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The Groton World Classroom group got to see the Changing of the Guard at the unknown tomb at Arlington National Cemetery. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



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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The parents and students climbed up and around the Albert Einstein Memorial for a group photo shot. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Pictured are Kasey Waage, Brenda Madsen, Mary Johnson and Al Ward in front of Martins Restaurant in Georgetown. This is the second time that Madsen and Johnson have been on the World Classroom Trip from Groton Area. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

World Classroom provides excellent education opportunities for middle school students

It was a pastor that had a vision of two people starting up an educational business in Aberdeen. In 1972, Al Ward's father, Dick Ward, was a pastor at the UMC Church in Aberdeen and in his final days on Earth, he had told his son, Al, and Brett Newton that they would start a business as a partnership, World Classroom. In 2014, they joined together to start a touring business for middle school students to Washington, D.C. The first year they had 232 students, the second year it went to 750 students and today, they average 6,000 students. Al Ward said, "There was no pay for us the first couple of years. We loved working with students and we continued to provide the service." They work with 60 middle schools in South Dakota and are getting schools from other states as well.



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The above photo features the group in front of the United States Capital building. The bottom photo taken from a different angle features both the Capital and the memorial of President Ulysses S. Grant. (Photos by Paul Kosel)



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It was a surprise to see Kasey Waage helping with the food distribution for World Classroom. She works for the organization and flew in to help with food and other aspects of the tour. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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On Feb. 23, 1945, during the Battle of Iwo Jima (Feb. 19 to March 26), six Marines planted the U.S. flag at the summit of Mount Suribachi. The scene was photographed by journalist Joe Rosenthal of the Associated Press and his image soon became famous around the world. Located on the southern tip of the Japanese island, Mount Suribachi is a dormant volcano that is 546 feet (166 meters) high. The summit has a dominating view of the rest of Iwo Jima, including its black sand beaches. During the battle, one of the bloodiest in the Pacific theater, Japanese forces used this vantage point to direct artillery fire onto the American forces. Soon after the start of the battle, the Americans aimed to capture the position.

A 40-man combat patrol, led by 1st Lt. Harold G. Schrier, was the first American unit to reach the summit of the mountain on Feb. 23. These men were from the 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines, and they carried with them a U.S. flag taken from the USS Missoula, a tank transport ship that delivered troops and cargo to Iwo Jima. Earlier, Schrier had been handed the flag by his battalion's adjutant and was told, "If you get to the top, put it up." The Groton Group of students and parents posed for a photo in front of the memorial. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The Groton group visit the Kennedy burial site at Arlington National Cemetery where it also features the eternal flame. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The Vietnam Memorial Wall was visited by the Groton group. In the left photo, you will notice the name of William E. Pasch, a Groton native. Yesterday was Father's Day so the wall was lined up with flowers. (Photos by Paul Kosel)

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Thanks to the January 6 riot on the nation's Capital, the entire Capital grounds are now fenced off and no access is given to the general public any more. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The Washington Monument with the Capital building, also being reflected off the water.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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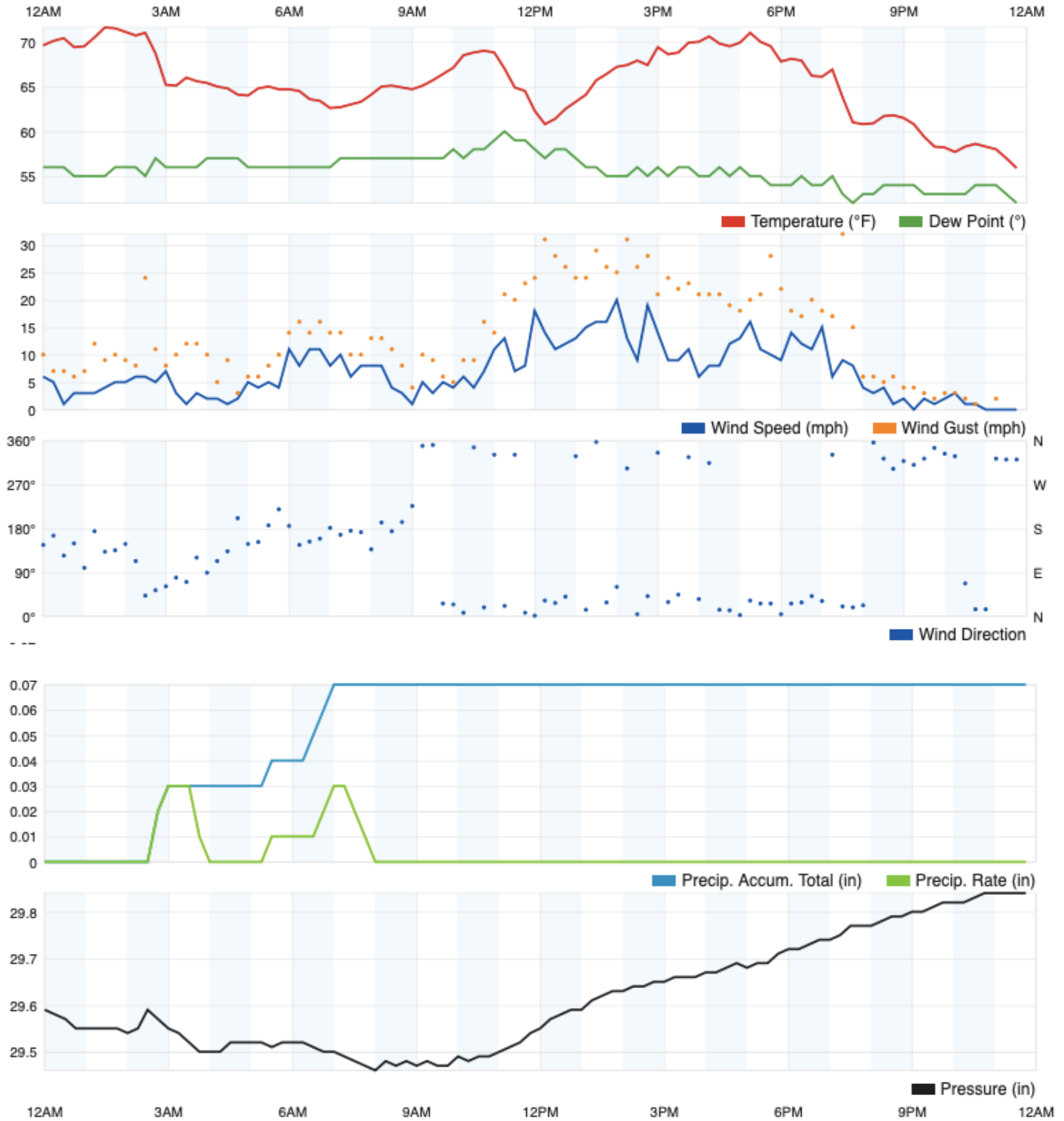


