months and as many as six astronauts on the station at a time during crew changeovers. With China stepping up international cooperation and exchanges, it's only a matter of time before foreign astronauts join the Chinese colleagues on missions to the station, Ji told reporters Wednesday.

WHAT ELSE IS CHINA DOING IN SPACE?

Along with its crewed space program, China has been moving boldly into exploration of the solar system with robotic space ships. It landed a probe on Mars last month that carried a rover, the Zhurong, which is conducting a range of surveys, looking particularly for frozen water that could provide clues as to whether

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the red plant once supported life.

Earlier, China landed a probe and rover on the moon's less explored far side, joining the Yutu, or Jade Rabbit, rover that was part of an earlier lunar exploration mission. China also brought back the first lunar samples by any country's space program since the 1970s and officials say they want to send Chinese astronauts to the moon and eventually build a research base there.

US Open tennis tournament to allow 100% fan capacity in 2021

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

The U.S. Open tennis tournament will allow 100% spectator capacity throughout its entire two weeks in 2021, a year after spectators were banned from the event because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The U.S. Tennis Association announced Thursday that all tickets for courts and grounds passes will go on sale in July.

The year's last Grand Slam tournament is scheduled to be held at Flushing Meadows in New York from Aug. 30 to Sept. 12.

The USTA's decision to return to its usual number of people on-site is the latest step in a return to normal for New York — and for fans of various sports — as the world emerges from more than a year of COVID-19 restrictions.

On Tuesday, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said many of the state's remaining social distancing rules would be eased because 70% of its adults have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine.

The New York Mets announced Wednesday they will return to full capacity next week. A sellout crowd of 52,078 attended a baseball game at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles on Tuesday night. The Indianapolis 500 on May 30 sold around 135,000 tickets, which is 40% of capacity at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

For tennis, the U.S. Open will be the first Grand Slam tournament to have full attendance since the Australian Open in January-February 2020 — shortly before the coronavirus outbreak turned into a full-blown pandemic.

The USTA held the 2020 U.S. Open with no spectators at all, significantly altering the atmosphere and the competitive conditions at an event where raucous crowds are a part of the scenery, especially during night sessions at 23,771-seat Arthur Ashe Stadium.

More than 700,000 people attended the 2019 U.S. Open.

The recently concluded French Open let more than 5,000 spectators into the Roland Garros grounds each day during Week 1, and that rose to more than 13,000 people by the end. The main stadium, Court Philippe Chatrier, was limited to 5,000 fans — about a third of capacity — for the singles finals last weekend.

The All England Club and British government announced this week that Centre Court would be filled at 50% capacity when Wimbledon starts on June 28, with that rising to 100% by the women's and men's singles finals on the closing weekend of July 10-11.

Wimbledon was canceled completely in 2020 because of the pandemic, the first time since 1945 that tournament wasn't held.

EXPLAINER: Iran vote to determine next president, direction

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's presidential election Friday will determine who will lead the country's civilian government as tensions remain high between the Islamic Republic and the West over its tattered nuclear deal with world powers.

WHO IS RUNNING?

Among the four candidates, hard-line judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi appears to be the front-runner based on state-linked polling. Abdolnasser Hemmati, the former head of Iran's Central Bank, appears to be representing moderates in the race. Also running are Mohsen Rezaei, a former Revolutionary Guard commander; and Amir Hossein Ghazizadeh, a current lawmaker. At the country's three debates, it appeared to instead be a two-man race as candidates largely targeted Hemmati for criticism over being part of the

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administration of current President Hassan Rouhani until recently.

WHO IS NOT RUNNING?

Rouhani, whose government reached the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, is term limited from seeking another four years in office. The Guardian Council, Iran's constitutional watchdog that approves candidates, also barred a number of prominent candidates from running this year. They included Ali Larijani, a conservative former parliament speaker who in recent years found himself allied with Rouhani. Also barred was former hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He still remains popular for his populist policies while in office despite his antagonism of the West. While Larijani accepted being blocked, Ahmadinejad has urged his supporters not to take part in the vote. Meanwhile, women remain barred from running, as do those calling for wholesale change in the country's government.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

Iran's president oversees the civilian arm of the country's government. The president sets domestic policy, which is important as Iran has faced years of crushing sanctions from the U.S. after then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from Tehran's nuclear deal. Those economic problems have seen nationwide protests twice in Rouhani's time in office. Iran also has faced wave after wave of new cases in the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The presidency also sets the tone for how Iran interacts with the wider world. However, the winning candidate will be under Iran's supreme leader, who has final say on all matters of state.

WHAT POWER DOES THE SUPREME LEADER HAVE?

At the heart of Iran's complex power-sharing government created after the 1979 Islamic Revolution is the supreme leader. The supreme leader also serves as the country's commander-in-chief of its military and the powerful Revolutionary Guard, a paramilitary force that also has vast economic holdings across Iran. An 88-member elected clerical panel called the Assembly of Experts appoints the supreme leader and can remove one as well, though that's never happened. Iran's current supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is 82 — leading some analysts to suggest this might be the last election he oversees.

SO IS IRAN A DEMOCRACY?

Iran describes itself as an Islamic Republic. It holds elections and has elected representatives passing laws and governing on behalf of its people, though the supreme leader has the final say on all state matters. However, the Guardian Council barred most allies of Rouhani and reformists from running in this election. Those who led Iran's Green Movement after Ahmadinejad's disputed 2009 re-election also remain under house arrest. Iran does not allow international observers to monitor its elections, which its Interior Ministry oversees. Security forces answering only to the supreme leader also routinely arrest and hold closed-door trials for dual nationals, foreigners and those with Western ties, using them as pawns in international negotiations. Raisi, as the head of the judiciary, faces international criticism for those arrests.

Iran nuclear deal hangs in balance as Islamic Republic votes

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's tattered nuclear deal with world powers hangs in the balance as the country prepares to vote on Friday for a new president and diplomats press on with efforts to get both the U.S. and Tehran to reenter the accord.

The deal represents the signature accomplishment of the relatively moderate President Hassan Rouhani's eight years in office: suspending crushing sanctions in exchange for the strict monitoring and limiting of Iran's uranium stockpile.

The deal's collapse with President Donald Trump's decision to unilaterally withdraw America from the agreement in 2018 spiraled into a series of attacks and confrontations across the wider Middle East. It also prompted Tehran to enrich uranium to highest purity levels so far, just shy of weapons-grade levels.

With analysts and polling suggesting that a hard-line candidate already targeted by U.S. sanctions will win Friday's vote, a return to the deal may be possible but it likely won't lead to a further detente between Iran and the West.

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"It's certainly not as complex as drafting a deal from scratch, which is what the sides did that resulted in the 2015 deal," said Henry Rome, a senior analyst focusing on Iran at the Eurasia Group. "But there's still a lot of details that need to be worked out."

He added: "I think there's a lot of domestic politics that go into this and an interest from hard-liners, including the supreme leader, to ensure that their favored candidate wins without any significant disruptions to that process."

The 2015 deal, which saw Iranians flood into the streets in celebration, marked a major turn after years of tensions between Iran and the West over Iran's nuclear program. Tehran has long insisted that its program is for peaceful purposes. However, U.S. intelligence agencies and International Atomic Energy Agency say Iran pursued an organized nuclear weapons program up until 2003.

In order to ease the threat seen by the West, Iran agreed under the deal to limit its enrichment of uranium gas to just 3.67% purity, which can be used in nuclear power plants but is far below weapons-grade levels of 90%. It also put a hard cap on Iran's uranium stockpile to just 300 kilograms (661 pounds). Tehran also committed to using only 5,060 of its first-generation centrifuges, the devices that spin the uranium gas to enrich it.

Before the deal, Iran had been enriching up to 20% and had a stockpile of some 10,000 kilograms (22,046 pounds). That amount at that enrichment level narrowed Iran's so-called "breakout" time — how long it would take for Tehran to be able to produce enough weapons-grade uranium for one atomic bomb.

Prior to the deal, experts estimated Iran needed two to three months to reach that point. Under the deal, officials put that period at around a year. The deal also subjected Iran to some of the most-stringent monitoring ever by the IAEA to monitor its program and ensure its compliance.

What the deal didn't do, however, was involve Iran's ballistic missile program or Tehran's support of militant groups around the region — such as the Lebanese Hezbollah or the Palestinian Hamas — that the West and its allies have designated terrorist organizations. At the time, the Obama administration suggested further negotiations could spring from the deal. However, Trump entered the White House on a promise to "tear up" the accord in part over that, which he ultimately did in 2018.

In the time since, Iran has broken all the limits it agreed to under the deal. It now enriches small amounts of uranium up to 63% purity. It spins far-more advanced centrifuges. The IAEA hasn't been able to access its surveillance cameras at Iranian nuclear sites since late February, nor data from its online enrichment monitors and electronic seals — hobbling the U.N. nuclear watchdog's monitoring abilities. Iran also restarted enrichment at a hardened underground facility and is building more centrifuge halls underground, after two attacks suspected to have been carried out by Israel.

If Iran's nuclear program remains unchecked, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has warned it could shrink Tehran's "breakout" time down to "a matter of weeks." That has worried nonproliferation experts.

"I think for the international community — and specifically for the United States — putting the nuclear program back into a box is critical," said Sanam Vakil, the deputy head of Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa program who studies Iran. "It's important because beyond the nuclear agreement, the negotiators are ultimately hoping to lengthen and strengthen the deal. And so you can't even get there until the current deal is stabilized."

Since President Joe Biden took office, his diplomats have been working with other world powers to come up with a way to return both the U.S. and Iran to the deal in negotiations in Vienna. There have been no direct U.S.-Iran in those negotiations, though separate talks have been underway involving a possible prisoner swap.

In Friday's presidential election in Iran, hard-line judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi appears to be the front-runner. He's already said he wants to return Iran to the nuclear deal to take advantage of its economic benefits. But given his previous belligerent statements toward the U.S., further cooperation with the West at the moment appears unlikely.

Meanwhile, it remains unclear when a deal will be reached in Vienna. And while Iran has broken through all the accord's limits, there's still more it could do to increase pressure on the West. Those steps could

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include using more centrifuges, further increasing enrichment, restarting a facility that makes plutonium as a byproduct or abandoning a nuclear nonproliferation treaty.

"It's a very fine tool," Rome said. "The Iranian political leadership can decide quite specifically what type of signal it wants to send, whether that's the type of machines it uses, the speed of the production, the quantity of the production in order to send a message to the West about the degree of pressure it wants to put on."

In poorest countries, surge combines with vaccine shortage

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA and FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — Hati Maronjei once swore he would never get a COVID-19 shot, after a pastor warned that vaccines aren't safe.

Now, four months after the first batch of vaccines arrived in Zimbabwe, the 44-year-old street hawker of electronic items is desperate for the shot he can't get. Whenever he visits a clinic in the capital, Harare, he is told to try again the next day.

"I am getting frustrated and afraid," he said. "I am always in crowded places, talking, selling to different people. I can't lock myself in the house."

A sense of dread is growing in some of the very poorest countries in the world as virus cases surge and more contagious variants take hold amid a crippling shortage of vaccine.

The crisis has alarmed public health officials along with the millions of unvaccinated, especially those who toil in the informal, off-the-books economy, live hand-to-mouth and pay cash in health emergencies. With intensive care units filling up in cities overwhelmed by the pandemic, severe disease can be a death sentence.

Africa is especially vulnerable. Its 1.3 billion people account for 18% of the world's population, but the continent has received only 2% of all vaccine doses administered globally. And some African countries have yet to dispense a single shot.

Health experts and world leaders have repeatedly warned that even if rich nations immunize all their people, the pandemic will not be defeated if the virus is allowed to spread in countries starved of vaccine.

"We've said all through this pandemic that we are not safe unless we are all safe," said John Nkengasong, a Cameroonian virologist who heads the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "We are only as strong as the weakest link."

Zimbabwe, which has imposed new lockdown measures because of a sharp rise in deaths and cases in the country of over 15 million people, has used just over a million of 1.7 million doses, blaming shortages in urban areas on logistical challenges.

Long lines form at centers such as Parirenyatwa Hospital, unlike months ago, when authorities were begging people to get vaccinated. Many are alarmed as winter sets in and the variant first identified in South Africa spreads in Harare, where young people crowd into betting houses, some with masks dangling from their chins and others without.

"Most people are not wearing masks. There is no social distancing. The only answer is a vaccine, but I can't get it," Maronjei said.

At the start of the pandemic, many deeply impoverished countries with weak health care systems appeared to have avoided the worst. That is changing.

In Zambia, where a vaccination campaign has stalled, authorities reported that the country is running out of bottled oxygen. Sick people whose symptoms are not severe are being turned away by hospitals in Lusaka, the capital.

"When we reached the hospital, we were told there was no bed space for her," Jane Bwalya said of her 70-year-old grandmother. "They told us to manage the disease from home. So we just went back home, and we are trying to give her whatever medicine can reduce the symptoms."

Uganda is likewise fighting a sharp rise in cases and is seeing an array of variants. Authorities report that the surge is infecting more people in their 20s and 30s.

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Intensive care units in and around the capital, Kampala, are almost full, and Misaki Wayengera, a doctor who heads a committee advising Uganda's government, said some patients are "praying for someone to pass on" so that they can get an ICU bed.

Many Ugandans feel hopeless when they see the astronomical medical bills of patients emerging from intensive care. Some have turned to concoctions of boiled herbs for protection. On social media, suggestions include lemongrass and small flowering plants. That has raised fears of poisoning.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni imposed new restrictions this month that included closing all schools. But he avoided the extreme lockdown measures of last year, saying he didn't want to hurt people's livelihoods in a country with a vast informal sector.

For beauticians, restaurant workers and vendors in crowded open-air markets struggling to put food on the table, the threat from COVID-19 may be high, but taking even a day off when sick is a hardship. Testing costs \$22 to \$65, prohibitive for the working class.

"Unless I am feeling very sick, I wouldn't waste all my money to go and test for COVID," said Aisha Mbabazi, a waiter in a restaurant just outside Kampala.

The 28-year-old had a scare weeks ago, she said, noting that a COVID-19 infection could cost her the job if her employer found out. But she has been unable to get a shot.

"I really wanted the vaccine because for us, any time you can get COVID," she said. "Even just touching the menu."

Dr. Ian Clarke, who founded a hospital in Uganda, said that while vaccine demand is growing among the previously hesitant, "the downside is that we do not know when, or from where, we will get the next batch" of shots.

Africa has recorded more than 5 million confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 135,000 deaths. That is a small fraction of the world's caseload, but many fear the crisis could get much worse.

Nearly 90% of African countries are set to miss the global target of vaccinating 10% of their people by September, according to the World Health Organization.

One major problem is that COVAX, the U.N.-backed project to supply vaccine to poor corners of the world, is itself facing a serious shortage of vaccine.

Amid a global outcry over the gap between the haves and the have-nots, the U.S., Britain and the other Group of Seven wealthy nations agreed last week to share at least 1 billion doses with struggling countries over the next year, with deliveries starting in August.

In the meantime, many of the world's poor wait and worry.

In Afghanistan, where a surge threatens to overwhelm a war-battered health system, 700,000 doses donated by China arrived over the weekend, and within hours, "people were fighting with each other to get to the front of the line," said Health Ministry spokesman Dr. Ghulam Dastagir Nazari.

The vaccine rush is notable in a country where many question the reality of the virus and rarely wear masks or social distance, often mocking those who do.

At the end of May, approximately 600,000 Afghans had received at least one dose, or less than 2% of the population of 36 million. But the number of those fully vaccinated is minute — "so few I couldn't even say any percentage," according to Nazari.

In Haiti, hospitals are turning away patients as the country awaits its first shipment of vaccines. A major delivery via COVAX was delayed amid government concern over side effects and a lack of infrastructure to keep the doses properly refrigerated.

"I'm at risk every single day," said Nacheline Nazon, a 22-year-old salesperson who takes a colorful, crowded bus known as a tap-tap to work at a clothing store in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, because that is all she can afford.

She said she wears a mask and washes her hands. If the vaccine becomes available, she said, "I'll probably be the first one in line to get it."

Black community has new option for health care: the church

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By CARRIE ANTLFINGER Associated Press

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Every Sunday at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, the Rev. Joseph Jackson Jr. praises the Lord before his congregation. But since last fall he's been praising something else his Black community needs: the COVID-19 vaccine.

"We want to continue to encourage our people to get out, get your shots. I got both of mine," Jackson said to applause at the church in Milwaukee on a recent Sunday.

Members of Black communities across the U.S. have disproportionately fallen sick or died from the virus, so some church leaders are using their influence and trusted reputations to fight back by preaching from the pulpit, phoning people to encourage vaccinations, and hosting testing clinics and vaccination events in church buildings.

Some want to extend their efforts beyond the fight against COVID-19 and give their flocks a place to seek health care for other ailments at a place they trust — the church.

"We can't go back to normal because we died in our normal," Debra Fraser-Howze, the founder of Choose Healthy Life, told The Associated Press. "We have health disparities that were so serious that one pandemic virtually wiped us out more than anybody else. We can't allow for that to happen again."

Choose Healthy Life, a national initiative involving Black clergy, United Way of New York City and others, has been awarded a \$9.9 million U.S. Department of Health and Human Services grant to expand vaccinations and make permanent the "health navigators" who are already doing coronavirus testing and vaccinations in churches.

The navigators will eventually bring in experts for vaccinations, such as the flu, and to screen for ailments that are common in Black communities, including heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, AIDS and asthma. The effort aims to reduce discomfort within Black communities about seeking health care, either due to concerns about racism or a historical distrust of science and government.

The initiative has so far been responsible for over 30,000 vaccinations in the first three months in 50 churches in New York; Newark, New Jersey; Detroit; Washington, D.C.; and Atlanta.

The federal funding will expand the group's effort to 100 churches, including in rural areas, in 13 states and the District of Columbia, and will help establish an infrastructure for the health navigators to start screenings. Quest Diagnostics and its foundation has already provided funding and testing help.