These girls were chosen by the Groton American Legion Auxiliary to attend Girls State this year. Pictured left to right are Alyssa Thaler, Kennedy Anderson, Kansas Kroll, Allyssa Locke, Brooklyn Imrie, Trinity Smith and Cassidy Schultz. (Courtesy Photo)

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Sunny

High: 74 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 44 °F

Tuesday



Sunny

High: 86 °F

Tuesday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 56 °F

Wednesday



Hot

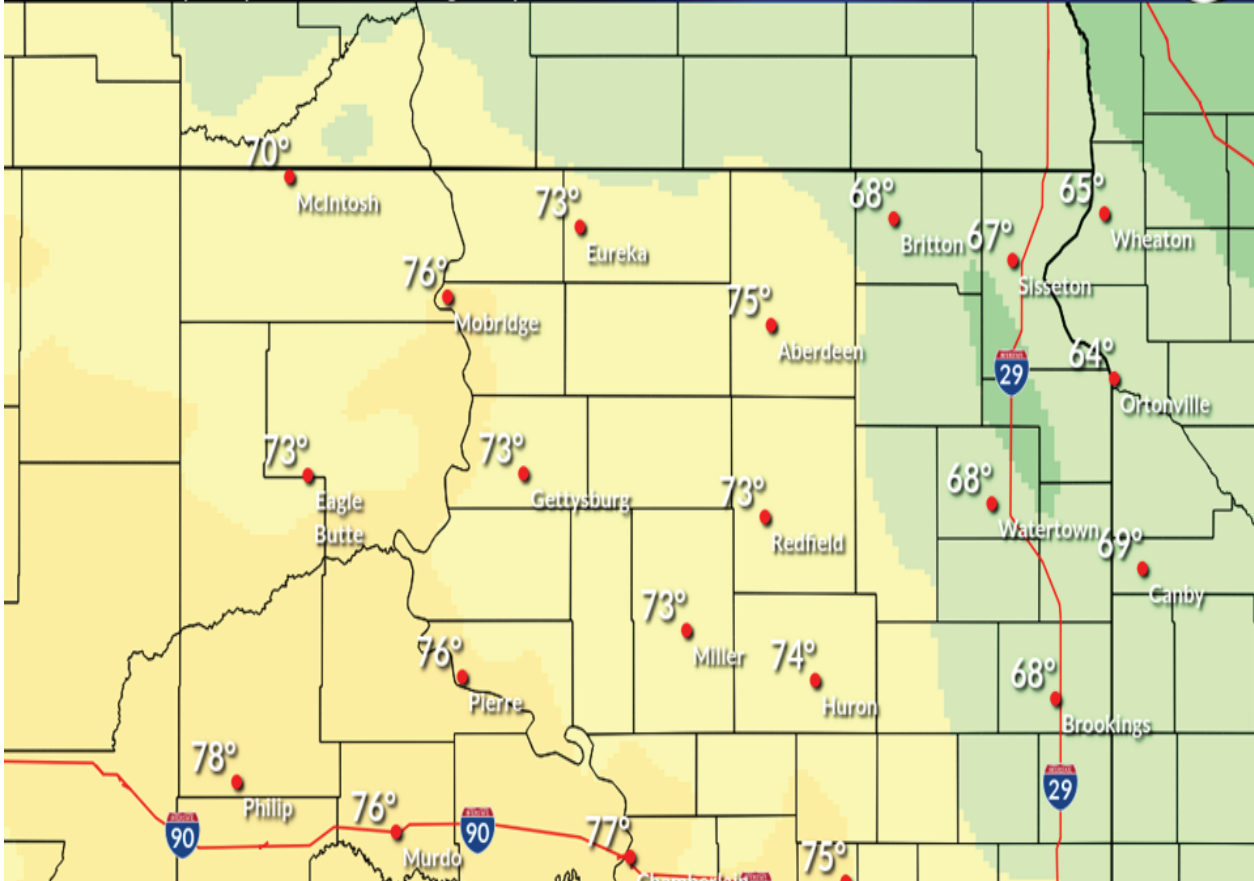
High: 100 °F

Today's High Temperatures!

One more cool day today before above average temperatures return

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD

Issued Jun 21, 2021 3:27 AM CDT



Temperatures will range from the upper 60s to the mid-70s today. Unfortunately, well above average temperatures will quickly return with highs on Wednesday being in the 90s and potentially nearing the century mark for many areas. Dry conditions will prevail through at least the day Thursday.

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Today in Weather History

June 21, 1902: Light to heavy frost occurred over most of the state with low temperatures ranging from the mid-20s to the lower 30s. Some record low temperatures include; 27 degrees in Ipswich and Leola, 29 in Kennebec, 30 in Mellette, 31 in Aberdeen, Clark, and Watertown, 32 in Faulkton and Gann Valley, 36 in Sisseton, and 40 degrees in Milbank.

June 21, 1961: One or more tornadoes moved southeast along a distance from east of Aberdeen to the southeastern edge of Sioux Falls. A funnel cloud was first seen between Aberdeen and Groton and later on near Raymond. A tornado hit about 4 pm a few miles southwest of Clark with about 20 farm buildings demolished. One house was destroyed, killing an elderly lady and injuring one person. A boy was reportedly lifted high in the air, and another woman carried 100 yards by winds. Both were injured. Between 4:30 and 5:00 pm, areas northeast of Willow Lake and in northern Kingsbury were hit with a total of 13 farm buildings destroyed or twisted off the foundations. Five buildings on one farm were destroyed, and a house was unroofed near Oldham. The house roof was found several miles away. The tornado was of F3 strength.

June 21, 1983: An F3 tornado touched down in a resort area two miles west of Pollock. Eleven people fled from the southwesternmost cabin and crawled under a nearby cabin. The southwest cabin was destroyed and the cabin the group crawled under was moved five feet from its concrete block foundation. Four people were treated for injuries. A van, boat, and trailer were demolished, and a small car was heavily damaged. The tornado turned east and reformed four miles east of Pollock, where it touched down briefly and dissipated. Another F3 tornado touched down in open prairie three miles northeast of Glad Valley and moved northeast, creating a path of destruction as it progressed. On one farm, nine buildings were wiped out and scattered up to two miles away. Trees and poles were uprooted and scattered a half mile away. This tornado was estimated to be on the ground for six miles with a path width of 300 yards. A third tornado, rated F2, touched down seven miles south of Pollock. This tornado damaged several cabin roofs, a restaurant, and downed several trees. Boats were tossed into a lake, and picnic tables were hurled against cars.

June 21, 2013: A long-lived severe thunderstorm developed over the southern Black Hills and moved eastward across the South Dakota plains during the morning hours. The storm produced large hail to softball size from eastern Custer to northern Jackson Counties. The softball size fell 12 miles east-southeast of Fairburn in Custer County, damaging property. This storm intensified along a strong warm front with volatile air and strong, deep layer winds into several supercell thunderstorms and a damaging line of thunderstorms/bow echo across parts of central and northeast South Dakota through the afternoon hours. Damaging winds up to 90 mph uprooted large trees and caused considerable structural and crop damage and loss of power to those along the path. The worst wind damage was located at Lake Poinsett, Watertown, and Milbank. A woman was killed, and her husband had been severely injured on Lake Poinsett when their lake house was destroyed. Numerous trees were downed along with many structures damaged or destroyed. Many trees had fallen onto homes, cabins, and trailers. The bowling alley in Clear Lake lost its roof along with numerous pole barns being destroyed along the path of the storm. Thousands of people were also left without power. Four tornado touchdowns occurred along with hail up to the size of softballs. Isolated flash flooding also occurred. Codington, Hamlin, Grant, and Deuel counties were all declared in a Federal Disaster Declaration. Total damage estimates were around 1,100,000 dollars.

1987: A tornado destroyed 57 mobile homes at the Chateau Estates trailer park northwest of Detroit, Michigan killing one person and injuring six others. Thunderstorms over Lower Michigan also drenched the Saginaw Valley with up to 4.5 inches of rain in less than six hours.

1988: The first full day of summer was a hot one, with afternoon highs of 100 degrees or above reported from the Northern and Central Plains to the Ohio Valley. Sixty-nine cities in the north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. The high of 110 degrees at Sioux Falls, SD was an all-time record for that location.