Choose Healthy Life expects to be involved for at least five years, after which organizers hope control and funding will be handled locally, possibly by health departments or in alignment with federally supported health centers, Fraser-Howze said.

The initiative is also planning to host seminars in churches on common health issues. Some churches already have health clinics and they hope that encourages other churches to follow suit, said Fraser-Howze, who led the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS for 21 years.

"The Black church is going to have to be that link between faith and science," she said.

In Milwaukee, nearly 43% of all coronavirus-related deaths have been in the Black community, according to the Milwaukee Health Department. Census data indicates Blacks make up about 39% of the city's population. An initiative involving Pastors United, Milwaukee Inner City Congregations Allied for Hope and Souls to the Polls has provided vaccinations in at least 80 churches there already.

Milwaukee is one of the most segregated cities in the country, according to the studies by the Brookings Institution. Ericka Sinclair, CEO of Health Connections, Inc., which administers vaccinations, says that's why putting vaccination centers in churches and other trusted locations is so important.

"Access to services is not the same for everyone. It's just not. And it is just another reason why when we talk about health equity, we have ... to do a course correction," she said.

She's also working to get more community health workers funded through insurance companies, including Medicaid.

The church vaccination effort involved Milwaukee Inner City Congregations Allied for Hope, which is faith organization working on social issues. Executive Director and Lead Organizer Lisa Jones says the effect of COVID-19 on the Black community has reinforced the need to address race-related disparities in health

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care. The group has hired another organizer to address disparities in hospital services in the inner city and housing, and lead contamination.

At a recent vaccination clinic in Milwaukee at St. Matthew, a Christian Methodist Episcopal church, Melanie Paige overcame her fears to get vaccinated. Paige, who has lupus and rheumatoid arthritis, said the church clinic helped motivate her, along with encouragement from her son.

"I was more comfortable because I belong to the church and I know I've been here all my life. So that made it easier."

Hawks rally from 26 points down, stun 76ers in Game 5

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Trae Young ran off the court clapping and yapping toward the few Hawks fans that braved the Philly crowd and stuck around and were rewarded with a comeback victory for the ages.

"I was just showing love to the ATL fans that showed up," Young said, "and we're going to need them to show up Friday for us."

Oh yes, there will be a Game 6 in the Eastern Conference semifinals, with the upstart Hawks — not top-seeded Joel Embiid and the Sixers — playing for a spot in the next round.

"If you don't believe, you got to believe now," Hawks coach Nate McMillan said.

How could they not? Atlanta fans can roll off a lengthy list of infamous collapses in its collective sports history.

Here was a comeback to remember.

Young was fouled on a 3-pointer and hit all three free throws with 1:26 left to cap a 26-point rally and send Atlanta on its way to a 109-106 victory Wednesday night in Game 5.

The Hawks won in Philadelphia for the second time in the series and can advance to the conference final for the first time since 2015 with a victory Friday night in Atlanta.

"We knew what we had to do and we had to do it in a hurry. No quit," McMillan said.

Young scored 39 points and added to a postseason where he has become a breakout star.

"We keep fighting no matter what the score is. I'm proud of this team," Young said. "We have confidence in each other."

Embiid scored 17 points in an 8-for-8 first quarter and seemingly had the Sixers on their way toward a romp with a 26-point lead in the first half. They still led 87-69 at the end of the third before they collapsed.

Consider:

— Embiid scored 39 points and Seth Curry had 36 and they were the only two Sixers to score a field goal in the second half.

— The Hawks outscored them 40-19 in the fourth on 16 of 22 shooting.

— The Sixers still had a 97.5% chance of winning Game 5 with 4:23 remaining.

— Had 10 of 15 turnovers in the second half.

"We got too comfortable," guard Ben Simmons said. "We didn't play the way we should be playing."

Lou Williams, Danilo Gallinari and Young opened the fourth on a huge run against the Sixers' second unit and kept attacking once 76ers coach Doc Rivers was forced to put the starters in and save the lead.

Gallinari hit a 3 that made it 87-76 and Embiid sprang from his cool down seat behind the basket and ran to the scorer's table to check back in the game. He instantly scored and pushed the lead back to 13.

Didn't matter.

The big shots kept coming for the Hawks — Williams buried a 3 that made it an 11-point game — and Young kept hitting his floaters and his fouls shots.

Williams and Young each scored 13 points in the fourth.

"It'll be one of those things where I'll look back when he's a Hall of Famer, he's an established superstar in this league and I can say I was part of that process and I worked with this gentleman," Williams said.

Simmons, along with Embiid the cornerstone for the Sixers, missed free throw after free throw much

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as he has for most of the postseason that sped up Atlanta's comeback.

Young's floater brought them within two and then he leaned into a 3-pointer and was fouled by Matisse Thybulle. Young, taunted all series by Sixers fans, calmly stepped to the line and buried all three shots. And so it was, 105-104 Hawks.

The Hawks led by 26 points in a Game 1 victory and won Game 4 at home Monday.

Gallinari scored 16 points, Williams had 15 points and John Collins had 19 points and 11 rebounds.

"We found a hot hand in Lou and found a rotation that works and stayed with it," McMillan said. "They showed their true character."

Simmons was 4 for 14 from the free throw line and even Embiid missed two big ones down the stretch. Simmons missed two with the Sixers up 104-96 and the Hawks came right down and scored. He is 22 for 66 from the line in the playoffs (33%).

"When Ben makes them, we get to leave him in," Rivers said. "When he doesn't, we can't. That's just the way it is."

Simmons said his free throw woes are "mental."

Embiid is basically playing on one good leg as he plays through torn cartilage in his right knee. The injury got the best of him in Game 4. He couldn't get any lift in his shots — notable in a blown layup late that should have won the game — and his 0-fer in the second half left Philly wondering how hard he could go in Game 5.

He went hard — but it wasn't enough. And the Sixers will need to force Game 7 if they want to play at home again.

"We'll be back here for game 7," Rivers said. "I believe that."

TIP-INS

Hawks: Made 22 of 28 free throws.

76ers: Julius Erving sat courtside and Allen Iverson rang the ceremonial bell. ... Danny Green (calf strain) wore a sleeve on his right leg and will remain sidelined for the rest of the series.

Congress approves bill to make Juneteenth a federal holiday

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States will soon have a new federal holiday commemorating the end of slavery.

The House voted 415-14 Wednesday to make Juneteenth, or June 19th, the 12th federal holiday. The bill now goes to President Joe Biden's desk, and he is expected to sign it into law.

Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865, when Union soldiers brought the news of freedom to enslaved Black people in Galveston, Texas — two months after the Confederacy had surrendered. That was also about 2 1/2 years after the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in the Southern states.

It's the first new federal holiday since Martin Luther King Jr. Day was created in 1983.

"Our federal holidays are purposely few in number and recognize the most important milestones," said Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y. "I cannot think of a more important milestone to commemorate than the end of slavery in the United States."

Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Texas, speaking next to a large poster of a Black man whose back bore massive scarring from being whipped, said she would be in Galveston this Saturday to celebrate along with Republican Sen. John Cornyn of Texas.

"Can you imagine?" said the rather short Jackson Lee. "I will be standing maybe taller than Sen. Cornyn, forgive me for that, because it will be such an elevation of joy."

The Senate passed the bill a day earlier under a unanimous consent agreement that expedites the process for considering legislation. It takes just one senator's objection to block such agreements.

"Please, let us do as the Senate. Vote unanimously for passage," Rep. David Scott, D-Ga., pleaded with his colleagues.

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The vote comes as lawmakers struggle to overcome divisions on police reform legislation following the killing of George Floyd by police and as Republican state legislators push what experts say is an unprecedented number of bills aimed at restricting access to the ballot box. While Republicans say the goal is to prevent voter fraud, Democrats contend that the measures are aimed at undermining minority voting rights.

Several members of the Congressional Black Caucus took to the floor to speak in favor of the bill. Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman, D-N.J., said she viewed Juneteenth as a commemoration rather than a celebration because it represented something that was delayed in happening.

"It also reminds me of what we don't have today," she said. "And that is full access to justice, freedom and equality. All these are often in short supply as it relates to the Black community."

The bill was sponsored by Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., and had 60 co-sponsors. Democratic leaders moved quickly to bring the bill to the House floor after the Senate's vote the day before.

Some Republican lawmakers opposed the effort. Rep. Matt Rosendale, R-Mont., said creating the federal holiday was an effort to celebrate "identity politics."

"Since I believe in treating everyone equally, regardless of race, and that we should be focused on what unites us rather than our differences, I will vote no," he said in a press release.

The vast majority of states recognize Juneteenth as a holiday or have an official observance of the day, and most states hold celebrations. Juneteenth is a paid holiday for state employees in Texas, New York, Virginia and Washington.

Under the legislation, the federal holiday would be known as Juneteenth National Independence Day.

Rep. Clay Higgins, R-La., said that he would vote for the bill and that he supported the establishment of a federal holiday, but he was upset that the name of the holiday included the word "independence" rather than "emancipation."

"Why would the Democrats want to politicize this by coopting the name of our sacred holiday of Independence Day?" Higgins asked.

Rep. Brenda Lawrence, D-Mich., replied, "I want to say to my white colleagues on the other side: Getting your independence from being enslaved in a country is different from a country getting independence to rule themselves."

She added, "We have a responsibility to teach every generation of Black and white Americans the pride of a people who have survived, endured and succeeded in these United States of America despite slavery."

The 14 House Republicans who voted against the bill were Andy Biggs of Arizona, Mo Brooks of Alabama, Andrew Clyde of Georgia, Scott DesJarlais of Tennessee, Paul Gosar of Arizona, Ronny Jackson of Texas, Doug LaMalfa of California, Thomas Massie of Kentucky, Tom McClintock of California, Ralph Norman of South Carolina, Mike Rogers of Alabama, Rosendale of Montana, Chip Roy of Texas and Tom Tiffany of Wisconsin.

Heat wave grips US West amid fear of a new, hotter normal

By ANITA SNOW Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — An unusually early and long-lasting heat wave brought more triple-digit temperatures Wednesday to a large swath of the U.S. West, raising concerns that such extreme weather could become the new normal amid a decades-long drought.

Phoenix, which is seeing some of the highest temperatures this week, tied a record for the second day in a row when it reached 115 degrees (46 Celsius) Wednesday and was expected to hit 117 (47 Celsius) each of the next two days, the National Weather Service said.

Scientists who study drought and climate change say that people living in the American West can expect to see more of the same in the coming years.

"Heat waves are getting worse in the West because the soil is so dry" from the region's megadrought, said Park Williams, a University of California, Los Angeles, climate and fire scientist who has calculated that soil in the western half of the nation is the driest it has been since 1895. "We could have two, three, four, five of these heat waves before the end of the summer."

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A few clouds were holding the temperatures down slightly in the desert region of southwest Arizona and southeast California. But there was no real relief expected from the excessive heat warning in effect until at least Sunday. Palm Springs hit a high of 120 degrees on Tuesday,

The dome of high pressure spread over the West the week before the official start of summer, causing unusually hot days and warm evenings.

Expecting crowds trying to cool off, a half dozen lifeguards in wide-brimmed straw hats and red T-shirts over swimsuits waited for people to arrive at a city pool in downtown Phoenix that features a water slide and several fountains. Several blocks away, outdoor misters spritzed diners on restaurant patios.

In California, the operator of the state's power grid is asking residents to voluntarily conserve power for a few hours Thursday evening as record-breaking heat blankets the West this week.

The California Independent System Operator issued the alert to help relieve stress on the grid. It asks people to set thermostats to 78 degrees or higher, turn off unnecessary lights and avoid using major appliances. CEO Elliot Mainzer said the grid was stable and there was no expectation of rotating power outages, but that could change as temperatures spike in the coming days.

Higher temperatures also were felt in the normally temperate San Francisco Bay Area. A few cooling centers were open but mostly empty by the afternoon.

Kathleen Craft, shelter coordinator for the city of Livermore, California, said temperatures had reached 99 degrees (37 Celsius) shortly after midday but only one woman had shown up at the city's cooling center.

"We're anticipating we'll see more people tomorrow when a temperature of 108 degrees is forecast," Craft said.

Elsewhere in the West, triple-digit heat was forecast in Denver, which saw a record high of 101 degrees (38 Celsius) Tuesday. The weather service issued an excessive heat warning for parts of western Colorado, most of which is experiencing extreme drought conditions.

Bekka Hamburg was trying to beat the heat by paddle-boarding on a lake just west of downtown Denver on Wednesday.

"I rented this (paddleboard) a week ago knowing that it would be like 100 degrees," the 24-year-old visiting from Indianapolis said. "I didn't pack any pants, didn't pack any T-shirts. I just packed tank tops and shorts."

Hamburg said it was the first time she had experienced Colorado's "dry heat," adding that it's much easier to manage than the humid heat common in the Midwest.

In Nevada, Las Vegas hit 116 degrees (46.6 Celsius), breaking the record of 114 degrees (45.5 Celsius) for the date set during a record hot spell on June 16, 1940.

The region is expected to remain at 113 degrees (45 C) or hotter through Sunday, National Weather Service meteorologist John Salmen said, and still could top the all-time local high of 117 degrees (47 Celsius), set June 20, 2017.

"This is pretty impressive. We're seeing all-time records fall," Salmen said.

New Mexico also experienced more record-breaking highs. But a possible respite was in sight with showers and thunderstorms expected in parts of the state.

In Montana, temperatures over 100 degrees (38 Celsius) have made it tougher to fight wildfires that have exploded in size, triggering evacuations and destroying an undetermined number of homes. Furious winds have stoked the flames and forced the crash-landing of a firefighting helicopter.

At least 14 new fires have been reported in Montana and Wyoming since Tuesday.

The dry weather was also being felt in Idaho, where authorities are preparing for what could be a challenging wildfire season.

Nick Nauslar, a meteorologist with the National Interagency Fire Center, told state officials this week that nearly 80% of Idaho is in drought and the rest will likely experience it in the coming months. He said Idaho had its second-driest spring in the last 126 years.

'Practical work' summit for Biden, Putin: No punches or hugs

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By AAMER MADHANI, JONATHAN LEMIRE, and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — U.S. President Joe Biden and Russia's Vladimir Putin exchanged cordial words and plotted modest steps on arms control and diplomacy but emerged from their much-anticipated Swiss summit Wednesday largely where they started -- with deep differences on human rights, cyberattacks, election interference and more.

The two leaders reached an important, but hardly relationship-changing agreement to return their chief diplomats to Moscow and Washington after they were called home as the relationship deteriorated in recent months. And Biden and Putin agreed to start working on a plan to solidify their countries' last remaining treaty limiting nuclear weapons.

But their three hours of talks on the shores of Lake Geneva left both men standing firmly in the same positions they had started in.

"I'm not confident he'll change his behavior," Biden said at a post-summit news conference, when he was asked about what evidence he saw that former KGB agent Putin would adjust his ways and actions. "What will change his behavior is the rest of the world reacts to them, and they diminish their standing in the world. I'm not confident in anything."

Both the White House and Kremlin had set low expectations going into the summit. They issued a joint statement after the conclusion that said their meeting showed the "practical work our two countries can do to advance our mutual interests and also benefit the world."

But over and over, Biden defaulted to "we'll find out" when assessing whether their discussions about nuclear power, cybersecurity and other thorny issues will pay off.

Back-to-back news conferences by Biden and Putin after the summit also put in stark relief that getting at the root of tensions between the U.S. and Russia will remain an enormously difficult task — including when the two sides, at least in public comments, sketched dramatically different realities on cyber matters.

Biden came into the summit pushing Putin to clamp down on the surge of Russian-originated cybersecurity and ransomware attacks that have targeted businesses and government agencies in the U.S. and around the globe. But when the summit ended, it wasn't evident that more than superficial progress had been made.

Biden said he made clear to Putin that if Russia crossed certain red lines — including going after major American infrastructure — his administration would respond and "the consequences of that would be devastating,"

Putin, in turn, continued to insist Russia had nothing to do with cyber intrusions despite U.S. intelligence evidence that indicates otherwise.

"Most of the cyberattacks in the world are carried out from the cyber realm of the United States," said Putin, also adding Canada, two Latin American countries he didn't name and Britain to the list.

While the U.S., Canada and Britain all engage in cyberespionage, the most damaging cyberattacks on record have come either from state-backed Russian hackers or Russian-speaking ransomware criminals who operate with impunity in Russia and allied nations.

In fact, the worst have been attributed by the United States and the European Union to Russia's GRU military intelligence agency, including the NotPetya virus that did more than \$10 billion in economic damage in 2017, hitting companies including shipping giant Maersk, the pharmaceutical company Merck and food company Mondelez.

Putin agreed at the summit that Russia will begin consultations with the U.S. on the matter and acknowledged that ransomware and cyberattacks are big problems. Still, he maintained that the two countries "just need to abandon various insinuations."

Despite the clear differences, Biden insisted that progress had been made, scolding reporters for being too pessimistic during a chat on the tarmac just before he boarded Air Force One to return home.

"There is a value to being realistic and putting on ... an optimistic face," the president said.

Biden said the two leaders spent a "great deal of time" discussing cybersecurity and he believed Putin understood the U.S. position.

"I pointed out to him, we have significant cyber capability," Biden said. "In fact, (if) they violate basic

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norms, we will respond.”

A disconnect between the two leaders was apparent on other matters, large and small.

Biden raised human rights issues with Putin, including the fate of opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Putin defended Navalny’s prison sentence and deflected repeated questions about mistreatment of Russian opposition leaders by highlighting U.S. domestic turmoil, including the Black Lives Matter protests and the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection. Biden was having none of it.

“My response is kind of what I communicated” to Putin, Biden said. “That’s a ridiculous comparison.”

Putin held forth for nearly an hour before international reporters after the summit. While showing defiance at questions about Biden pressing him on human rights, he also expressed respect for the U.S. president as an experienced political leader.

The Russian noted that Biden repeated wise advice his mother had given him and that American president also spoke about his family — messaging that Putin said might not have been entirely relevant to their summit but demonstrated Biden’s “moral values.”

Overall, the tone was more businesslike than Putin’s 2018 summit with then-President Donald Trump, who embraced some of Putin’s unlikely statements about election interference but was considered somewhat amateurish and unpredictable by the Russians.

At this faceoff, though Putin raised doubt that the U.S.-Russia relationship could soon return to a measure of equilibrium of years past, he suggested that Biden was someone he could work with.

“The meeting was actually very efficient,” Putin said. “It was substantive, it was specific. It was aimed at achieving results, and one of them was pushing back the frontiers of trust.”

The summit had a somewhat awkward beginning — both men appeared to avoid looking directly at each other during a brief and chaotic photo opportunity before a scrum of jostling reporters.

It ended sooner than expected. Biden said that was because they had covered all the key areas and then “looked at each other like, OK, what next?”

Then Biden answered his own question

“What is going to happen next is we are going to be able to look back, look ahead in three to six months and say ‘Did the things we agreed to sit down and try to work out, did it work?’”

Lawyer: US drops lawsuit, grand jury probe over Bolton book

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

The Justice Department on Wednesday abandoned its lawsuit against John Bolton, former President Donald Trump’s onetime national security adviser, over his book that officials argued disclosed classified information, according to court documents and Bolton’s representatives.

Prosecutors also have dropped a grand jury investigation over the book’s publication, Bolton’s lawyer said Wednesday.

The Trump administration sued last year to block the release of Bolton’s book, “The Room Where It Happened,” and to recover copies of the book that had already been distributed. The book, released in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election, offered a behind-the-scenes, and unflattering, account of Trump’s foreign policy dealings. It described how Trump asked China’s President Xi Jinping to help the American’s reelection prospects and how Trump had pressured his Ukraine counterpart for politically charged investigations.

Justice Department lawyers who sued over the book had insisted that the manuscript contained classified information that could damage national security and that Bolton, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, had failed to complete a prepublication review process designed to prevent the disclosure of government secrets.

On Wednesday, the Biden administration filed a document in federal court dismissing the suit, formally bringing the yearlong court fight to an end.

“These actions represent a complete vindication for Ambassador Bolton, and a repudiation of former President Trump’s attempt, under the pretext of protecting classified information, first to suppress the

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book's publication and when that failed in court, to penalize the ambassador," said Bolton spokeswoman Sarah Tinsley.

Bolton's lawyers say he moved forward with the book after a White House National Security Council official, with whom Bolton had worked for months, had said the manuscript no longer contained classified information.

That official, Ellen Knight, described in a letter submitted to the court last September how Trump administration officials repeatedly exerted political pressure in an unsuccessful effort to block the book's release. She described an unusual process of delay tactics and legal maneuverings.

Knight, a career government records professional, said through her lawyer that after she had determined that the manuscript no longer contained classified information and was ready for clearance, she learned that a political appointee with no experience in the prepublication review process had been assigned by the White House to conduct a new review.

That official subsequently flagged hundreds of passages in Bolton's manuscript that the official believed were still classified.

A federal judge last year rejected the Justice Department's efforts to halt the book's release, partly because hundreds of thousands of copies had already been distributed. But the judge expressed concern that Bolton published the book before receiving a formal clearance letter, which Knight said was blocked by the White House.

Besides suing Bolton, the Justice Department opened a criminal investigation over the book, though that inquiry has now been dropped, said Bolton's representatives. A department spokesman declined to comment on Wednesday.

Bolton's lawyer, Charles J. Cooper, described the government's efforts to block the book as part of a "politically motivated order" by Trump.

"By ending these proceedings without in any way penalizing Ambassador Bolton or limiting his proceeds from the book, the Department of Justice has tacitly acknowledged that President Trump and his White House officials acted illegitimately," Cooper said in a statement.

The book generated substantial attention even before its publication after news broke during Trump's first impeachment trial that Bolton had written how Trump had linked the supply of military assistance to Ukraine to that country's willingness to conduct investigations into Trump's Democratic rival, now-President Joe Biden.

Those allegations were at the heart of an impeachment trial that ended with Trump's Senate acquittal in February 2020. Bolton though refused to testify at impeachment proceedings.

Bolton's time at the Trump White House was unsurprisingly rocky. A noted national security hawk, Bolton was an odd choice for Trump, who advocated ending the United States' overseas military operations. The two continued to clash in public comments long after Bolton left office.

"The government's abandonment of both the criminal investigation of Bolton and the civil lawsuit indicates that both actions were pursued at the behest of the Trump White House as political retribution against Bolton, and not on the legal merits," said former Justice Department national security official David Laufman.

"This is now one additional matter warranting investigation by the Justice Department's Inspector General," he added.

US ends strict Trump-era asylum rules for violence victims

By AMY TAXIN Associated Press

The U.S. government on Wednesday ended two Trump administration policies that made it harder for immigrants fleeing violence to qualify for asylum, especially Central Americans.

Attorney General Merrick Garland issued new instructions to immigration judges to stop following the Trump-era rules that made it tough for immigrants who faced domestic or gang violence to win asylum in the United States. He also undid a policy that made it difficult for immigrants to obtain asylum based on threats to a family member.

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The moves could make it easier for immigrants to win their cases for humanitarian protection and were widely celebrated by immigrant advocates.

"The significance of this cannot be overstated," said Kate Melloy Goettel, legal director of litigation at the American Immigration Council. "This was one of the worst anti-asylum decisions under the Trump era, and this is a really important first step in undoing that."

Garland said he was making the changes after President Joe Biden ordered his office and the Department of Homeland Security to draft rules addressing complex issues in immigration law about groups of people who should qualify for asylum.

Gene Hamilton, a key architect of many of former President Donald Trump's immigration policies who served in the Justice Department, said in a statement that he believed the change would lead to more immigrants filing asylum claims based on crime and that should not be a reason for protections.

The Biden administration changes come as U.S. immigration authorities have reported unusually high numbers of encounters with migrants on the southern border. In April, border officials reported the highest number of encounters in more than 20 years, though many migrants were repeat crossers who previously had been expelled from the country under pandemic-related powers. The number of children crossing the border alone also has hovered at all-time highs.

Many Central Americans arrive on the border fleeing gang violence in their countries. But it isn't easy to qualify for asylum under U.S. immigration laws, and the Trump-era policies made it that much harder.

More than half of asylum cases decided by the immigration courts in the 2020 fiscal year were denials, according to data from the Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review. Four years earlier, it was about one in five cases.

In the current fiscal year, people from countries such as Russia and Cameroon have seen higher asylum grant rates in the immigration courts than people from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, the data shows.

Immigration judges abide by instructions set by the attorney general, and their courts are within the Justice Department.

In one of the reversals, Garland restored a 2014 case that defined married women in Guatemala who are unable to leave their relationship as a group deserving of asylum, a decision that eased the way for other victims of domestic violence. In 2018, then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions overturned that guidance and added that victims of gang violence also should be largely ineligible, extending the scope to large swaths of non-government actors.

In another case involving a Mexican man who claimed his father was targeted by a drug cartel, Garland reversed a decision by former Attorney General William Barr that said such family ties were insufficient grounds for an asylum claim.

Jason Dzubow, an immigration attorney in Washington who focuses on asylum, said he recently represented a Salvadoran family in which the husband was killed and gang members started coming after his children. While Dzubow argued they were in danger because of their family ties, he said the immigration judge denied the case, citing the Trump-era decision among the reasons.

Dzubow welcomed Garland's changes but said he doesn't expect to suddenly see large numbers of Central Americans winning their asylum cases, which remain difficult under U.S. law.

"I don't expect it is going to open the floodgates, and all of a sudden everyone from Central America can win their cases. Those cases are very burdensome and difficult," he said. "We need to make a decision: Do we want to protect these people?"

Rift on Communion policy as US Catholic bishops open meeting

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

Divisions flared quickly on Wednesday as U.S. Catholic bishops opened a national meeting highlighted by a sensitive agenda item — whether to take initial steps toward a possible rebuke of politicians, including President Joe Biden, who receive Communion while supporting abortion rights.

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Some said the issue was so important and contentious that all the more than 260 participating bishops should have an opportunity to address it during the three-day meeting that's being held virtually.

Others derided that proposal as a delaying tactic by those who are skeptical of the initiative. They said bishops would have ample time to comment at a later meeting when the full draft of a new statement on Communion would be presented for consideration.

After an extended exchange, 59% of the bishops voted against a motion by St. Louis Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski to allow more speaking opportunities at this week's meeting.

At stake is a proposal that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' 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, probably an in-person gathering in November.

Some conservative bishops say such a statement should signal to Catholic politicians that support of abortion rights should disqualify them from receiving Communion.

Yet there are scores of bishops who oppose any swift or aggressive action on the issue; some cite a letter from the Vatican urging the USCCB to take a cautious, collegial approach. Nearly 70 bishops last month signed a letter to USCCB president and Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez urging him to delay the discussion until the bishops convene in person, but that request was not granted.

Gomez, in his opening address Wednesday, did not mention the Communion debate but stressed the importance of unity in a time of heightened political and social divisions.

"It's not realistic to expect the church to stay immune from the pressures of division," he said. "And we are living in a secular society where politics is becoming the substitute religion for a lot of people. So we need to guard against the temptation to think about the church in simply political terms."

"Only a church that is united can heal the brokenness and challenge the injustices that we see more clearly now in the wake of this pandemic," he added.

Gomez noted that Pope Francis also has emphasized unity within the church — a point driven home in an address to the bishops by the Vatican's ambassador to the United States, Papal Nuncio Christophe Pierre.

"Pope Francis is convinced that dialogue is the best way to realize what always ought to be affirmed and respected," Pierre said. "Our commitment to this type of dialogue, one which produces unity of faith and action, and not merely talking about things endlessly, will strengthen the church's credibility."

Some bishops have expressed concern that the debate is being used as a political weapon to embarrass Catholic Democrats — such as Biden and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi — who hold high office and support abortion rights.

One of Wednesday's participants, retired Bishop Michael Pfeifer of San Angelo, Texas, openly assailed Biden for recent moves to expand and protect abortion access. Pfeifer's request to add this specific topic to the agenda was rebuffed, but Gomez said that some of the contentious aspects of the president's policies would be raised later in the meeting by Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, head of the USCCB's Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

Biden is the country's second Catholic president and the first to hold that office while espousing clear-cut support for abortion rights.

Naumann has said such a stance by a public figure is "a grave moral evil," and he has advocated for a public rebuke of the president.

Among other subtopics, a Communion document would likely address the issue of who among Catholic public figures is worthy of receiving the sacrament. However, Bishop Kevin Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana, chairman of the doctrine committee, said it would not mandate a national policy and instead leave decisions about specific churchgoers up to individual bishops and archbishops.

Cardinal Wilton Gregory, the archbishop of Washington, has made clear that Biden is welcome to receive Communion at churches in the archdiocese.

After tumultuous year, can Portland make a comeback?

By SARA CLINE Associated Press/Report for America

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PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The smell of fresh empanadas wafted through the stands at Portland's Saturday Market. People talked through their masks with artists as others sifted through fork windchimes, crystal necklaces, tie dye dresses and clay mugs.

The weekly event was smaller than in years past, but longtime attendees say it was a sign of life being breathed back into downtown.

Nine blocks away, past businesses still shuttered with plywood boards — the names of Black people killed by police painted onto them — a panhandler leaned against a fence outside the federal courthouse in an area that was choked with tear gas last summer as thousands of protesters seized the streets. It's now overwhelmed by a makeshift homeless camp.

The scenes are from a city trying to emerge from one of its most wrenching periods, one that saw its reputation go from quirky "Portlandia" to violent dystopia in the minds of many on the outside looking in.

The Pacific Northwest city had best been known nationally for its ambrosial food scene, craft breweries and nature-loving hipsters.

But last year, as a portion of its downtown was consumed by nightly protests that often turned violent and resulted in clashes with federal agents, former President Donald Trump and his administration labeled Portland an "anarchist jurisdiction."

"It does feel kind of like someone dropped a bomb in some areas (of Portland), but I think they're very contained areas," said Ocean Howell, a professor at the University of Portland who teaches urban history and planning. "I think there's likely some businesses that are gone and aren't coming back. And there are just some people, generally, who are kind of spooked from everything."

City officials insist Portland is resilient as they launch a revitalization plan — in the form of citywide cleanups of protest damage, aggressive encampment removals, increased homeless services and police reform — to repair its reputation.

But even the city's famously liberal locals grew weary of months of racial justice protests, increased shootings, a more noticeable homeless population and strict COVID-19 restrictions.

When the pandemic reached Portland in March 2020, businesses boarded up, turned off neon "open" signs and sent employees home.

"A year ago, when we were at the end of the longest economic expansion in post World War history in this country. We had 100,000-plus individuals coming in and out of downtown daily," said Andrew Hoan, president and CEO of the Portland Business Alliance. "And then, overnight, they disappeared."

Portland's signature events, such as its Rose Festival, brew fests and drag shows, were canceled, postponed or held virtually. Tourists shied away. No other part of the city was so obviously altered as downtown, which saw an 80% decrease in foot traffic, based on a study conducted by the Portland Business Alliance.

A year later there are still "pockets" in the city that seem frozen in a scene from six months ago. However, officials say there is hope and already noticeable signs of recovery.

Gov. Kate Brown has begun to lift some of the country's strictest COVID-19 restrictions, and restaurants and bars have expanded capacity. The state has set a goal to completely reopen the economy by the end of June or early July.

"We're in a virtuous cycle now, where one element feeds the other," Hoan said, noting customers are again lining up outside the famous Powell's Books and fans are returning to Timbers' soccer games.

"Office workers start to breathe life into the retail scene and hospitality scene, and that sends a signal to other retailers and hospitality owners," he said.

While all cities have dealt with the impact of COVID, Portland faced additional challenges over the past year — from a large homeless population, to nearby "once-in-generation" wildfires, to winter ice storms that left tens of thousands without power. But the events that challenged the city's reputation the most was political violence on top of racial awakening.

The Rose City was thrust into the national spotlight over the summer as people attended nightly racial justice protests. Photos of thousands of people laying on the historic Burnside Bridge for eight minutes and 46 seconds in remembrance of George Floyd captivated the nation.

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But as time passed, scenes of chaos emerged: violent clashes between protesters and federal agents sent by Trump. In late August, a Trump supporter was shot and killed downtown when a large caravan of Trump supporters and Black Lives Matter protesters clashed in the streets.

Even with most protests taking place within a few blocks, news of the mayhem stretched across the country.

Hoan said participants who were violent or damaged businesses negatively affected the city's reputation. "And we're dealing with the consequences now," he said.

Protests continue in the city and sometimes turn violent, but that activity is concentrated in small areas.

"I get the impression that some people from outside the area, from some of the news coverage, get the impression that the whole city is just a warzone between antifa and Proud Boys, and that's really not the case," Howell said.

Based on a survey conducted by the city last month, 68% of people said their top reason for not visiting was due to riots and protests.

In recent months, Portland officials have committed millions of dollars to cleaning up downtown — removing graffiti, clearing large homeless encampments and restoring damaged buildings.

In addition, the mayor's office has launched a reputation and rebranding effort.

"We're doggedly determined to recover," Mayor Ted Wheeler said in his State of the City address this year. "Our community has what it takes to move forward to a much greater future."

Millions fear eviction as US housing crisis worsens

By KEN SWEET and MICHAEL CASEY AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — More than 4 million people say they fear being evicted or foreclosed upon in the coming months, just as two studies released Wednesday found that the nation's housing availability and affordability crisis is expected to worsen significantly following the pandemic.

The studies come as a federal eviction moratorium is set to expire at the end of the month. The moratorium has kept many tenants owing back rent housed. Making matters worse, the tens of billions of dollars in federal emergency rental assistance that was supposed to solve the problem has not reached most tenants.

The housing crisis, the studies found, risks widening the gap between Black, Latino and white households, as well as putting homeownership out of the reach of lower-income Americans.

The reports were released on the same day as Census Bureau's biweekly Household Pulse Survey came out. It showed that nearly 4.2 million people nationwide report that it is likely or somewhat likely that they will be evicted or foreclosed upon in the next two months.

Many of those tenants are waiting to see what becomes of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eviction moratorium, which is set expire June 30. Housing advocates are pressuring President Joe Biden's administration to extend it. They argue extending it would give states the time to distribute more than \$45 billion in rental assistance and protect vulnerable communities from COVID-19. The rental assistance has been slow to reach tenants.

"The latest data confirm two things — emergency rental assistance is very slow to reach renters in need, and millions of renters remain behind on rent and at heightened risk of evictions," Diane Yentel, president of the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, said in an email.

Among those confronting the June 30 deadline is Victor Richardson. The 78-year-old, who is disabled and in a wheelchair, is facing eviction from his \$2,500-a-month assisted living center in Tucson, Arizona, and has a court hearing early next month.

"We have been successfully fighting this and I've come to believe we are going to come out this victoriously," said Richardson, who housing advocates said would not be admitted to a homeless shelter because of his disability.

The reports by Harvard University and the National Association of Realtors come from different perspectives, but ultimately reach the same conclusion: The United States isn't building enough housing to address

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population growth, causing record low home availability, and rising home prices are putting homeownership out of reach of millions of Americans.

Without substantial changes in homebuilding and home affordability, both reports say, the result will be a more-or-less permanent class of renters contrasted with what will likely be a mostly white class of homeowners. While these problems were known before the coronavirus pandemic, the economic impact of the pandemic exacerbated the problem, the reports say.

"These disparities are likely to persist even as the economy recovers, with many lower-income households slow to regain their financial footing and facing possible eviction or foreclosure," researchers at Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University wrote.

A separate study commissioned by the National Association of Realtors found that the U.S. housing market needs to build at least 5.5 million new units to keep up with demand and keeping home ownership affordable over the next 10 years. That's on top of the roughly 1.2 million units built per year on average, or a roughly 60% increase in home construction for the next decade, just to keep up with demand.