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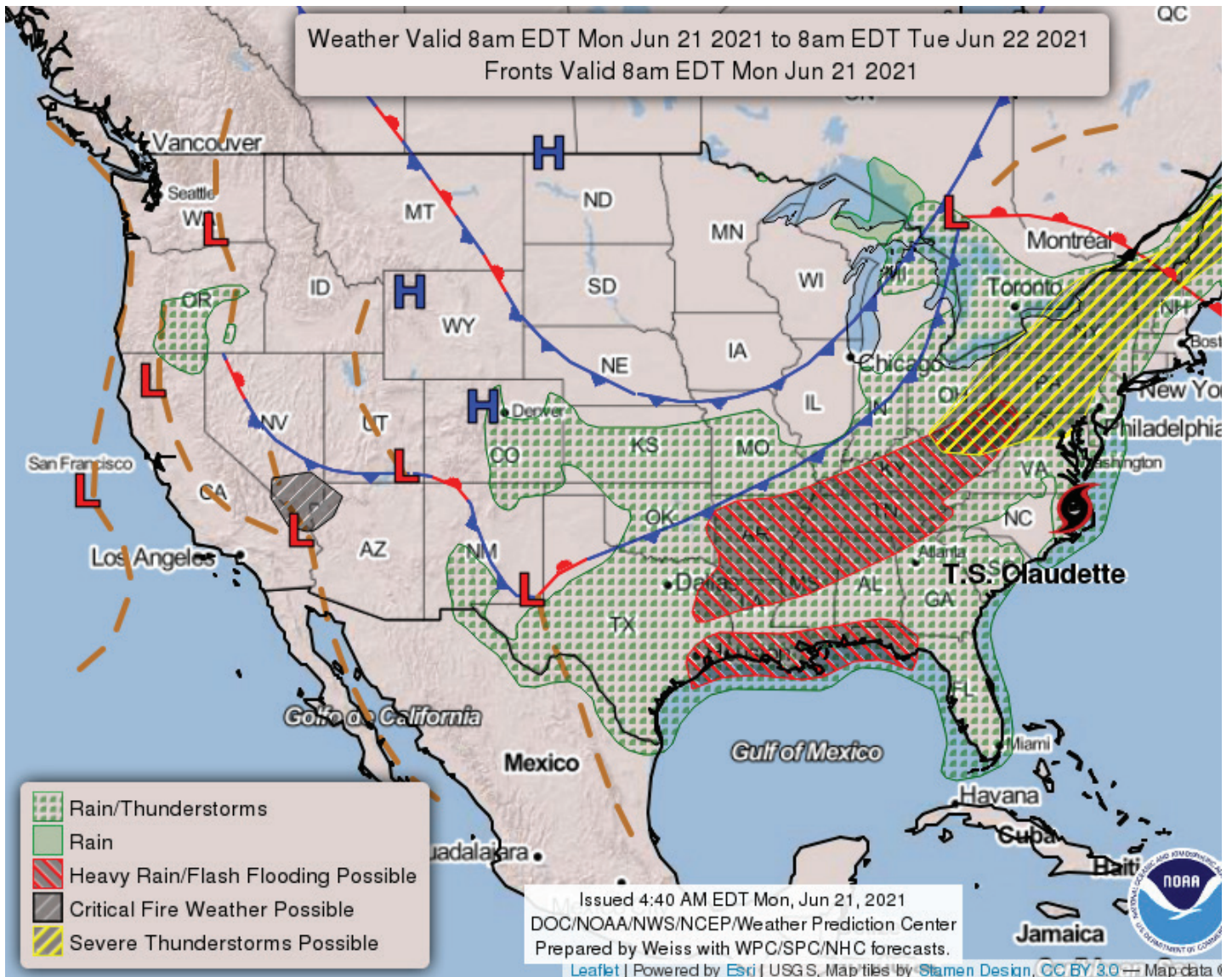
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 72 °F at 1:34 AM
Low Temp: 55 °F at 11:59 PM
Wind: 33 mph at 12:02 PM
Precip: .07 total

Today's Info

Record High: 108° in 1988
Record Low: 31° in 1902
Average High: 82°F
Average Low: 57°F
Average Precip in June.: 2.42
Precip to date in June.: 0.60
Average Precip to date: 9.70
Precip Year to Date: 4.54
Sunset Tonight: 9:26 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:46 a.m.



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HE RULES FOREVER

He who created all things rules everything! Kingdoms that were once great and powerful can no longer be found on a map. Nations that were once feared and wealthy are now weak and impoverished. Countries that once were respected are now looked upon as failures.

God has been, is, and always will be the Creator-Ruler.

His sovereignty began when the universe began and kingdoms, nations, and countries came into existence according to His divine plan. He reigned before time began and will continue to reign even when clocks cease to tick. "He rules forever by His power."

His eyes are never closed as He watches over every nation and individual. Deeds that show compassion and deeds that are cruel do not escape His careful observation. Though He is invisible to us, nations are not invisible to Him. He is aware of every citizen in every country and carefully records the actions of the rulers and leaders. "His eyes watch the nations," wrote the Psalmist.

The rebellious and unrighteous, the godless and the god-restricting will not escape His judgment. No nation has ever succeeded when they have rebelled against God, His laws or His truth. Nations sin, people sin and God warns them and waits for them to repent.