"The scale of underbuilding and the existing demand-supply gap is enormous and will require a major national commitment to build more housing of all types by expanding resources, addressing barriers to new development and making new housing construction an integral part of a national infrastructure strategy," wrote Kenneth Rosen, David Bank, Max Hall, Scott Reed and Carson Goldman with the Rosen Consulting Group, in its report to the association of realtors.

The association's report points out several regions requiring more homes, including many parts of California and the West, Southern Florida, and the Northeast, particularly the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area.

Without additional housing, an increasing share of Americans are likely to become renters in the coming years. While renting is not necessarily a bad thing since it provides more flexibility, homeownership has been the primary driver of wealth generation in the U.S. since World War II. Home equity is often a way for Americans to have a financial safety net at times of economic trouble, as seen in the pandemic.

These problems get worse when broken out by racial backgrounds. Black and Latino homeowners have less in savings than their white counterparts. White potential homeowners also have generational wealth to potentially tap in the form of a down payment.

"The diverging circumstances between those with the resources to weather the economic shutdowns and those struggling to simply stay afloat thus widened already large inequalities in income and wealth," said the Harvard researchers.

Outside of a massive increase in homebuilding, researchers at Harvard pointed to government home affordability programs as likely the best solution to address the problem long term.

"Any of a number of new proposals to provide down payment assistance to socially disadvantaged buyers would potentially bring millions of low-income households and households of color into homeownership."

Fed sees earlier time frame for rate hikes with inflation up

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve signaled Wednesday that it may act sooner than previously planned to start dialing back the low-interest-rate policies that have helped fuel a swift rebound from the pandemic recession but have also coincided with rising inflation.

The Fed's policymakers forecast that they would raise their benchmark short-term rate — which affects many consumer and business loans, including mortgages and credit cards — twice by late 2023. They had previously estimated that no rate hike would occur before 2024.

At a news conference, Chair Jerome Powell said the Fed's policymaking committee also began discussing when to reduce its monthly bond purchases. But Powell made clear that the Fed has yet to decide when it will do so. The purchases, which consist of \$120 billion in Treasury and mortgage bonds, are intended to keep longer-term rates low to encourage borrowing.

The Fed has made clear that its first step in slowing its support for the economy will be to pare its bond

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purchases — and that it would begin to raise rates only sometime after that. Its key rate has been pinned near zero since March 2020.

The central bank's new forecast for rate hikes starting in 2023 reflects an economy that's achieving faster progress than was expected earlier this year.

At the same time, Powell sought Wednesday to dispel any concerns that the Fed might be in a hurry to withdraw its economic support by making borrowing more expensive. The economy, he said, still hasn't improved enough to reduce the pace of the monthly bond purchases, which the Fed has said it intends to continue until "substantial further progress" has been made toward its employment and inflation goals.

"We are a ways away from substantial further progress, we think," Powell said at his news conference. "But we are making progress."

Soon after the Fed issued its statement Wednesday, U.S. stocks fell further from their record highs, and bond yields rose. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note rose from 1.48% to 1.55%.

Sung Won Sohn, an economist at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, suggested that the markets' initially negative reaction to the Fed's statement might have caused Powell to take a more dovish tone at his news conference. ("Doves," in Fed parlance, typically focus on the Fed's mandate to maximize employment and worry less about inflation. "Hawks," by contrast, tend to concern themselves more with the need to prevent high inflation.)

"We got two different messages from the Fed today," Sohn said. "The interest rate projections were a bit more hawkish than the market expected."

But at his news conference, Sohn said, Powell "emphasized that the economy is still not where it should be, especially in terms of unemployment ... and the Fed still thinks the economy needs stimulus from the central bank."

Still, Powell also sketched an overall optimistic picture in his remarks Wednesday. The inflation spikes of the past two months, he said, will likely prove temporary, and hiring should accelerate through summer and into the fall as COVID-19 recedes further with increased vaccinations. That will allow schools and day care centers to reopen, which will enable more parents to work, while supplemental federal aid for the jobless ends.

"There is every reason," Powell said, "to think that we will (soon) be in a labor market with very attractive numbers, with low unemployment, high participation and rising wages across the spectrum."

His comments suggested that the Fed chair isn't concerned that hiring this spring, while solid, has fallen shy of forecasts. Powell had said in early spring that he would want to see a "string" of hiring reports showing about 1 million added jobs each month. The job market has yet to reach that total in any month this year, though employers have posted a record-high number of open jobs

At the same time, inflation has shot up much faster than the Fed's policymakers had forecast in March. Inflation jumped to 5% in May compared with a year earlier — the largest 12-month spike since 2008.

The increase was driven partly by a huge rise in used car prices, which have soared as shortages of semiconductors have slowed vehicle production. Sharply higher prices for car rentals, airline tickets, and hotel rooms were also major factors, reflecting pent-up demand as consumers shift away from the large goods purchases many of them had made while stuck at home to spending on services.

Powell stuck with his long-standing view that those spikes will have only a temporary impact.

"The prices that are driving higher inflation are from categories that are being directly affected by the recovery from the pandemic and the reopening of the economy," he said. "Prices that have moved up really quickly because of the shortages and bottlenecks and the like, they should stop going up. And at some point, they in some cases should actually go down."

The central bank on Wednesday raised its forecast for inflation to 3.4% by the end of this year, from 2.4% in its previous projection in March. Yet the officials foresee price increases remaining tame in the following two years.

Fed officials also expect the economy to grow 7% this year, which would be the fastest calendar-year expansion since 1984. They project that growth will slow after that, to 3.3% in 2022 and 2.4% in 2023.

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Economists generally expect the Fed to continue discussing tapering its bond purchases and then — by late August or September — to outline specifically how and when it would begin. That would set the stage for a reduction in bond purchases to actually begin near the end of this year or in early 2022.

Another key consideration for the Fed is whether inflation persists long enough to affect the public's behavior. If Americans begin to expect price increases, those expectations can trigger a self-fulfilling cycle as workers demand higher wages, which, in turn, can lead their employers to keep raising prices to offset their higher labor costs.

Powell said that measures of longer-term inflation expectations have increased in recent months, after falling at the outset of the pandemic. But they mostly remain in a range consistent with the Fed's 2% inflation target.

"It's gratifying to see them having moved up off of their pandemic lows," he said.

Italy impress again in 3-0 win over Switzerland at Euro 2020

By ANDREW DAMPF AP Sports Writer

ROME (AP) — The wingers sprint forward like Ferraris. The midfielders are just as capable at scoring as the forwards. And the reserves look like starters.

A new-look Italy is impressing with its offensive flair at the European Championship.

Midfielder Manuel Locatelli scored two goals Wednesday and the Azzurri beat Switzerland 3-0 to become the first team to reach the last 16 at Euro 2020, and they did it with a game to spare.

They also did it with their 10th consecutive victory.

"I'm fortunate to have great players who enjoy playing soccer, like to have fun and take some risks — which is the essence of soccer," Italy coach Roberto Mancini said.

As usual — and perhaps the only characteristic carried on from Italy teams of the past — the defense was impenetrable.

It's quite a turnaround for a team that failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup.

Italy extended its unbeaten streak to 29 matches — one shy of the team record — and kept its 10th clean sheet in that run.

Mancini, however, suggested that Italy still trails France, Portugal and Belgium on the list of tournament favorites.

"One of them is the World Cup champion, one is the European champion and one has been first in the ranking for quite a while," Mancini said. "They've been shaped over time and it's only normal that they're ahead of us. But anything can happen in soccer. It's not such a sure thing."

Locatelli's first goal came following a textbook exchange with Sassuolo teammate Domenico Berardi midway through the first half. His second came with a long, low shot shortly after the break that left Switzerland goalkeeper Yann Sommer immobile.

Ciro Immobile added the third with another long-range effort in the 89th for his second score of the tournament.

Giorgio Chiellini had a goal waved off by video review early in the match because of a handball. Then the Italy captain exited with a left thigh injury.

Italy leads Group A with a six points after overwhelming Turkey 3-0 in the tournament opener. Wales is next with four points earlier after beating Turkey 2-0 in Baku.

Switzerland has one point and Turkey has zero.

"They caused us a lot of problems and we weren't (playing) at 100%," Switzerland coach Vladimir Petković said. "We weren't secure on the pitch, which is normally not our character."

Locatelli's first goal was an offensive masterclass.

He started it off with a long pass from within Italy's half to Berardi streaking down the right flank. Berardi then cut inside and crossed back to the onrushing Locatelli, who tapped in from close range.

"Manu and I know each other very well," Berardi said. "He was smart to give me the ball and carry on the run."

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Added Mancini: "It was an extraordinary goal."

And to think that Locatelli only gained his starting spot because of an injury to the more experienced Marco Verratti, who is expected back for the next game against Wales.

At age 23, Locatelli became the tournament's youngest scorer so far.

Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma preserved the shutout with a double save on Steven Zuber late in the second half.

The Azzurri have now scored 30 unanswered goals over their last 10 matches.

In the final group games, Italy remains in Rome to face Wales while Switzerland returns to Baku to face Turkey.

AP FACT CHECK: Putin's errant claims on cyberattacks, Jan. 6

By FRANK BAJAK, DARIA LITVINOVA and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

Russian President Vladimir Putin contradicted the evidence Wednesday when he asserted Russians are not a leading source of cyberattacks on the United States and other countries. They are.

Putin also accused the imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny of leaving Russia unlawfully to seek medical treatment, ignoring the fact Navalny was flown from the country while he was in a coma.

And Putin distorted the circumstances of the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol when he tried to equate that attack with the threats his government contends with from political opposition in Russia.

In response, President Joe Biden made the unsubstantiated claim that the Capitol attackers killed a police officer, whose death actually was attributed to natural causes possibly aggravated by the events of the insurrection.

A look at their claims in separate news conferences that followed their meeting Wednesday in Geneva.

PUTIN: "From American sources, it follows that most of the cyberattacks in the world are carried out from the cyber realm of the United States. Second place is Canada. Then two Latin American countries. Afterward comes Great Britain. Russia is not on the list of countries from where — from the cyberspace of which — most of the various cyberattacks are carried out."

THE FACTS: This portrayal defies the record. Putin did not identify the source of the list he cited. But Russian-based digital malfeasance is well established by U.S. officials and security researchers alike.

While the U.S., Canada and Britain all engage in cyberespionage, the most damaging cyberattacks on record have come either from state-backed Russian hackers or Russian-speaking ransomware criminals who operate with impunity in Russia and allied nations.

In one such attack, the NotPetya virus did more than \$10 billion in economic damage in 2017, hitting companies including shipping giant Maersk, the pharmaceutical company Merck and the food company Mondelez.

The cyberattacks that have recently done the most damage are from ransomware sowed and activated by Russian-speaking criminal gangs that enjoy safe harbor in Russia and allied nations and whose members have sometimes colluded with Russian security services.

The global ransomware plague that has caused tens of billions of dollars of damage in the past 18 months — hitting a company, hospital, school or other target about every eight minutes — was a major issue for Biden at the summit.

As well, Russian intelligence operatives famously interfered in the 2016 U.S. presidential election by hacking Democratic email accounts and orchestrating the release of those communications to boost the campaign of Republican Donald Trump and harm his Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton.

Russian military hackers also attacked and briefly shut down portions of Ukraine's power grid in the winters of 2015 and 2016.

Altogether, the cybersecurity firm Recorded Future estimates there were 65,000 successful ransomware attacks globally in 2020 from all sources.

The May attack on the Colonial Pipeline, which prompted it to cut off fuel supplies to the U.S. East Coast for five days, was the most spectacular in its impact on crucial infrastructure and came after the Biden

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administration called ransomware a national security threat exceeding cyberespionage

PUTIN, on the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol: "People came to the U.S. Congress with political demands after the election. Over 400 people have criminal cases opened against them, they're facing prison terms of 20, or maybe even up to 25 years. They're being called domestic terrorists and accused of a range of other crimes. Seventy of them were immediately after these events, and only 30 of them are still under arrest, unclear on what grounds."

THE FACTS: His suggestion that dozens of Jan. 6 insurrectionists were arrested and quietly imprisoned for political speech with unclear legal grounds is incorrect.

More than 480 people have been arrested in connection with the attack, mostly on federal charges ranging from unlawfully entering the Capitol to conspiracy. They include more than three dozen members and associates of right-wing extremist groups such as the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers.

Each of the suspects charged by the Justice Department was arrested based on a criminal complaint signed by a federal judge and requiring investigators prove they have probable cause the person committed a federal crime, or an indictment from a grand jury.

The cases have attracted media attention, prosecutors have highlighted many of the arrests with news releases and court records in the U.S. are generally public. The Justice Department also set up a website to list the cases it brought against suspects charged in the attack. It contains links to the charging documents against them.

So far, four people charged in the attack have pleaded guilty to federal charges.

BIDEN, on Putin comparing the Jan. 6 Capitol attack to political opponents trying to undermine him in Russia: "I think that's a ridiculous comparison. It's one thing for — literally — criminals to break through a cordon, go into the Capitol, kill a police officer, and be held unaccountable than it is for people who are ... marching on a capitol saying, you're not allowing me to speak freely, you're not allowing me to do A, B or C or D."

THE FACTS: His allegation that attackers killed a police officer is unproven. The truth about the death of Brian Sicknick, a U.S. Capitol Police officer, is more complicated.

The District of Columbia medical examiner's office ruled that Sicknick died from natural causes, though the stressful circumstances he faced in the melee a day earlier had probably contributed to his condition. Two men have been charged with assaulting and spraying a chemical irritant at Sicknick in the riot.

Sicknick had a stroke. The medical examiner's determination means that his death is not the result of any injuries.

Capitol Police accepted the medical examiner's findings but said the ruling didn't change the fact that Sicknick had died in the line of duty, "courageously defending Congress and the Capitol."

PUTIN, defending Navalny's imprisonment: "This person knew that he was breaching the laws effective in Russia. ... Consciously, I want to underline this, ignoring the demand of the law, this gentleman went abroad for treatment. ... He didn't register with the authorities. ... He knew that he was then being investigated and he came back deliberately."

THE FACTS: He left the country while he was in a coma; he did not leave Russia by choice.

Navalny was taken into custody Jan. 17 when he returned to Russia from five months in Germany where he was recovering from nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin.

Navalny fell severely ill on a domestic flight in August and was taken to a Siberian hospital in a coma. Two days later, after resistance from doctors, he was flown to Germany for treatment, still in a coma. Putin, however, implied that Navalny had made a conscious decision to leave the country. "This citizen went abroad for treatment," he said.

Authorities later determined that Navalny's time abroad violated terms of a suspended sentence he had been handed in an embezzlement case that he says was politically motivated.

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Nonetheless, he returned to Russia, knowing he faced potential prison time. Navalny is now serving 2½ years in prison for violating his suspended sentence terms.

After Putin's comments, Navalny's wife, Yulia Navalnaya, posted on Instagram a photo of a covered human form on a gurney outside an airplane. "I kept a photograph of how Alexei, deliberately ignoring the requirement to be registered at the inspection, 'went abroad for treatment,'" she wrote, mocking Putin's words.

Review: In Pixar's 'Luca,' young life as a stolen adventure

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

A brisk and bright sun-dappled fable of above-ground adventure and below-the-surface identity, Enrico Casarosa's "Luca" — a summery, shimmering fish-out-of-water fairy tale — is one of Pixar's most pure and condensed enchantments.

Pixar has plunged into the sea before, of course, in the aquatic "Finding Nemo" and "Finding Dory." Lushly detailed waters have been sprinkled through many of the studio's films, from the rushing river of "The Good Dinosaur" to the frothy seaside surf of "Piper." One personal favorite: how, after the frantic Paris chase in "Ratatouille," the diminutive Chef Skinner bobs furiously in the Seine.

But in "Luca," we're in the ocean to look longingly upon another world, which happens to be our own. Luca Paguro (Jacob Tremblay) is a 13-year-old sea monster who lives off the coast of the Italian Riviera. He's a farm boy, like many protagonists before him, with dreams of another, forbidden realm — only Luca shepherds goatfish, instead of goats, on rolling underwater pastures. To him, the surface is a magical, unknowable place that he's only heard rumors of from his grandmother (Sandy Martin), who's quickly shushed by his protective parents (Maya Rudolph, Jim Gaffigan).

But curiosity and the urgings of another, more land-accustomed sea monster, Alberto (Jack Dylan Grazer), compel Luca to swim up to a beach and stride ashore. He watches Alberto do it first. When Luca gets up the nerve, the transformation is immediate. Fin turns to foot. Tail disappears. And a very sea-legged boy steps forward, swiftly falling on his face and flopping on the ground like a fish.

Walking comes quickly enough, though, and through Luca's eyes we see the wonders of surface-dwelling anew — the blue sky, the swaying trees, the rustling grass. Luca and Alberto (who already has a fort with collected treasures) rush to frolic in all the fun of being human. Luca, feeling guilty, keeps saying he's about to rush home. But he can't help himself. In "Luca," young life is a stolen adventure.

They don't have everything quite figured out. Alberto, more confident and reckless than Luca, calls a phonograph a "magic singing lady machine" and believes the stars in the night sky are little glittering anchovies. But they are absolutely certain of one thing: the Vespa is the single greatest human invention. That draws them to the nearby town of Portorosso (the name seems a nod to the great and most European of the Studio Ghibli canon, "Porco Rosso"), a quintessential Italian hamlet with a village fountain and a "La Strada" poster on the wall. It's the late 1950s.

They quickly recognize an unexpected danger. Portorosso is adorned with pictures of slayed and slaughtered sea monsters. The whole town lives in fear of them — a concern mirrored by Luca's family who quake at the thought of "land monsters." Revealing their true natures would be suicidal, and all it takes is a water balloon or a bit of rain to ruin their human disguises. Still, that doesn't stop Luca and Alberto from entering a triathlon with the hope of winning a Vespa, or from befriending a village girl, Giulia (Emma Berman), with a fearsome fisherman father (Marco Barricelli).