If they repent He spares His judgment and voids the punishment that is rightfully theirs because of their wrong-doing and unrighteousness. But when nations continue to sin, they will collapse from within or be destroyed from without.

Only nations who have honored God have survived.

Prayer: We pray, Father, that our nation will repent and return to our heritage that once followed Your Word. If ever we need You as our Lord, it is now! Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For by his great power he rules forever. He watches every movement of the nations; let no rebel rise in defiance. Psalm 66:7

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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

CNH Industrial to Acquire Raven Industries, Enhancing Precision Agriculture Capabilities and Scale

LONDON & SIOUX FALLS, S.D.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Jun 21, 2021--

CNH Industrial N.V. (NYSE: CNHI / MI: CNHI) today announced that it has entered into an agreement to acquire 100% of the capital stock of Raven Industries, Inc. (NASDAQ: RAVN), a US-based leader in precision agriculture technology for US\$58 per share, representing a 33.6% premium to the Raven Industries 4-week volume-weighted average stock price, and US\$2.1 billion Enterprise Value. The transaction will be funded with available cash on hand of CNH Industrial. Closing is expected to occur in the fourth quarter of 2021, subject to the satisfaction of customary closing conditions, including approval of Raven shareholders and receipt of regulatory approvals.

This press release features multimedia. View the full release here: <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20210620005255/en/>

The acquisition builds upon a long partnership between the two companies and will further enhance CNH Industrial's position in the global agriculture equipment market by adding strong innovation capabilities in autonomous and precision agriculture technology.

"Precision agriculture and autonomy are critical components of our strategy to help our agricultural customers reach the next level of productivity and to unlock the true potential of their operations," said Scott Wine, Chief Executive Officer, CNH Industrial. "Raven has been a pioneer in precision agriculture for decades, and their deep product experience, customer driven software expertise and engineering acumen offer a significant boost to our capabilities. This acquisition emphasizes our commitment to enhance our precision farming portfolio and aligns with our digital transformation strategy. The combination of Raven's technologies and CNH Industrial's strong current and new product portfolio will provide our customers with novel, connected technologies, allowing them to be more productive and efficient."

"Our Board and Management are excited about this partnership and what it means for our future," said Dan Rykhus, President & Chief Executive Officer for Raven Industries. "For 65 years, our company has been committed to solving great challenges. Part of that commitment includes delivering groundbreaking innovation by developing and investing in our core capabilities and technology. By coming together with CNH Industrial, we believe we will further accelerate that path as well as bring tremendous opportunities and value to our customers — once again fulfilling our purpose to solve great challenges. Our relationship with CNH Industrial has expanded over decades, and we have a deep respect for one another and a shared commitment to transform agriculture practices across the world. We look forward to CNH Industrial leveraging the Raven talent and culture, as well as the Sioux Falls community, as part of their vision and future success."

"Raven Industries' capabilities, innovation culture, entrepreneurial spirit and engineering talent are impressive and will continue to thrive as part of the CNH Industrial family. Sioux Falls is and will continue to be a true center of excellence," added Wine. "We are incredibly excited to collaborate in bringing our customers more integrated precision and autonomous solutions, not only to improve productivity and profitability, but also promote more sustainable solutions and environmental stewardship. Together, our teams will create a stronger business for our employees, dealer network, and customers, enabling us to shape the future of agriculture, augment our world-leading sustainability credentials, and maximize our growth opportunities."

Headquartered in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Raven Industries is organized into three business divisions: Applied Technology (precision agriculture), Engineered Films (high-performance specialty films) and Aero-star (aerospace) with consolidated net sales of US\$ 348.4 million for the twelve months ended January 31, 2021. The company is a global technology partner for key strategic OEMs, agriculture retailers and dealers. The transaction is expected to generate approximately US\$400 million of run-rate revenue synergies by

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calendar year 2025, resulting in US\$150 million of incremental EBITDA.

The Engineered Films and AeroStar segments are industry leaders in the high performance specialty films and stratospheric platform industries, respectively, and CNH Industrial believes they represent attractive independent businesses with excellent near and long-term potential. Accordingly, CNH Industrial plans to undertake a strategic review of each business to best position them for future success and maximize shareholder value.

CNH Industrial does not expect the proposed acquisition will have any impact on its guidance for 2021. The acquisition is expected to be funded with Group consolidated cash 1 not affecting third party debt of industrial activities 2. Cash consideration for the transaction is not included in the free cash flow definition, and consequently it will not affect its free cash flow guidance for the FY 2021E.

Barclays and Goldman Sachs acted as financial advisors to CNH Industrial and Sullivan & Cromwell LLP as its legal advisor. J.P. Morgan Securities LLC acted as financial advisor to Raven and Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP as its legal advisor.

Conference Call

CNH Industrial will host an investor conference call today at 2:30 p.m. CEST/ 1:30 p.m. BST/ 8:30 a.m. EDT to discuss this transaction. The call can be followed live online at this link and a recording will be available later on the Company's website www.cnhindustrial.com. A presentation will be made available on the CNH Industrial website prior to the call.

About CNH Industrial

CNH Industrial N.V. (NYSE: CNHI /MI: CNHI) is a global leader in the capital goods sector with established industrial experience, a wide range of products and a worldwide presence. Each of the individual brands belonging to the Company is a major international force in its specific industrial sector: Case IH, New Holland Agriculture and Steyr for tractors and agricultural machinery; Case and New Holland Construction for earth moving equipment; Iveco for commercial vehicles; Iveco Bus and Heuliez Bus for buses and coaches; Iveco Astra for quarry and construction vehicles; Magirus for firefighting vehicles; Iveco Defence Vehicles for defence and civil protection; and FPT Industrial for engines and transmissions. More information can be found on the corporate website: www.cnhindustrial.com

About Raven Industries, Inc.

Raven Industries (NASDAQ: RAVN) provides innovative, high-value products and systems that solve great challenges throughout the world. Raven is a leader in precision agriculture, high-performance specialty films, and aerospace and defense solutions, and the company's groundbreaking work in autonomous systems is unlocking new possibilities in areas like farming, national defense, and scientific research. Since 1956, Raven has designed, produced, and delivered exceptional solutions, earning the company a reputation for innovation, product quality, and unmatched service. For more information, visit <https://ravenind.com>.

Additional Information and Where to Find It

This communication is not intended to and does not constitute an offer to sell or the solicitation of an offer to subscribe for or buy or an invitation to purchase or subscribe for any securities or the solicitation of any vote or approval in any jurisdiction, nor shall there be any sale, issuance or transfer of securities in any jurisdiction in contravention of applicable law. In connection with the proposed transaction, Raven Industries, Inc. ("Raven") will file a proxy statement on Schedule 14A with the Securities and Exchange Commission ("SEC"), as well as other relevant materials regarding the transaction. Following the filing of the definitive proxy statement, Raven will mail the definitive proxy statement and a proxy card to its shareholders in connection with the transaction. INVESTORS AND SECURITY HOLDERS OF RAVEN ARE URGED TO READ THE PROXY STATEMENT AND OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS FILED OR TO BE FILED WITH THE SEC CAREFULLY WHEN THEY BECOME AVAILABLE BECAUSE THEY WILL CONTAIN IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT CNH INDUSTRIAL N.V. ("CNH INDUSTRIAL"), RAVEN, THE TRANSACTION AND RELATED MATTERS. Investors and security holders will be able to obtain copies of the proxy statement (when available) as well as other filings containing information about CNH Industrial and Raven, without charge, at the SEC's website, <http://www.sec.gov>, and Raven stockholders will receive information at an appropriate time on how to obtain transaction-related documents free of charge from Raven.

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Participants in Solicitation

Raven and its directors and executive officers, and CNH Industrial and its directors and executive officers, may be deemed to be participants in the solicitation of proxies in connection with the proposed transaction. Information about the directors and executive officers of Raven is set forth in the proxy statement for Raven's 2021 Annual Meeting of Stockholders, which was filed with the SEC on April 9, 2021. Information about the directors and executive officers of CNH Industrial is set forth in CNH Industrial's annual report on Form 20-F for the year ended December 31, 2020, which was filed with the SEC on March 3, 2021. Investors may obtain additional information regarding the interest of such participants by reading the proxy statement regarding the proposed transaction when it becomes available.

Cautionary Language Concerning Forward-Looking Statements

This document contains certain forward-looking statements within the meaning of the safe harbor provisions of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995 with respect to the proposed transaction between CNH Industrial and Raven, including statements regarding the benefits of the transaction, the anticipated timing of the transaction, plans, objectives, expectations and intentions of the parties with respect to the transaction, CNH Industrial's, Raven's and/or the combined group's estimated or anticipated future business, performance and results of operations and financial condition, and other statements that are not historical facts. These statements may include terms such as "may", "will", "expect", "could", "should", "intend", "estimate", "anticipate", "believe", "remain", "on track", "design", "target", "objective", "goal", "forecast", "projection", "outlook", "prospects", "plan", or similar terms. Forward-looking statements are not guarantees of future performance. Rather, they are based on CNH Industrial's and Raven's current state of knowledge, expectations and projections about future events and are by their nature, subject to inherent risks and uncertainties. They relate to events and depend on circumstances that may or may not occur or exist in the future and, as such, persons reading this communication are cautioned not to place undue reliance on them.

These forward-looking statements are subject to risks and uncertainties that may cause actual results to differ materially from those indicated in the forward-looking statements. Such risks and uncertainties include, but are not limited to, the occurrence of any event, change or other circumstances that could give rise to the termination of the merger agreement; the risk that Raven stockholders may not approve the transaction; the failure to obtain necessary regulatory approvals or that such approvals will be subject to conditions that are not anticipated; risks that any of the other closing conditions to the proposed transaction may not be satisfied in a timely manner; adverse effects on CNH Industrial's or Raven's operating results because of a failure to complete the proposed transaction; the failure to realize the expected benefits and synergies of the pending acquisition; the failure to successfully and effectively integrate Raven's businesses; significant transaction costs and/or unknown or inestimable liabilities; risks related to potential litigation associated with the proposed transaction; risks related to financial community and rating agency perceptions of each of CNH Industrial and Raven and its business, operations, financial condition and the industry in which it operates; risks related to the disruption of management time from ongoing business operations due to the proposed merger; failure to realize the benefits expected from the proposed merger; effects of the announcement, pendency or completion of the proposed transaction on the ability of CNH Industrial or Raven to retain customers and retain and hire key personnel and maintain relationships with their suppliers, and on their operating results and businesses generally; general economic and business conditions that affect the combined companies following the consummation of the pending acquisition, including the significant economic uncertainty and volatility caused by COVID 19; changes in government policies regarding banking, monetary and fiscal policy; legislation, particularly pertaining to capital goods-related issues such as agriculture, the environment, debt relief and subsidy program policies, trade and commerce and infrastructure development; government policies on international trade and investment, including sanctions, import quotas, capital controls and tariffs; volatility in international trade caused by the imposition of tariffs, sanctions, embargoes, and trade wars; development and use of new technologies and technological difficulties; and other similar risk and uncertainties and the success of CNH Industrial