It would be easy to label "Luca," which arrives Friday on Disney+, "minor Pixar." Its visuals, while beguiling, don't push new digital ground the way many Pixar animations have. There isn't an existential journey into the mind, beyond the grave or into the heavens. It's a couple of kids coming of age over a sun-kissed summer.

But I think the modesty of "Luca" is part of what makes it great. As much as Pixar's recent output ("Soul," "Onward," "Coco") has been daringly conceptual, it has sometimes felt as though the studio and its artists are too focused on charting new narrative territory. "Luca," Pixar's shortest feature since its

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first ("Toy Story"), is modest, straightforward and classical. It feels like Pixar's page out of Italo Calvino's "Italian Folktales."

Casarosa's film comes and goes like a soft summer breeze, but that doesn't stop it from being utterly charming and, by the time of its magnificent final shot, a little devastating, too. In sweet sea monsters that just want to do what other kids do, "Luca" finds a simple and beautiful metaphor for all those who feel like they need to hide themselves to fit in. It left me, anyway, with a fish-eating grin.

"Luca," a Walt Disney Co. release, is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association of America for rude humor, language, some thematic elements and brief violence. Running time: 95 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four.

Vaccine effort turns into slog as infectious variant spreads

By MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

As cases tumble and states reopen, the potential final stage in the U.S. campaign to vanquish COVID-19 is turning into a slog, with a worrisome variant gaining a bigger foothold and lotteries and other prizes failing to persuade some Americans to get vaccinated.

"The last half, the last mile, the last quarter-mile always requires more effort," Dr. Nirav Shah, director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said Wednesday.

While two of the states slammed hardest by the disaster, California and New York, celebrated their reopenings this week with fireworks and a multimillion-dollar drawing, hospitalizations in parts of Missouri are surging and cases are rising sharply in Texas, illustrating the challenges the country faces this summer.

One major concern is the highly contagious and potentially more severe delta variant of the coronavirus that originated in India. While health officials say the vaccines are effective against it, the fear is that it will lead to outbreaks in states with lower vaccination rates.

The delta variant has increased from 2.7% of all cases in May to 9.7% this month, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said during a call for governors on Monday, according to details provided by the Washington governor's office.

At the same time, states are convening focus groups to better understand who is declining to get vaccinated, why, and how to convince them that getting the shot is the right thing to do.

"It's a race between the vaccines going into people and the current or future variants," said Kansas Health Secretary Dr. Lee Norman.

Average deaths and cases per day have plummeted 90% or more across the U.S. since the winter. But the picture is uneven.

In Texas, the rolling average of newly confirmed infections has climbed from about 1,000 per day on May 31 to nearly 2,000 this week.

A swath of Missouri is seeing a big rise in cases and hospitalizations as tourists eager to get out after being cooped up for a year make their way to popular destinations like Branson and Lake of the Ozarks. Health officials said more than 200 people were hospitalized with the virus in southwestern Missouri, nearly double the number at the start of May. The number of patients in intensive care units in the region has tripled.

Health experts cite two factors driving the surge there: the faster-spreading delta variant and a reluctance among residents to get vaccinated.

The U.S. is expected to fall short of President Joe Biden's goal of dispensing at least one dose to 70% of American adults by July 4. The figure stands at about 65%.

Among the states that don't expect to hit the goal are Kansas and Idaho. In Idaho, some counties have adult vaccination rates under 30%, said Elke Shaw-Tulloch, public health administrator for the state Department of Health and Welfare.

To increase vaccinations, several states are working to break up large shipments of vaccine into smaller lots, which can then be distributed to doctors' offices. Health officials see primary care physicians as key to easing people's concerns.

"People want to hear it from their doctor, their medical providers, people that they know and trust,"

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Norman said.

Big, splashy giveaways such as lotteries have gotten a lot of headlines and dispensed millions of dollars. In Maine, home of the outdoor wear company L.L. Bean, Bean gift cards were a big hit. But elsewhere, there has been skepticism about such programs.

Shaw-Tulloch said some businesses in Idaho had offered financial incentives for employees to get vaccinated but didn't get many takers. Instead, she said, the key is making it easy to get a vaccine by turning it into part of a person's "daily flow."

Some people's attitude is that "if a vaccine were to fall out of the sky and hit me in the arm, I'll get it. But I'm not going to interrupt my busy daily life to make that effort and go in and get a vaccination," she said.

She added: "That's why we're really focusing on walk-in clinics, pop-up clinics where, wherever they turn, there's a place that's easily available for getting the vaccine."

Elsewhere around the world, there have been glimmers of hope, as India reopened the Taj Mahal amid a decline in new infections. In France, where virus cases are below 4,000 per day — down from 35,000 in the spring — authorities eased the requirements on wearing masks outdoors and said the nightly curfew will end this weekend.

"We have not known such a low level of virus spreading since last August," Prime Minister Jean Castex said.

Meanwhile, South Africa imposed tighter restrictions on public gatherings and liquor sales as hospital admissions due to COVID-19 increased by 59% over the past two weeks, authorities said. New cases there have nearly doubled.

The recorded U.S. death toll from COVID-19 hit 600,000 on Tuesday, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. Worldwide, it stands at 3.8 million, though both numbers are thought to be a significant undercount.

The Latest: Biden and Putin depart Geneva after summit

GENEVA — Geneva can breathe a sigh of relief after hosting a U.S.-Russia summit.

President Joe Biden is aboard Air Force One and is on his way back to Washington after Wednesday's meeting at an 18th century lakeside villa.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had already departed for Moscow aboard his plane by the time Air Force One took off.

Both leaders flew out of Switzerland after holding solo news conferences after meeting for more than three hours.

Security was tight and access extremely limited to areas around the summit site.

GENEVA -- President Joe Biden has expressed regret for some sharp words to a reporter who questioned him about the success of his summit with Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

The initial exchange came at the press conference after Biden's meeting with Putin in Geneva on Wednesday.

When a reporter asked Biden how he could consider the summit a success when Putin came out of it still denying responsibility for cyberattacks or other alleged wrongdoing, Biden shot back, "If you can't understand that you're in the wrong business."

But Biden came over to reporters at his next step shortly after that, before getting on Air Force One.

Biden told the reporters he had been a "wise guy" in his answer, and expressed regret for having been "short."

Biden also spoke positively again about the summit and his meetings with allies on the weeklong trip, which was meant in part to show the U.S. engaging again after President Donald Trump's withdrawal from U.S. allies.

"I think we, the country, has put a different face on where we've been and where we're going" Biden told reporters before getting on Air Force One.

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GENEVA — President Joe Biden says after his meeting with President Vladimir Putin that he is “not going to walk away” from the plight of two Americans detained in Russia.

Speaking to reporters, Biden says he raised the imprisonment of Paul Whelan and Trevor Reed in his meeting with Putin.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting in Geneva, Biden said: “We discussed it. I’m going to follow through with that discussion.”

Putin opened the door to possible discussions about a prisoner swap with the U.S. for the release of the Americans and said those conversations would continue. The U.S. did not immediately comment on Putin’s characterization of the discussion.

GENEVA -- Joe Biden says he and Vladimir Putin finished their presidential summit early thanks to having briskly worked through each man’s full agenda for the talks.

Biden told reporters after Wednesday’s meeting in Geneva that the two men sat across the table at their meeting site talking through each issue “in excruciating detail.”

At the end of that, “we looked at each other like, ‘Ok, what next?’” Biden said. “We had covered so much.” Administration officials had said they expected the session at a Geneva villa to run four to five hours.

GENEVA — President Joe Biden said he and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to further discussions on keeping certain types of critical infrastructure off-limits to cyberattacks. Biden also said they will have additional talks on the pursuit of criminals carrying out ransomware attacks.

Biden told reporters in Geneva that 16 types of critical infrastructure should be off limits to cyberattacks, “period.” He said that includes the energy and water sector.

It comes after a ransomware attack in May on one of the largest pipeline operators in the U.S. forced the shutdown of fuel supplies to much of the East Coast for nearly a week. That attack is blamed on a Russian criminal gang. Russia has not cooperated with criminal investigations of ransomware and does not extradite suspects to the U.S.

GENEVA — President Joe Biden says he and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed in detail the “next steps our countries should take on arms control measures” to reduce the risk of war.

At a news conference, Biden said this means that diplomats and military experts from both countries will meet for what he called a “strategic stability dialogue” to lay the groundwork for future arms control and risk reduction measures.

He did not say when the talks would begin. The idea is to work out a way to set the stage for negotiations on an arms control deal to succeed the New START treaty that is set to expire in 2026.

GENEVA — President Joe Biden says he stressed human rights issues in his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. That includes the cases of two Americans who Biden says are “wrongfully imprisoned” in Russia.

Biden also says he’ll continue to raise concerns about cases like Alexei Navalny, the jailed leader of the Russian opposition to Putin.

Biden adds that he’ll keep on airing concerns about issues of “fundamental human rights because that’s what we are.”

Biden commented after a nearly four-hour meeting with Putin in Geneva on Wednesday.

GENEVA — Russian President Vladimir Putin hailed U.S. President Joe Biden as a constructive and highly experienced leader after their summit in Geneva.

Speaking at a news conference after Wednesday’s talks, Putin said he believes that he and Biden “were speaking the same language” despite sharp disagreements on a variety of issues.

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He said that Biden is a "very constructive, balanced ... and extremely experienced."

The Russian leader noted that he appreciated Biden making "some recollections about his family, about what his mon was telling him."

"These are important things even though they aren't directly linked to the business, they show the level, the quality of his moral values," he said of the U.S. president. "It's all very attractive."

Asked about Biden's description of him as a "killer" in an interview earlier this year, Putin responded that the U.S. president explained himself in a phone call.

He argued that "we don't have to look each other in the eye and soul and make pledges of eternal love and friendship," adding that "we defend the interests of our countries and peoples and our relations always have primarily pragmatic character."

GENEVA — President Joe Biden gave Vladimir Putin something close to both men's style to mark their first presidential summit together – a pair of custom aviator sunglasses.

Biden in particular is known for wearing aviator shades, and is sometimes parodied for them.

The White House announced the gifts at the close of the two men's summit in Geneva on Wednesday.

The custom aviators given the Russian president were a brand manufactured in Massachusetts and designed for fighter pilots.

The U.S. leader also gave Putin a crystal sculpture of an American bison made by a New York-based glass company.

GENEVA — Russian President Vladimir Putin says that he and U.S. President Joe Biden have agreed that their two nations will start consultations on cybersecurity.

After a meeting with Biden in Geneva, Putin said: "We believe that cybersecurity is important for the world in general, for the U.S. in particular, and for Russia as well."

The Russian president said that the two countries "just need to abandon various insinuations, sit down at the expert level and start working in the interests of the U.S. and Russia."

Putin charged that "most of the cyberattacks in the world are carried out from the cyber realm of the United States," with Canada, two Latin American countries he didn't name and Britain next on the list.

However, the most damaging cyberattacks on record have been attributed by the United States and the European Union to Russia's GRU military intelligence agency, including the NotPetya virus that did more than \$10 billion in economic damage in 2017, hitting companies including shipping giant Maersk, the pharmaceutical company Merck and food company Mondelez.

While the U.S., Canada and Britain all engage in cyberespionage, the most damaging cyberattacks on record have come either from state-backed Russian hackers or Russian-speaking ransomware criminals who operate with impunity in Russia and allied nations.

GENEVA — Russian President Vladimir Putin says opposition leader Alexei Navalny got what he deserved when he was handed a prison sentence.

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

Speaking Wednesday after a summit with U.S. President Joe Biden in Geneva, Putin said Navalny received his due punishment for violating the terms of his probation, adding that he was aware that he was facing a prison sentence when he returned to Russia.

"He deliberately moved to be arrested," Putin said, sticking to his habit of not mentioning Navalny by name.

Last week, a Moscow court outlawed the organizations founded by Navalny by labeling them extremist, the latest move in a campaign to silence dissent and bar Kremlin critics from running for parliament in

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September.

GENEVA — Russian President Vladimir Putin says an agreement has been reached to conduct U.S.-Russian negotiations on limiting the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Speaking after a summit with U.S. President Joe Biden in Geneva, Putin said they agreed that the U.S. State Department and the Russian Foreign Ministry would work out details for the talks.

Russia has long called for the start of strategic stability talks to potentially replace the New START treaty limiting nuclear weapons after it expires in 2026.

Washington broke off talks with Moscow in 2014 in response to Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea and its military intervention in support of separatists in eastern Ukraine. Talks resumed in 2017 but gained little traction and failed to produce an agreement on extending the New START treaty during the Trump administration.

Shortly after Biden took office in January, the two sides agreed to a five-year extension of the pact just days before it was due to expire.

Moscow has said it's ready to include its prospective doomsday weapons — such as the Poseidon atomic-powered, nuclear-armed underwater drone and the Burevestnik nuclear-powered cruise missile — in the talks on condition the U.S. brings its missile defense and possible space-based weapons into the equation.

GENEVA — Russian President Vladimir Putin has described the tone of the talks with U.S. President Joe Biden on Wednesday as "constructive" and said there was no hostility during the talks.

His remarks came at a news conference after he and Biden met in Geneva for a high-stakes summit amid tensions between the West and the Kremlin.

"Our assessment of many issues differ, but in my view both sides demonstrated the desire to understand each other and looks for ways to get our positions closer," Putin said.

"The conversation was rather constructive," he added.

GENEVA — Russian President Vladimir Putin says he and U.S. President Joe Biden have agreed to return their ambassadors to their posts in a bid to lower tensions.

Putin made the announcement at a news conference following a summit on Wednesday with Biden in Geneva.

The return of ambassadors follows a diplomatic tug-of-war that saw deep cuts in diplomatic personnel.

Russia's ambassador to the U.S., Anatoly Antonov, was recalled from Washington about three months ago after Biden described Putin as a killer.

U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Sullivan left Moscow almost two months ago after Russia suggested he return to Washington for consultations.

GENEVA — President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin have concluded their meetings in Geneva, the White House said.

The pair met for nearly four hours on Wednesday, first in a smaller session and later in a larger meeting that was expanded to include more officials from both sides and which lasted about 65 minutes.

Putin and then Biden are scheduled to hold press conferences before departing the summit site.

GENEVA -- Several posters dedicated to the imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny appeared in Geneva on Wednesday, the day of the summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Joe Biden.

Navalny, Putin's most vocal critic, was arrested in January upon returning from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin — an accusation that Russian officials reject.

Biden has condemned Navalny's poisoning and subsequent arrest, and was expected to raise the issue

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on Wednesday.

The posters, which were written in both English and French and were taken down on Wednesday evening, read: "Navalny poisoned with Novichok. And still no investigation? How come, President Putin?"

On Tuesday, a few dozen supporters of Navalny protested in Geneva, hoping to send a message to Putin.

HĒLSINKI — NATO member Estonia says two Russian fighter jets violated its airspace this week, in what it claimed was the fourth such incident this year.

Two Russian Sukhoi Su-35 fighters entered Estonia's airspace in the vicinity of Hiiumaa, a Baltic Sea island belonging to Estonia, without permission and spent there less than one minute Tuesday morning, Estonia's military said in a statement.

It added that the transponders on the Russian planes weren't switched on, they hadn't filed a flight plan and there was no two-way radio communication with the Estonian air traffic service.

The Russian Embassy charge d'affaires was summoned to the Estonian Foreign Ministry and handed over a note on the incident on Wednesday.

BRŪSSELS — The European Union's top diplomat is warning that the bloc's testy relations with Russia will probably get worse and that EU member countries must not let Moscow divide them.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said ties with Russia are "at the lowest level" and the likelihood they will improve soon remains "a distant prospect."

His remarks came Wednesday as President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin were meeting in Geneva for a high-stakes summit amid tensions between the West and the Kremlin.

Borrell's comments were made as he unveiled his recommendations Wednesday for new strategy toward Russia.

EU leaders will debate it at their next summit on June 24-25. But EU member countries are deeply divided over the best approach to take with Moscow. Russia is the EU's biggest natural gas supplier and plays a pivotal role in a series of international conflicts and issues.

GENEVA -- A former U.S. ambassador to Russia says he "can guess" why U.S. President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin will not have a joint news conference after their summit in Geneva on Wednesday.

Michael McFaul, who served as U.S. Ambassador in Moscow between 2012 and 2014, recalled that the last joint press conference between Putin and a U.S. president — Donald Trump — in Helsinki in 2018 "was terrible for American national interests."

The Helsinki news conference was considered a "win" for the Russian side after Trump appeared to side with Putin over his own security agencies on allegations of Russian election interference.

This year, the White House opted against a joint news conference after the summit between Putin and Biden, deciding it did not want to appear to elevate Putin at a time when the U.S. president is urging European allies to pressure Putin to cut out myriad provocations.

After the talks, Putin and Biden are scheduled to hold their own separate news conferences, one after another.

GENEVA — The Swiss government is going to reimburse scores of Geneva businesses that have been forced to close because of security measures linked to the Russia-U.S. summit on Wednesday.

Geneva officials adopted a decree Wednesday to compensate the owners of shops that ended up inside the security perimeter set up around the meeting of Presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin.

Laurent Paoliello, a spokesman for the regional security department, said the funds would come from the federal government, but cautioned that it wouldn't be a "blank check."

He said the payments would be doled out after a thorough analysis over the coming weeks of revenue shortfalls by what he said could amount to about 100 enterprises.

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GENEVA — Peace activists unfurled a huge banner in Lake Geneva on Wednesday calling on the Russian and U.S. presidents to slash their nuclear arsenals.

Campaigners in a sailboat spread the banner, reading “Peace and Security Through Disarmament,” in the water so that it could be seen from the sky soon before Russian President Vladimir Putin landed at the Geneva airport for a summit with U.S. President Joe Biden.