and Raven in managing the risks and uncertainties involved in the foregoing. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic may give rise to risks that are currently unknown or amplify the risks associated with the foregoing factors.

Any forward-looking statements contained in this document speak only as of the date hereof and CNH Industrial and Raven disclaim any obligation to update or revise any forward-looking statements. Further information concerning CNH Industrial and Raven and their respective businesses, including additional risks and uncertainties, are included in CNH Industrial's reports and filings with the SEC, the Autoriteit Financiële Markten and Commissione Nazionale per le Società e la Borsa and Raven's reports and filings with the SEC.

1 Consolidated cash refers to Cash and Cash Equivalents of the Group, which amounted to \$7.1 billion at the end of March 2021 2 Third party debt of Industrial Activities amounted to \$6.3 billion at the end of March 2021

South Dakota company joins autonomous farming revolution

By LAURA JOHNSON South Dakota Public Broadcasting

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A John Deere tractor is pulling a grain cart. Dust swirls around the equipment as the tractor roars by.

That's a familiar sight in South Dakota. But there's something different about this tractor.

The cab is empty.

The tractor is controlled by OMNiDRIVE, a product in the new Raven Industries OMNi series. OMNiDRIVE autonomously pilots a tractor hauling a grain cart and syncs it with a combine. The farmer in the combine controls the tractor with a tablet, eliminating the need for an additional driver.

Nick Langerock is the director of strategic marketing for Raven in Sioux Falls.

"It provides the combine harvester operator the ability to command the tractor that's pulling the grain cart to go to a staging area to sync up to the combine when it's time to unload or to go to the offload station to take grains to the bins," Langerock said.

Hardware is installed in the tractor that syncs up to a tablet. The tablet communicates with a GPS system in the combine to help the tractor navigate the field, South Dakota Public Broadcasting reported.

The second product, OMNiPOWER, is an autonomous vehicle that operates sprayer and spreader implements without a tractor. The machine looks like a Mars rover as it rolls across a field.

"What it allows it to do is allow it to be a carrier for that implement rather than traditionally pulling with a tractor an implement, this is actually a carrier of the implement and it can actually perform those applications autonomously," Langerock said.

OMNiPOWER carried a sprayer implement during a recent demonstration.

An engineer using a tablet tapped on a field map, while keeping a watchful eye on the equipment. A farmer remotely controlling the machine can program the concentration of chemicals in specific areas.

Travis Bunde is a sales manager at Raven. He said OMNiDRIVE works in all fields, but OMNiPOWER currently works only with smaller grains such as wheat, oats and barley.

"The machine today is not set up to drive through rows, our standard row widths, but it does have the potential in the future to have that capability," Bunde said.

OMNi products could reduce the number of workers needed in the field. Langerock said that will help farmers.

"Cause there's a lot of labor stresses in the marketplace today, right? It's not that we don't want to pay labor, it's that we can't find the labor that's needed," Langerock said.

Both products are equipped with camera sensors that act as the machines' eyes. Bunde said the sensors ensure safety for the farmer and prevent damage to the equipment.

"We have a very sophisticated perception system on the machine which utilizes a variety of different sensor technologies to understand its environment and recognize obstacles and even try to identify whether that obstacle is an actual hard obstacle or potentially just a deer or an animal running across the field," Bunde said.

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OMNi is not the first autonomous technology in agriculture. Ag companies like Monarch and CASE make autonomous tractors. Raven is one of the few companies producing autonomous technology for existing, non-autonomous equipment.

Groups merge to support Sioux Falls startups, entrepreneurs

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Two groups have merged to support entrepreneurs and startups in Sioux Falls. The Zeal Center for Entrepreneurship will merge with and take the name of Start Up Sioux Falls. The nonprofit recently revealed new branding, website and announced plans to move downtown.

Sioux Falls business leader Matt Paulson said it didn't make sense for Sioux Falls to have two organizations that focus on supporting startups and entrepreneurs, South Dakota Public Broadcasting reported.

"We knew we would be stronger if we combined efforts. For the organization to be successful in the future we needed to combine the best aspects of Zeal and the best aspects of Startup Sioux Falls into one organization," Paulson said.

Brienne Maner, who heads the new Startup Sioux Falls, said the merger creates a "more streamlined approach to the city's economics."