It was an initiative by Swiss anti-nuclear group Campax, which is urging the leaders to not only get rid of existing warheads but also stop investing in developing new ones, arguing that would set an example for other nuclear powers.

The action was among multiple mini-protests around Wednesday’s summit, their first since Biden took office.

The leaders are expected to talk about arms control. Anti-nuclear groups say the U.S. and Russia account for nearly 90% of the world’s nuclear arsenals.

GENEVA -- President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin have finished the first round of their summit talks Wednesday and are proceeding to the first of two larger meetings in Geneva.

Biden and Putin first met accompanied by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and a pair of translators.

Two additional sessions are planned Wednesday afternoon with the leaders to be joined by additional aides and translators.

On the U.S. side, the larger meetings are set to include Blinken, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland, U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Sullivan and National Security Council Russia experts Eric Green and Stergos Kaloudis.

The Russian delegation is to include Lavrov, Putin’s foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov, Lavrov’s deputy Sergei Ryabkov, the chief of the General Staff of the Russian military Gen. Valery Gerasimov, Russian ambassador to Washington Anatoly Antonov, as well as Kremlin envoys on Ukraine and Syria and Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

Overall, the summit is projected to last four to five hours before each leader holds a press conference.

GENEVA — President Joe Biden’s summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin began with minutes of unusually fierce shoving and shouting among U.S. and Russian journalists and security forces.

Organizers at Wednesday’s summit in Geneva opened the meeting room to journalists for what’s normally a few minutes of news media filming and shouting questions before talks start.

On Wednesday, however, Russian and U.S. security forces and officials initially blocked journalists as they tried to enter the room.

The scene then devolved into minutes of chaos inside the meeting room.

American journalists described Russian security and news media grabbing them by the arms and clothes to try to hold them back. U.S. journalists tried to shoulder their way in, and a U.S. reporter was knocked to the ground.

Before the scene calmed, some in the crowd shouted they were being crushed in the melee.

Biden and Putin initially sat awkwardly in front of the press, but then watched and at times laughed at the tumult.

WASHINGTON — The White House says that President Joe Biden was not suggesting to reporters that he trusts Russian President Vladimir Putin with his reaction to a reporter’s question in Geneva.

At the start of a high-stakes summit in Geneva, Biden appeared to suggest that he can take the Russian leader at his word, nodding his head during a photo opportunity when asked by a reporter if Putin can be trusted.

Communications director Kate Bedingfield said later there was a “chaotic scrum with reporters shouting over each other” in that moment.

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She argued that Biden "was very clearly not responding to any one question" when a journalist asked if he trusted Putin.

Journalists and security officials were shoving to get into the small room where Biden and Putin are meeting.

Bedingfield said Biden was "nodding in acknowledgment to the press generally."

She noted that Biden on Monday told reporters that his approach with Putin would be to "verify, then trust."

Biden's press secretary Jen Psaki later said that the president "wasn't responding to any question or anything other than the chaos."

GENEVA — Russian President Vladimir Putin thanked President Joe Biden and expressed wishes for a "productive" meeting as the two kicked off their meeting in Geneva Wednesday.

Putin told Biden upon first meeting him he was thankful for the gathering as he knew the U.S. president "had a long trip and lots of work." But the Russian president emphasized that there are "lots of questions accumulated in Russia-U.S. relations that require discussion on the highest level."

The two are expected to address everything from cybercrime to Russia's alleged interference in U.S. elections during their meeting.

Biden, who has spoken to Putin over the phone, told the Russian leader that "it is always better to meet face to face."

GENEVA — Swiss President Guy Parmelin welcomed Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Joe Biden for the start of their summit under blue skies, wishing them a "fruitful dialogue" in Geneva -- which he touted as a "city of peace."

It was a moment in the sun for Switzerland both literally and figuratively.

Parmelin, whom Swiss media have poked fun at for his allegedly poor English, spoke in French -- his native language and one historically associated with fine diplomacy. He used the opportunity to promote Switzerland's image for neutrality and as a hub of international diplomacy.

"Switzerland is very honored to welcome you for this summit, and it is delighted -- in line with its tradition of good offices -- to support dialogue and mutual understanding," said Parmelin, flanked by Putin and Biden on the steps of Villa La Grange, the 18th century manor house overlooking Lake Geneva that hosted the landmark U.S.-Russia summit on Wednesday.

"I wish you both, Mr. Presidents, a fruitful dialogue in the interest of your two countries and the world," he said.

He then quipped "Best wishes, and goodbye" in both English and Russian.

GENEVA — President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin are starting their diplomatic talks in Geneva.

The two were first greeted by the Swiss president before sitting down for a small meeting that includes just Biden, Putin, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, with a translator for each side. They'll then move to larger talks, which will include more senior aides and are expected to last hours.

The two plan to discuss everything from cybercrime to Russia's alleged interference in America's elections, as well as arms control and Russia's intrusion in Ukraine.

Both sides have played down expectations for any major breakthroughs, but both Biden and Putin have stressed the need to restore more stable relations between the two nations.

GENEVA -- President Joe Biden has arrived at the 18th-century manor house in Geneva where he'll hold high-profile talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Biden is set to meet in person with the Russian president for the first time in a decade. He last met Putin when the Russian leader was prime minister and Biden was serving as vice president, in March of 2011.

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He has since called Putin both a "killer" and a "worthy adversary."

The two are likely to discuss some issues that also were central to their 2011 meeting, like trade and arms control. But this meeting comes at a low point in diplomatic relations between the two nations.

Biden says he hopes to find areas of "cooperation" with Putin, but he's also expected to confront the Russian president on cybercrime, Russia's interference in U.S. elections and other issues that have contributed to frosty relations between the two countries.

GENEVA — Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is frequently late at high-level meetings, arrived on time at the 18th century Villa La Grange in Geneva for his high-stakes summit with President Joe Biden.

The Russian leader landed in Geneva and traveled to the summit venue, located in the Swiss city's largest park, in a Russian-made Aurus limousine that was airlifted from Moscow for the summit along with a fleet of other vehicles.

Putin, 68, who has received a Russian-made vaccine against the coronavirus, wasn't wearing a mask. However members of his delegation were wearing masks.

GENEVA -- Russian President Vladimir Putin has arrived at a lakeside villa in Geneva for his summit with U.S. President Joe Biden.

The two leaders are set to start their meeting accompanied by their top diplomats and a pair of translators. Other senior officials plan to join them for two successive rounds of talks that are expected to last for several hours Wednesday.

Topics on the summit agenda include strategic stability, cyber security, climate change, the coronavirus pandemic and the Arctic. Putin and Biden also are expected to cover regional crises in Ukraine, Syria and Libya, as well as the Iranian nuclear program and Afghanistan.

Putin's foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov, sought to moderate expectations for the summit but strongly emphasized the meeting's importance amid the strained ties between Moscow and Washington.

"It's the first such meeting that takes place at a time when the bilateral relations are extremely bad," Ushakov told reporters this week. "Both parties realize it's time to start dealing with the issues that have piled up."

GENEVA – Russian President Vladimir Putin has arrived in the Swiss city of Geneva for a summit with U.S. President Joe Biden.

Their meeting comes amid soaring Russia-U.S. tensions. The summit agenda covers a broad range of issues, from arms control and cybercrime to the pandemic and a diplomatic tug-of-war between Moscow and Washington.

The White House and the Kremlin have sought to downplay expectations for Wednesday's summit. But Biden and Putin have both emphasized the importance of a direct dialogue to try to negotiate a more stable and predictable relationship despite the sharp policy differences between the United States and Russia.

Ties between the two powers have remained at post-Cold War lows over Moscow's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula, accusations of Russian interference in elections, hacking attacks and other irritants.

The two leaders are scheduled to meet for four or five hours at a lakeside mansion.

GENEVA — The acting chief of protocol for the Geneva region says staff members at the villa where U.S. President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin are meeting will keep face masks on during the summit even if the two leaders don't.

Geneva authorities require the wearing of masks in public, though there are exceptions. The requirement holds particularly in places with a lot of pedestrian traffic, such as shopping areas.

Marion Bordier Bueschi, who is managing the grand lakeside mansion that will serve as the summit site, told The Associated Press that staffers inside Villa La Grange were already wearing masks.

She said Putin and Biden would likely not wear masks during their talks on Wednesday. She noted that

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both leaders have been vaccinated against the coronavirus.

Confirmed cases and deaths from COVID-19 have dropped across Switzerland, and authorities are planning steps to ease the mask requirement later this month.

GENEVA — U.S. President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin are both coming to the summit table in Geneva with their own agendas and non-negotiable red lines. There will be no talk of a “reset” in U.S.-Russian relations.

Biden and his aides have made clear that he will not follow in the footsteps of his recent predecessors by aiming to radically alter the United States’ ties to Russia. Instead, the White House is looking to move toward a more predictable relationship and attempt to rein in Russia’s disruptive behavior.

Biden will push Putin on Wednesday to stop meddling in democratic elections, to ease tensions with Ukraine and to stop giving safe harbor to hackers carrying out cyber and ransomware attacks. Aides believe that lowering the temperature with Russia will also reinforce the United States’ ties to democracies existing in Moscow’s shadow.

Putin also won’t be expecting a new détente to mend the rift caused by Russia’s 2014 annexation of Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula. Nor does he count on a rollback of the crippling U.S. and EU sanctions that have restricted Moscow’s access to global financial markets and top Western technologies.

Putin’s task now is more modest — to spell out Russia’s top security concerns and try to restore basic channels of communication that would prevent an even more dangerous destabilization. The main red line for Moscow is Ukraine’s aspirations to join NATO.

GENEVA — A spokesman for Russian President Vladimir Putin cautioned that Putin’s talks with U.S. President Joe Biden “will not be easy” or likely yield any breakthroughs.

Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told The Associated Press a few hours before the Russia-U.S. summit in Geneva on Wednesday that the topics on the broad agenda “are mostly problematic.”

“We have many long-neglected questions that need to be trawled through. That’s why President Putin is arriving with an attitude to frankly and constructively set questions and try to find solutions,” Peskov said.

“No, this day cannot become historic, and we shouldn’t expect any breakthroughs. The situation is too difficult in Russian-American relations,” he continued. “However, the fact that the two presidents agreed to meet and finally start to speak openly about the problems is already an achievement. We can say that without having started yet, the summit already has a positive result, but we should not await breakthroughs.”

Peskov said the bilateral issues Russia wants to discuss include strategic stability, arms control, cooperation in regional conflicts, cooperation on the pandemic, and climate change.

GENEVA — U.S. President Joe Biden and Russia’s Vladimir Putin are set to meet for their highly anticipated summit in the Swiss city of Geneva. It’s a moment of high-stakes diplomacy that comes as both leaders agree that U.S.-Russian relations are at an all-time low.

For four months, the two leaders have traded sharp rhetoric. Biden has repeatedly called out Putin for malicious cyberattacks by Russian-based hackers on U.S. interests, for disregard of democracy in the jailing of Russia’s top opposition leader and for interfering in American elections.

Their talks on Wednesday are expected to last four to five hours. In advance, both sides set out to lower expectations. Arrangements for the meeting have been carefully choreographed and vigorously negotiated by both sides.

Putin and his entourage will arrive first at the summit site: Villa La Grange, a grand lakeside mansion set in Geneva’s biggest park. Next come Biden and his team. Swiss President Guy Parmelin will greet the two leaders.

Biden and Putin first will hold a relatively intimate meeting joined by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. The talks will then expand to include five senior aides on each side.

After the meeting concludes, Putin is scheduled to hold a solo news conference, with Biden following suit.

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The White House opted against a joint news conference, deciding it did not want to appear to elevate Putin at a time when the president is urging European allies to pressure Putin to cut out myriad provocations.

Iran election race narrows but fears persist of low turnout

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran grappled with fears of low voter turnout two days ahead of its presidential election as the race narrowed on Wednesday into a showdown between the country's hard-line judiciary chief and moderate former Central Bank chief.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned of a foreign conspiracy to undermine the vote while the country's Interior Ministry acknowledged a startling lack of competition that was turning the election into a coronation for Khamenei's protégé, hard-liner Ebrahim Raisi.

In an extensive televised speech, Khamenei railed against the media's grim portrayal of the poll and tried to cajole people into voting, warning of "increased pressure" from Iran's "enemies" if citizens stay away from the polls on Friday.

Iran's clerical vetting body had barred a range of prominent reformists and key allies of relatively moderate President Hassan Rouhani to run in this election, giving the green light to just Raisi and several low-profile candidates, mostly hard-liners with little popular support. The Guardian Council's evisceration of any viable challengers has sparked widespread criticism and fueled calls for a boycott.

Voter apathy was running deep even before the disqualifications, due in part to the devastated economy and subdued campaigning amid a surge in coronavirus cases. The state-linked Iranian Student Polling Agency most recently projected a 42% turnout from the country's 59 million eligible voters, which would be a historic low.

At a press conference, the interior minister admitted it was no real contest.

"The actual competition in the elections is not a very serious one ... considering the actions of the Guardian Council," said Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli. "We can say that the reasons are the weak competition and the coronavirus situation."

That left Khamenei and top officials the task to try lure the disillusioned public back to the polls. Iranian authorities have promoted voter turnout as validation for their style of governance after the 1979 Islamic Revolution installed the clerically overseen system that endures today.

Khamenei lashed out against Iran's "enemies" for discouraging people from voting. He accused "American and British media and their mercenaries" of "killing themselves to question the elections and weaken popular participation."

He also acknowledged that many ordinary Iranians, impoverished and battered by years of heavy American sanctions, may not see the benefit of political participation.

"But not voting because of (economic) complaints is not correct," Khamenei said.

Meanwhile, two hard-line candidates withdrew Wednesday, throwing their support behind presumed front-runner Raisi. The only reformist candidate in the vote also dropped out, making former Central Bank chief Abdolnasser Hemmati the main moderate contender. Such dropouts are common in Iranian presidential elections in order to boost the chances of similar candidates. No campaigning is allowed on Thursday, 24 hours before polls open.

Within Iran, candidates exist on a political spectrum that broadly includes hard-liners who want to expand Iran's nuclear program and confront the world, moderates who hold onto the status quo and reformists who want to change the theocracy from within.

Alireza Zakani, a conservative lawmaker who became known for his vocal opposition to Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, dropped out and said he would vote for Raisi. Soon after, Saeed Jalili, the top nuclear negotiator for former hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the height of Western concerns over Tehran's nuclear program, followed suit. Over 200 lawmakers in parliament, which is dominated by hard-liners, urged the remaining hard-line contenders to withdraw and back Raisi's bid.

Mohsen Mehralizadeh, the pro-reform candidate who served as governor in two provinces and previously in reformist President Mohammad Khatami's administration, also announced his departure, apparently to

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boost Hemmati's chances.

In remarks Wednesday, Hemmati sought to rally the pro-reform vote and position himself as a stand-in for Rouhani, who is term-limited from running again. He announced that he'd select current Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to join his administration as either vice president or foreign minister, embracing the top diplomat who was an architect of Tehran's now-tattered nuclear deal.

"The economic development of Iran is not possible without strong diplomatic engagement abroad," Hemmati tweeted, explaining his choice of Zarif. "My administration is after the removal of sanctions and use of foreign policy to achieve political development."

Zarif, among the best-known political figures in Rouhani's administration, has come under fire from the political establishment recently, following the leak of a contentious audiotelephone recording in which he offered a blunt appraisal of power struggles in the Islamic Republic.

There was no immediate word from Zarif on Hemmati's announcement, but the minister has previously indicated a willingness to join the incoming administration.

Polling and analysts indicate that Hemmati lags behind Raisi, the current judiciary chief cultivated by Khamenei.

Raisi has drawn deep skepticism from the West, in part for running a judicial system that remains one of the world's top executioners and sees the Revolutionary Courts operate many trials behind closed doors. His alleged involvement in human rights abuses dates back to a mass execution of political prisoners at the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988.

Despite anti-virus restrictions, thousands of Raisi supporters mobbed a stadium in the northwestern city of Tabriz on Wednesday, with only some wearing masks. Roaring crowds chanted, "No one but Raisi, Iran's final word!" as he took the stage and repeated campaign promises to alleviate the suffering of Iran's poor.

Raisi's ascendancy comes at a delicate time for the region, as Iran and the United States negotiate a return to Tehran's historic atomic accord with world powers that gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program.

But even as the narrowing of the field boosted his bid, politicians cross the ideological spectrum appeared most concerned with whether Iranians would vote at all — or defy the leadership and stay home.

In a statement, Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard likened casting a ballot to "hitting enemies with a pinpoint missile."

Rouhani, who had publicly protested the Guardian Council's rejection of high-profile nominees from his own administration, pleaded with people to vote.

"Going to polling stations in present circumstances ... makes us more powerful," he said.

In video widely shared on social media Wednesday, influential reformist movement leader and former President Khatami also asked Iranians to "make an effort, show up and vote," despite their disappointment.

Latinas left workforce at highest rate, see slow recovery

By ASTRID GALVAN Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Teresa Marez spent 14 years building a strong clientele base as a hair stylist in San Antonio. When her son, who is autistic, had to switch to virtual learning because of the pandemic, she quit her job to help him.

It's been 10 months, and the clients are all gone.

Marez is one of many Latinas who have been out of work since last year. Latinas have left the workforce at rates higher than any other demographic and have had some of the highest unemployment rates throughout the pandemic, according to a report by the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative, a Latino-focused think tank, provided to The Associated Press before its release on Wednesday.

That could spell trouble not just for a post-pandemic economic recovery but for the long-term stability of the country as baby boomers continue to retire and women in general are feeling compelled to leave work. And women like Marez, who has used much of her savings, are missing out on years of economic gains.

Before the pandemic, Latinas were projected to increase their numbers in the workforce by nearly 26%

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from 2019 to 2029 — a higher rate than any other group, the report found. It's unclear if or how that projection will now change.

Marez isn't sure what she's going to do next.

"If I did go back to doing hair, I would be starting from the beginning again, really," she said. "I was kind of burned out anyway and I can't see myself at like 45 years old starting from the beginning."

Marez is thinking about going back to school to study nutrition and Spanish, but she's still working out a plan.

The UCLA study found that Latinas experienced the highest unemployment rate — 20% — of any demographic in April 2020, right after all of the business shutdowns began. By the end of 2020, when businesses were starting to reopen, Latinas and Black women still had nearly double the unemployment rate of their white counterparts, the study found.

Also troubling: the rate at which Latinas dropped from the workforce altogether, which the government usually considers to be the case when someone hasn't actively looked for work in four weeks.

Participation in the labor force for Latinas aged 25 to 54 fell from 71% pre-pandemic to just below 67% in May 2021, according to the latest available data by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. That translates to 465,000 fewer Latinas working or seeking work.

Kassandra Hernández, a lead researcher on the UCLA report, said this is crucial to how the economy recovers from the pandemic.

"If we don't recognize the complexities or the nuances of these narratives, of what's happening with Latinas, we might actually be set back," Hernández said.

Simply put: The American workforce needs Latinas to fill the many jobs that are slowly starting to come back, and those that will be left behind by retiring baby boomers.

Sylvia Allegretto, a labor economist at the University of California, Berkeley, said the U.S. economy already faces challenges from slowing birthrates, an aging workforce and declining immigration. Retirements among older Americans have also increased. A growing workforce is a key driver of economic growth.

"The long-term trend is we don't have enough workers," she said. "If you want to make sure you have a vibrant, growing economy, you need more people."

But Allegretto said businesses also need to offer higher pay and better benefits so that more of those who were laid off or quit jobs during the pandemic can re-enter the workforce. That may take more time as much of the economy is still reopening from the pandemic shutdown. California just lifted all its business restrictions Tuesday, she noted.

"If (employers) have to start sweetening the deal, maybe with some benefits, maybe with some time off, that's a good thing," Allegretto said.

Latinas face many hurdles. Research has shown Latinas are more likely than all other U.S. mothers to stay home with children instead of work. They also tend to do much more work at home than the men in their lives, spending twice as much time on household activities and nearly three times more time caring for household members than Latinos.

Latinas are overrepresented in low-wage jobs in the hospitality and broader service industries, stifling their upward mobility.

Hernández said women need access to child care, better pay and educational opportunities to help them overcome not just the disparities in career opportunities but the setbacks that the pandemic brought.

The pandemic forced many Latinas to leave work to care not just for their children but also for extended family — "the tios or abuelos or vecinos — you name it," said Xochitl Oseguera, the vice president of MamásConPoder, the Spanish-language community that's part of MomsRising, a grassroots organization that works to improve women's economic security.

Latinos were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. They were more than twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as whites, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Their vaccination rates are much lower, too, so while many Americans feel the coronavirus is behind them, the pandemic lives in Latino communities.

Oseguera works with Latinas in different industries and hears firsthand why so many haven't returned

to the workforce.

"They're worried about going back and getting sick," Oseguera said. "My hope is also that those jobs really reconsider the way that we have been working with essential workers to not only have a secure environment but also have access to paid family leave, paid sick leave, access to fair pay, so that we can really recover from the last year of not being part of the workforce."

For Ciara Fernandez Faber, going back to work also depends on the work-life balance she needs to care for her toddler. Faber, who lives in Denver, left her job as an attorney when her son's preschool closed. Her husband is a doctor, and it wasn't an option for him to stay home with him.

"To my experience, like, it doesn't matter what profession it is, it just seems like across the board it's impacted Latina women more. I don't know if it's like values that we place on work-life balance or child care issues. I don't know," Faber said.

COVID hits Ecuador doctors who delayed wedding to treat sick

By GONZALO SOLANO Associated Press

QUITO, Ecuador (AP) — They were a pair of young doctors in love who put off marriage to save lives. As the pandemic raged in Ecuador last year, they posted a social media photo of themselves dressed in biohazard suits kissing and holding a sign saying: "Today was to be our wedding day, but instead..."

David Vallejo and Mavelin Bonilla's decision to postpone their May 23, 2020, wedding to treat COVID-19 patients at a large public hospital in southern Quito moved many people in Ecuador and beyond.

A second photo posted later showed them holding a sign reading: "We are working for you. BE CAREFUL! Don't let your guard down."

But within months, both would come down with what appeared to be COVID-19.

Vallejo would be fighting for his life in intensive care. Bonilla, who experienced only mild symptoms, would be shattered after being told her fiancée had a less than 10% chance of survival.

Bonilla, 26, told The Associated Press that she had been sad when the couple posted the initial photo announcing the wedding delay. "It really was a dream — I don't know if for all girls but at least for me it was — to leave my house in white and marry David. It was my longing, my dream."

But the health crisis in Ecuador was spiraling out of control. Hundreds of patients were arriving every day at the Social Security hospital where they worked, and there were long waiting lists for hospital beds.

The South American country of 17.4 million people by now has recorded about 434,000 cases and 21,000 confirmed deaths.

Vallejo was the oldest resident at the time and was in charge of the most seriously ill patients. He immersed himself for months trying to save lives — and sometimes failing.

"They were months in which a lot of patients died and it was hard; I came home crying," said Vallejo, who survived COVID-19 but is still undergoing physical and speech therapy to recover. "I had to call the relatives to inform them."

In January, both of the couple exhibited COVID-19 symptoms and Vallejo's condition deteriorated rapidly. He was told he would be intubated for seven days to save his life.

"I never felt more scared," he recalled.

He said he asked for a pen and paper and wrote: "I am Doc David, I have a fervent desire to live life, fulfill my dreams." Among his dreams, he wrote, was to get married, build a family and travel to Spain to study a specialty. He thanked his colleagues for their efforts to save him.

On Jan. 17, he was sedated and his memories went on hold, but the ordeal was just beginning for Bonilla.

She recalls that at the end of January a doctor informed her that "David was very ill and only has a 10% chance of surviving." She cried uncontrollably but had to keep their families informed.

Vallejo was still unconscious and in intensive care on Feb. 2, his 28th birthday. Bonilla and his medical colleagues brought a birthday cake and a loudspeaker and sang "Happy Birthday" to him from outside the hospital holding hands in the shape of a heart.

After 17 days, Vallejo emerged from sedation, but was then overtaken by a hospital infection that almost

claimed his life again. It took 30 days to recover from that.

The young doctor emerged from the ordeal with a facial paralysis and no strength in his muscles from his prolonged immobility. He "couldn't even raise his hand," he recalls. He communicated with his fiancée by moving his eyelashes.

"I had to learn to speak again with therapy, learn to walk, to do all things," he said.

He said the hardest thing was thinking of how "Mavelin felt during that time that I was asleep. How my parents felt, and I think it is the worst thing that, unintentionally, I put them in that situation."

The couple say they are waiting for the Civil Registry date for their long-delayed wedding and hope it will be at the end of this month. They plan a small wedding, due to pandemic restrictions, with only their closest family members. In early July, they plan to travel to Spain to study a medical specialty.

"Even before this, I always thought you had to value the little things, the little shared moments," Vallejo said. "Now I believe this more than ever. To go for a walk holding her hand is a great moment for me."

US Army has hidden or downplayed loss of firearms for years

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

The U.S. Army has hidden or downplayed the extent to which its firearms disappear, significantly understating losses and thefts even as some weapons are used in street crimes.

The Army's pattern of secrecy and suppression dates back nearly a decade, when The Associated Press began investigating weapons accountability within the military. Officials fought the release of information for years, then offered misleading answers that contradict internal records.

Military guns aren't just disappearing. Stolen guns have been used in shootings, brandished to rob and threaten people and recovered in the hands of felons. Thieves sold assault rifles to a street gang.

Army officials cited information that suggests only a couple of hundred firearms vanished during the 2010s. Internal Army memos that AP obtained show losses many times higher.

Efforts to suppress information date to 2012, when AP filed a Freedom of Information Act request seeking records from a registry where all four armed services are supposed to report firearms loss or theft.

The former Army insider who oversaw this registry described how he pulled an accounting of the Army's lost or stolen weapons, but learned later that his superiors blocked its release.

As AP continued to press for information, including through legal challenges, the Army produced a list of missing weapons that was so clearly incomplete officials later disavowed it. They then produced a second set of records that also did not give a full count.

Secrecy surrounding a sensitive topic extends beyond the Army. The Air Force wouldn't provide data on missing weapons, saying answers would have to await a federal records request AP filed 1.5 years ago.

The broader Department of Defense also has not released reports of weapons losses that it receives from the armed services. It would only provide approximate totals for two years of AP's 2010 through 2019 study period.

The Pentagon stopped regularly sharing information about missing weapons with Congress years ago, apparently in the 1990s. Defense Department officials said they would still notify lawmakers if a theft or loss meets the definition of being "significant," but no such notification has been made since at least 2017.

On Tuesday, when AP first published its investigation, Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., demanded during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing that the Pentagon resurrect regular reporting. In a written statement to AP, the Pentagon said it "looks forward to continuing to work with Congress to ensure appropriate oversight."

Blumenthal also challenged Army Secretary Christine Wormuth on her branch's release of information.

"I'd be happy to look into how we've handled this issue," Wormuth replied. She described herself as "open to" a new reporting requirement and said the number of military firearms obtained by civilians is likely small.

Poor record-keeping in the military's vast inventory systems means lost or stolen guns can be listed on property records as safe. Security breakdowns were evident all the way down to individual units, which have destroyed records, falsified inventory checks and ignored procedures.

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Brig. Gen. Duane Miller, the No. 2 law enforcement official in the Army, said that when a weapon does vanish the case is thoroughly investigated. He pointed out that weapons cases are a small fraction of the more than 10,000 felony cases Army investigators open each year.

"I absolutely believe that the procedures we had in place absolutely mitigated any weapon from getting lost or stolen," Miller said of his own experience as a commander. "But does it happen? It sure does."

The Associated Press began investigating the loss and theft of military firearms by asking a simple question in 2011: How many guns are unaccounted for across the Army, Marines Corps, Navy and Air Force?

AP was told the answer could be found in the Department of Defense Small Arms and Light Weapons Registry. That centralized database, which the Army oversees, tracks the life cycle of rifles, pistols, shot-guns, machine guns and more -- from supply depots to unit armories, through deployments, until the weapon is destroyed or sold.

Getting data from the registry, however, would require a formal Freedom of Information Act request.

That request, filed in 2012, came to Charles Royal, then the longtime Army civilian employee who was in charge of the registry at Redstone Arsenal in Alabama.

Royal was accustomed to inquiries. Military and civilian law enforcement agencies would call him thousands of times each year, often because they were looking for a military weapon or had recovered one.

In response to AP's request, Royal pulled and double-checked data on missing weapons. Royal then showed the results to his boss, the deputy commander of his department.

"After he got it, he said, 'We can't be letting this out like this,'" said Royal, who retired in 2014, in an interview last year.

His boss didn't say exactly why, but Royal said the release he prepared on weapons loss was heavily scrutinized within the Army.

"The numbers that we were going to give was going to kind of freak everybody out to a certain extent," Royal said -- not just because they were firearms, but also because the military requires strict supervision of them.

AP was unable to reach Royal's supervisor and an Army spokesman had no comment on the handling of the FOIA request.

In 2013, the Army said it would not release any records. The AP appealed that decision and, nearly four years later, Army lawyers agreed that registry records should be public.

It wasn't until 2019 that the Army released a small batch of data. The records from the registry showed 288 firearms over six years.

Though years in the making, the response was clearly incomplete.

Standing in the stacks at the public library in Decatur, Alabama, last fall, Royal reviewed the seven printed pages of records that Army eventually provided AP.

"This is worthless," he said.

Told that in multiple years, the Army reported just a single missing weapon, Royal was skeptical. "Out of the millions that they handled, that's wrong," he said in a later interview. AP has appealed the FOIA release for a second time.

The data weren't even accurate when compared to Army criminal investigation records. Using the unique serial numbers assigned to every weapon, AP identified 19 missing firearms that were not in the registry data. This included a M240B machine gun that an Army National Guard unit reported missing in Wyoming in 2014.

The Army could not explain the discrepancy.

Reporters also filed another records act request for criminal cases opened by Army investigators.

In response, Army's Criminal Investigation Command produced summaries of closed investigations into missing or stolen weapons, weapons parts, explosives or ammunition.

Army spokesman Lt. Col. Brandon Kelley said that the records were "the Army's most accurate list of physical losses." Yet again, the total from the records provided -- 230 missing rifles or handguns during

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the 2010s -- was a clear undercount.

The records did not reflect several major closed cases and excluded open cases, which typically take years to finish. That meant any weapons investigators are actively trying to track down were not part of the total.

Army's first two answers -- 288 and 230 -- are contradicted by an internal analysis, one that officials initially denied they had done.

Asked in an interview whether the Army analyzes trends of missing weapons, Miller said no -- there were breakdowns of murders, rapes and property crimes, but not weapons loss or theft.

"I don't spend a lot of time tracking this data," Miller said.

In fact, in 2019 and 2020, the Army distributed memos describing military weapons loss as having "the highest importance." The numbers of missing "arms and arms components remain the same or increased" over the seven years covered by the memos, called ALARACTs.

A trend analysis in the document cited theft and "neglect" as the most common factors.

The memos counted 1,303 missing rifles and handguns from 2013-2019.

During the same seven years, the investigative records the Army said were authoritative showed 62 lost or stolen rifles or handguns.

Army officials said that some number they couldn't specify were recovered among the 1,303. The data, which could include some combat losses and may include some duplications, came from criminal investigations and incident reports. The internal memos are not "an authoritative document," and were not closely checked with public release in mind, Army spokesman Kelley said.

Members of Miller's physical security division were tracking the data, though Miller said he wasn't personally aware of the memos until AP brought them to his attention. He said that that if he were, he would have shared them.

"When one weapon is lost, I'm concerned. When 100 weapons are lost, I'm concerned. When 500 are lost, I'm concerned," Miller said in a second interview.

Each armed service is supposed to inform the Office of the Secretary of Defense of losses or thefts. That office also has not released data to AP, but spokesman John Kirby gave approximate numbers of missing weapons for the past few years. The numbers were lower than AP's totals.

"There is no effort to conceal," Kirby said. "There is no effort to obstruct."

Let the recovery begin: EU chief OKs first virus plans

MADRID (AP) — The European Union moved a step closer Wednesday to deploying the bloc's massive pandemic recovery fund, with a top executive going to Portugal and Spain to announce the bloc's initial endorsement of their national spending plans.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen first visited Portugal, which was the first of the EU's 27 countries to formally present ideas for spending its share of the 800 billion euros (\$970 billion) earmarked last year to help countries out of a sharp economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

She then crossed the border to visit Madrid, where she met with Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to give the stamp of approval to Spain's plan to use nearly 70 billion euros (\$85 billion) in grant money.

The commission highlighted Spain's emphasis on the environment with investments in renewable energy and climate-friendly technologies like electric cars.

"This plan will deeply transform Spain's economy, make it greener, more digital, more resilient," von der Leyen said. "We have endorsed this plan because it is ambitious, far-sighted and will help build a better future for the Spanish people."

The commission's green light for the proposals will have to be ratified by the leaders of the member states within four weeks.

In coming years, Spain is also to receive an additional 70 billion euros in loans, leaving it only behind Italy as the biggest beneficiary of the funds after both southern European countries were the first of the bloc to be pummeled by the pandemic.

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In Portugal, von der Leyen told Prime Minister António Costa that his government's plan for how to use its 16.6 billion-euro windfall (\$20 billion) in grants and loans has earned the commission's blessing.

Portugal says much of its spending will go to improving the public health network, reducing pollution from public transportation, making housing more energy efficient and buying computers for schools.

So far, 23 of the EU's 27 countries have submitted their spending plans to Brussels authorities, which vet them to ensure they are in line with the bloc's policy goals. EU officials will follow up later to check whether nations are abiding by their commitments.

The EU's 1.1 trillion-euro (\$1.3 trillion) seven-year budget from next year will also help national economies recover from the economic hurt caused by COVID-19.

Von der Leyen also plans to visit Greece, Denmark and Luxembourg later this week.

She started her tour of member states a day after the bloc launched its bond sale for the EU Next Generation funds.

Johannes Hahn, the European Commission for Budget and Administration, said Tuesday that the issue of 20 billion euros in bonds was "the largest ever issuance from a European public sector institution and the largest amount the EU has raised in a single transaction."

Israel to halt nighttime 'mapping' of Palestinian homes

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The Israeli military says it is reining in a controversial practice of conducting late-night raids of Palestinian homes in the West Bank aimed at gathering information about the houses and their inhabitants.

The military has in the past defended the practice, known as "intelligence mapping," as a necessary measure to counter militant groups. But human rights groups say the policy served only to intimidate civilians.

Under the practice, soldiers would rouse families in the middle of the night to document the dimensions and inhabitants of homes in the occupied territory. Rights groups said the raids, conducted in homes where no one was suspected of illegal activities, served no strategic purpose and caused deep psychological trauma.

The change in policy came half a year after Yesh Din, Physicians for Human Rights Israel, and Breaking the Silence, three Israeli activist groups, published a report on what they described as "arbitrary invasions" of private Palestinian homes. They said the practice "effectively serves as a means to oppress and intimidate the Palestinian population and increase control over it."

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war. While the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority administers autonomous zones within the territory, Israel retains overall control and frequently conducts military raids even in Palestinian-controlled areas.

Today, almost 3 million Palestinians live in the West Bank, according to official Palestinian figures, alongside nearly half a million Israeli settlers.

The Palestinians seek the entire West Bank as the heartland of an independent state, along with the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem. Israel says the West Bank is disputed territory whose fate should be resolved through negotiations. Most of the international community considers the West Bank occupied territory and Israeli settlements to be illegal and obstacles to peace.

In a letter to Yesh Din on Tuesday, the army said its raids "were not random operations" and were "intended for an operational-intelligence purpose." It said there were strict guidelines for such operations "in order to minimize the damage and disturbance to the residents' quality of life."

Nonetheless, it said the raids would be halted "except in exceptional circumstances."

The Israeli military confirmed the decision, saying any future cases would be carried out only under the command of high ranking officials.

Yesh Din executive director Lior Amihai called the military's decision "very significant."

"Home invasions are inherent to the apartheid regime in place in the West Bank and we will continue to expose and challenge this and other practices until human rights are respected for all," he said.

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Breaking the Silence Executive Director Avner Gvoryahu said that it was "an important outcome" of the groups' report, "but fundamentally this is not going to bring an end to the occupation or (end) harm to Palestinians."

The announcement came less than a month after widespread unrest in the West Bank, east Jerusalem, and within Israeli cities during May's 11-day war between the Israeli military and Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip. The conflict erupted after Hamas launched rockets at Israeli cities following weeks of mounting tensions and violent clashes between Israeli police and Palestinian protesters in the contested city of Jerusalem.

Greenpeace apologizes, local police slam Euro 2020 protester

By CIARÁN FAHEY AP Sports Writer

MUNICH (AP) — Greenpeace has apologized and Munich police are investigating after a protester parachuted into the stadium and injured two people before Germany's game against France at the European Championship.

The protester used a powered paraglider with a motor attached to his back but lost control and hit overhead camera wires attached to the stadium roof, careening over spectators' heads before he landed on the field ahead of Tuesday's game. Debris fell on the field and main grandstand, narrowly missing France coach Didier Deschamps.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman on Wednesday slammed the Greenpeace stunt and said those behind it should reflect on what had happened.

"This was an irresponsible action that put people in great danger," Steffen Seibert said, adding that it was a relief nothing more serious had happened.

Greenpeace spokesperson Benjamin Stephan apologized for the botched protest and the injuries caused.

"The paraglider didn't want to go into the stadium yesterday. The pilot wanted to fly over the stadium while maintaining the necessary safety distance and only let a balloon float into the stadium with a message to Volkswagen, a main sponsor, with the demand that they get out of the production of climate-damaging diesel and gasoline engines quicker," Stephan said.

"And there was a technical problem during the flight over — the hand throttle of the electric para motor failed, and because there was no more thrust, the glider suddenly lost height."

Stephan said the pilot had no option but to make an emergency landing on the field after striking the steel cables attached to the stadium's roof.

"We are in the process of clarifying this and are working with everyone and of course we take responsibility and would like to emphasize again that we're very sorry, and that we apologize to the two people who were harmed," Stephan said.

Bavaria interior minister Joachim Herrmann said snipers had the pilot in their sights.

"Because of the Greenpeace logo, it was decided not to have the snipers intervene," Herrmann told the Bild tabloid. "If the police had come to another conclusion, that it was a terrorist attack, then the pilot might have had to pay for the action with his life."

Seibert called on the organizers to "critically reflect on the purpose of such actions, which are about maximum spectacle for maximum PR-effect. This leads to such situations which potentially endanger the public."

Local police had earlier blasted "such irresponsible actions in which a considerable risk to human life is accepted."

Police spokesman Andreas Franken said the two men who were hurt both sustained light head injuries and have since been discharged from the hospital. They had been working at the game.

The 38-year-old pilot, who has an address in the southwestern state of Baden Württemberg, was unharmed. He was released late Tuesday but remains under investigation for a string of charges, including interfering with air traffic and bodily harm, as well as breaching the peace, Franken said.

Franken said security measures will be toughened for Saturday's match between Germany and Portugal,

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but declined to give further details.

"Of course this will lead to us looking at our measures again and if necessary adapting them," Franken said. "This must disturb and alarm us, and lead to us reviewing our concept."

The protester's parachute had the slogan "KICK OUT OIL!" and "Greenpeace" written on it.

The parachutist managed to land on the field and Germany players Antonio Rüdiger and Robin Gosens were the first to approach him. He was then led away by security stewards.

UEFA called the action "reckless and dangerous" and said "law authorities will take the necessary action."

The German soccer federation also condemned the action.

"It could probably have turned out much worse," Germany team spokesman Jens Grittner said.

UEFA and one of its top-tier tournament sponsors, Russian state energy firm Gazprom, have previously been targeted by Greenpeace protests.

In 2013, a Champions League game in Basel was disrupted when Greenpeace activists abseiled from the roof of the stadium to unfurl a banner protesting Russian oil and Gazprom, which sponsored the visiting team, German club Schalke.

Greenpeace later donated money to a charity supported by Basel, which was fined by UEFA for the security lapse.

UEFA defended its environmental credentials in a statement on Tuesday after the incident.

"UEFA and its partners are fully committed to a sustainable Euro 2020 tournament," UEFA said, "and many initiatives have been implemented to offset carbon emissions."

Computer trouble hits Hubble Space Telescope, science halted

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The Hubble Space Telescope has been hit with computer trouble, with all astronomical viewing halted, NASA said Wednesday.

The orbiting observatory has been idle since Sunday when a 1980s-era computer that controls the science instruments shut down, possibly because of a bad memory board.

Flight controllers at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland tried to restart the computer Monday, but the same thing happened. They're now trying to switch to a backup memory unit. If that works, the telescope will be tested for a day, before the science instruments are turned back on and observations can resume.

For now, the cameras and other instruments are in a so-called safe mode.

Launched in 1990, Hubble is showing more and more signs of aging, despite a series of repairs and updates by spacewalking astronauts during NASA's shuttle era. The idled computer was installed during the fifth and final service call in 2009.

NASA plans to launch Hubble's successor, the James Webb Space Telescope, in November. This observatory will be too far from Earth — 1 million miles (1.5 million kilometers) away in a solar orbit — for astronaut tune-ups. The launch from French Guiana using Europe's Ariane rocket is years behind schedule; the latest delay of two weeks is the result of rocket processing and scheduling issues.

Scientists hope to have an overlap in orbit between Hubble and the considerably more advanced and powerful Webb.

China set to send first crew to new space station Thursday

By SAM McNEIL Associated Press

JIUQUAN, China (AP) — The three members of the first crew to be sent to China's space station say they're eager to get to work making their home for the next three months habitable, setting up testing and experiments and preparing for a series of spacewalks.

The three met with reporters Wednesday from inside a germ-free glassed-in room, hours before they were to blast off on Thursday morning.

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"First of all, we need to arrange our home in the core module, then get started on a whole range of diagnostic tests on crucial technology and experiments," said mission commander Nie Haisheng, 56, the most senior of the three who is making his third trip to space.

"The task is very arduous and there are many challenges. My colleagues and I will cooperate closely, operate carefully and overcome all difficulties," Nie said.

Unsurprisingly, all said they had complete confidence in the mission, which carries special political meaning for the ruling Communist Party as it prepares to celebrate its centenary next month.

Liu Boming, 54, whose one previous flight in 2008 included China's first spacewalk, said there would be multiple such activities during the mission as the astronauts carry out their science experiments, conduct maintenance and prepare the Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, core module to receive two other modules to be sent up next year.

Tang Hongbo, 45, who is making his first flight since being selected among the second batch of astronauts in 2010, said he had been training virtually nonstop for years. "There is pressure," Tang said. "But where there is pressure there is motivation and ... I have confidence in myself and have confidence in our team."

Thursday's launch begins the first crewed space mission in five years for an increasingly ambitious space program. China has sent 11 astronauts into space since becoming the third country to do so on its own in 2003, and has sent orbiters and rovers to the moon and Mars.

The astronauts will be traveling in the Shenzhou-12 spaceship launched by a Long March-2F Y12 rocket set to blast off at 9:22 a.m. (0122 GMT) from the Jiuquan launch center in northwestern China.

While the first Tianhe crew are all men, women will be part of future crews, officials have said.

Beijing doesn't participate in the International Space Station, largely due to U.S. concerns over the Chinese space program's secrecy and its military connections. Despite that, foreign science missions and possibly foreign astronauts are expected to visit the Chinese station in the future, China Manned Space Agency Assistant Director Ji Qiming told reporters at Jiuquan.

"Outer space is the common wealth of people all over the world, and exploring the universe is the shared cause of all mankind," Ji said.

"We are willing to carry out international cooperation and exchanges with all countries and regions worldwide that are committed to the peaceful use of outer space," Ji said, adding that existing cooperation is being expanded with countries including Russia, Italy and Germany along with the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs.

"I believe that in the near future, when the Chinese space station is complete, we will see Chinese and foreign astronauts taking on joint missions to the Chinese space station," Ji said.

Ji conceded the construction of the Chinese station had come "relatively late," but said that was also an advantage because it allowed China to use the latest technologies and concepts, particularly in the areas of reliability and safety.

"Exploring the vast universe, developing space activities, building a powerful space nation is our unremitting space dream," Ji said.

"The construction and operation of China's space station will raise our technologies and accumulate experience for all the people. It is a positive contribution by China for human exploration of the universe, peaceful utilization of outer space and push forward the building of a community of shared future for mankind," he said.

The mission is the third of 11 planned through next year to add the additional sections to the station and send up crews and supplies. The main living section of the station was launched in April while the other two modules will be primarily for scientific work.

The mission builds on experience China gained from earlier operating two experimental space stations. It also landed a probe on Mars last month that carried a rover, the Zhurong, and earlier landed a probe and rover on the moon and brought back the first lunar samples by any country's space program since the 1970s.

Once completed, the station will allow for stays of up to six months, similar to the much larger Interna-

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tional Space Station.

All astronauts will have their own living area, and a stationary bike and other exercise equipment will allow them to counter some of the effects of weightlessness. They'll also be able to bring personal items to remind them of home and stave off boredom while not working, Nie said.

The Chinese station reportedly is intended to be used for 15 years and may outlast the International Space Station, which is nearing the end of its functional lifespan.

The launch of Tianhe was considered a success although China was criticized for allowing the uncontrolled reentry to Earth of part of the rocket that carried it into space. Usually, discarded rocket stages reenter the atmosphere soon after liftoff, normally over water, and don't go into orbit.

The rocket blasting off Thursday is of a different type, and Ji dismissed concerns about it or the models used for cargo missions posing a threat when they reenter. China published their trajectories and they are expected to burn up long before they could be a danger, he said.

Loan relief granted to defrauded for-profit college students

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

The U.S. Education Department said Wednesday it's erasing student debt for thousands of borrowers who attended a for-profit college chain that made exaggerated claims about its graduates' success in finding jobs.

The Biden administration said it is approving 18,000 loan forgiveness claims from former students of ITT Technical Institute, a chain that closed in 2016 after being dealt a series of sanctions by the Obama administration. The new loan discharges will clear more than \$500 million in debt.

The move marks a step forward in the Biden administration's effort to clear a backlog of claims in the borrower defense program, which provides loan forgiveness to students who were defrauded by their colleges. Claims piled up during the Trump administration, which stalled the program and only started processing claims after a federal court demanded it. There are now more than 100,000 pending claims.

In announcing the new action, Education Secretary Miguel Cardona vowed to continue standing up for students who are deceived by their schools.

"Our action today will give thousands of borrowers a fresh start and the relief they deserve," Cardona said in a statement. "Many of these borrowers have waited a long time for relief, and we need to work swiftly to render decisions for those whose claims are still pending."

It follows another round of loan discharges in March, when the Education Department cleared \$1 billion in federal student debt for 72,000 borrowers. Those claims all came from former students of for-profit colleges.

Borrower advocates applauded the new approvals but called for swift relief for the thousands of other students whose claims are still pending, including many who attended ITT Tech.

"It appears the Biden administration genuinely wants to help people who are owed discharges," said Alex Elson, vice president of Student Defense, a Washington legal group. "But that makes it all the more confounding that they are so hesitant to use their authority to immediately and automatically help the countless additional borrowers who are still waiting."

Borrower defense is among several education programs targeted for an overhaul by the Biden administration as it works to reverse Trump-era policies. Cardona is hosting a series of hearings this month as his agency considers changes to that policy and others.

The program was rarely used until 2015, when the Education Department received thousands of claims from former students of Corinthian Colleges. The chain of for-profit colleges had recently shut down following findings that it lied to students about job placement rates.

Following the collapse of Corinthian and other beleaguered for-profit colleges, the Obama administration moved to make it easier for students to get loans erased. But the overhaul was reversed by the Trump administration, which later wrote its own rules making it tougher to get relief. In changing the rules, then-Education Secretary Betsy DeVos said it had become too easy to get loans forgiven.

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Cardona began chipping away at DeVos' rules in March when he rescinded a formula that allowed the Education Department to give only partial loan discharges to students whose claims were approved. All borrowers granted relief will now get their loans cleared in full.

Many of the 18,000 claims from ITT Tech were approved after the Education Department found that the company lied about graduates' job prospects. The agency said ITT made "repeated and significant misrepresentations" about its ability to help students get jobs. In reality, many students said it was harder to find employment when they listed ITT on their resumes, the department said.

Other claims were approved after the department found that ITT misled students about their ability to transfer course credits to other colleges. Credits were rarely accepted elsewhere, the department said, leaving students with "little to no progress" in their academic careers.

Borrowers will be notified about their claim approvals in the coming weeks, the agency said.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, June 17, the 168th day of 2021. There are 197 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 17, 1994, after leading police on a slow-speed chase on Southern California freeways, O.J. Simpson was arrested and charged with murder in the slayings of his ex-wife, Nicole, and her friend, Ronald Goldman. (Simpson was later acquitted in a criminal trial but held liable in a civil trial.)

On this date:

In 1775, the Revolutionary War Battle of Bunker Hill resulted in a costly victory for the British, who suffered heavy losses.

In 1885, the Statue of Liberty arrived in New York Harbor aboard the French ship *Isere* (ee-SEHR').

In 1933, the "Kansas City Massacre" took place outside Union Station in Kansas City, Mo., as a group of gunmen attacked law enforcement officers escorting federal prisoner Frank Nash; four of the officers were killed, along with Nash.

In 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Abington (Pa.) School District v. Schempp*, struck down, 8-1, rules requiring the recitation of the Lord's Prayer or reading of Biblical verses in public schools.

In 1967, China successfully tested its first thermonuclear (hydrogen) bomb.

In 1972, President Richard Nixon's eventual downfall began with the arrest of five burglars inside the Democratic headquarters in Washington, D.C.'s Watergate complex.

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan announced the retirement of Chief Justice Warren Burger, who was succeeded by William Rehnquist.

In 2009, President Barack Obama extended some benefits to same-sex partners of federal employees. Nevada Sen. John Ensign resigned from the GOP leadership a day after admitting an affair with a former campaign staffer.

In 2012, Rodney King, 47, whose 1991 videotaped beating by Los Angeles police sparked widespread outrage and who struggled with addiction and repeated arrests, died in Rialto, California, in an apparent accidental drowning.

In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 7-2 that states can't demand proof of citizenship from people registering to vote in federal elections unless they get federal or court approval to do so.

In 2015, nine people were shot to death in a historic African-American church in Charleston, South Carolina; suspect Dylann Roof was arrested the following morning. (Roof was convicted of federal hate crimes and sentenced to death; he later pleaded guilty to state murder charges and was sentenced to life in prison without parole.)

In 2019, Iran announced that it was breaking compliance with the international accord that kept it from making nuclear weapons; the announcement meant that Iran could soon start to enrich uranium to just a step away from weapons-grade levels. The Trump administration followed Iran's announcement by order-

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ing 1,000 more troops to the Middle East.

Ten years ago: The United Nations endorsed the rights of gay, lesbian and transgender people for the first time ever, passing a resolution hailed as historic by the U.S. and other backers and decried by some African and Muslim countries. A Saudi woman defiantly drove through Riyadh while others brazenly cruised past police patrols in the first forays of a challenge to Saudi Arabia's male-only driving rules. Rory McIlroy became the first player in the 111-year history of the U.S. Open to reach 13-under par.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama, his wife and their daughters traveled to Carlsbad Caverns National Park in New Mexico as part of a long Father's Day weekend that was also designed to draw attention to America's natural wonders. Thousands of friends and fans said farewell to "The Voice" singer Christina Grimmie at services in Medford, New Jersey, a week after the 22-year-old was shot to death while signing autographs in Orlando, Florida, by a man who then killed himself.

One year ago: Prosecutors in Atlanta brought murder charges against white police officer Garrett Rolfe in the fatal shooting of a Black man, Rayshard Brooks, following a struggle; a second officer, Devin Brosnan, was charged with aggravated assault and violating his oath. Quaker Oats announced that it would retire the Aunt Jemima brand, saying the company recognized that the character's origins were "based on a racial stereotype." City commissioners in Portland, Oregon, voted to cut \$16 million from the police budget in response to concerns about use of force and racial injustice. Jean Kennedy Smith, the last surviving sibling of President John F. Kennedy, died at her New York home at the age of 92. Prosecutors in Los Angeles said actor Danny Masterson of "That '70s Show" was arrested and charged with raping three women in the early 2000s; the actor has denied the charges. (A judge has ordered Masterson to stand trial on three counts of rape.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Peter Lupus is 89. Movie director Ken Loach is 85. Actor William Lucking is 80. Singer Barry Manilow is 78. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich is 78. Comedian Joe Piscopo is 70. Actor Mark Linn-Baker is 67. Actor Jon Gries (gryz) is 64. Rock singer Jello Biafra is 63. Movie producer-director-writer Bobby Farrelly is 63. Actor Thomas Haden Church is 61. Actor Greg Kinnear is 58. Actor Kami Cotler is 56. Olympic gold medal speed skater Dan Jansen is 56. Actor Jason Patric is 55. Actor-comedian Will Forte is 51. Latin pop singer Paulina Rubio is 50. Tennis player Venus Williams is 41. Actor Arthur Darvill is 39. Actor Jodie Whittaker is 39. Actor Manish Dayal is 38. Country singer Mickey Guyton is 38. Actor Marie Avgeropoulos is 35. Rapper Kendrick Lamar is 34. NHL forward Nikita Kucherov is 28. Actor Damani Roberts is 25. Actor KJ Apa is 24.