Study: Abandoned gypsum mine could extend below interstate

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — An abandoned gypsum mine in Black Hawk that was exposed by a sinkhole in 2020 may extend farther than current mapped areas show, according to a geophysical study.

Mohammad Sadeghi, a professor of geological engineering at Montana Technical University who led the study, says there's the possibility that the mine extends below Interstate 90. The group recommends that further research be done in the area.

More than 40 people from 15 homes in the Hideaway Hills neighborhood were forced to evacuate after the collapse in April 2020 in Black Hawk, which is located about eight miles northwest of Rapid City.

There are at least two lawsuits filed in relation to the collapse, one of which is one step closer to class-action status, the Rapid City Journal reported.

The Fitzgerald Law firm of Rapid City filed a lawsuit against developers and county and state entities. Fox Rothschild, a large national law firm, filed one against state government.

Hideaway Hills residents are also seeking answers to a potential loss of sewage service due to the mine.

Sadeghi has presented his team's research methods to Hideaway Hills residents and said he believed the sinkhole opened due to surface water infiltrating the ground and seeping into the roof of the mine that dissolved gypsum.

Remains of 10 more Native American kids to be disinterred

CARLISLE, Pa. (AP) — The remains of 10 more Native American children who died more than a century ago at a boarding school in central Pennsylvania are being disinterred and will be returned to their relatives, authorities said.

A team of archaeologists began work Saturday at the cemetery on the grounds of the Carlisle Barracks, which also houses the U.S. Army War College. Nine of the children were from the Rosebud Sioux tribe in South Dakota and one is from the Alaskan Aleut tribe.

The cemetery contains more than 180 graves of students who attended the former Carlisle Indian Industrial School — a government-run boarding school for Native American children. This is the Army's fourth disinterment project at the school in as many years.

The school founded by an Army officer opened in 1879 and housed some 10,000 indigenous children before it shut down in 1918. Students were forced to cut their braids, dress in uniforms, speak English and adopt European names. Infectious disease and harsh conditions claimed the lives of many of the children buried there.

The Army is fully funding the cost of the project — about \$500,000 per year, including travel to the

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transfer ceremony as well as transport and reburial of the deceased children, said Barbara Lewandrowski of the Office of Army Cemeteries. The Carlisle Barracks Post Cemetery closed Monday and will likely remain closed until July 17.

"The Army's commitment remains steadfast to these nine Native American families and one Alaskan Native family. Our objective is to reunite the families with their children in a manner of utmost dignity and respect," Karen Durham-Aguilera, Executive Director of Army National Military Cemeteries, said in a statement Tuesday.

Since 2016, dozens of Native American and Alaskan Native families have requested that their ancestors be returned from Carlisle, Lewandrowski said.

The children's English names, and where available their Native Americans names, were: Dennis Strikes First (Blue Tomahawk), Rose Long Face (Little Hawk), Lucy Take The Tail (Pretty Eagle), Warren Painter (Bear Paints Dirt), Ernest Knocks Off (White Thunder), Maud Little Girl (Swift Bear), Friend Hollow Horn Bear, Dora Her Pipe (Brave Bull) and Alvan — also known as Roaster, Kills Seven Horses and One That Kills Seven Horses; and Sophia Tetoff of the Alaskan Aleut tribe on Saint Paul Island in the Bering Sea.

The Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center archives at Dickinson College include newspaper clippings detailing the deaths of some students or identification cards with name, tribal affiliation, date of arrival and date of departure, with the reason for the latter often listed as "death," the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported.

Dennis Strikes First arrived Oct. 6, 1879 and died Jan. 19, 1887 of typhoid pneumonia. A news item indicates that he was the son of Blue Tomahawk of Rosebud Agency, Dakota and calls him a "bright, studious, ambitious boy, standing first in his class, and of so tractable a disposition as to be no trouble to his teachers."

Another clipping detailed the Dec. 14, 1880, deaths of Ernest Knocks Off and Maud Little Girl, describing it as a "sad and mysterious coincidence." Ernest was sent to the hospital in October to receive treatment for a sore throat, but he wouldn't agree to take any medicine, leaving him "weak and exhausted." Maud Little Girl was said to have died of pneumonia and was called a "bright, impulsive, warm-hearted girl, much beloved by her school mates."

Sweden's PM loses confidence vote amid housing crisis

By DAVID KEYTON and JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

STOCKHOLM (AP) — Stefan Lofven, Sweden's Social Democratic prime minister since 2014, lost a confidence vote in parliament on Monday amid a housing crisis and skyrocketing real estate prices, making him the first Swedish government leader ever to lose such a motion.

The vote was initiated by the small Left Party, an ally of the minority government that is not in the two-party center-left coalition but had provided the votes to pass legislation.

At the center of a controversy that sparked the Left Party to lose confidence and vote against Lofven are plans to deregulate Sweden's housing market because of accelerating price increases that took place during the pandemic.

Sweden has strict regulations on rents aimed at maintaining affordable prices in larger cities. However, this disincentives property developers from building new homes for the rental market. People needing to rent a home can find themselves waiting for years for a contract, and buying property is increasingly hard amid soaring home prices.

However, the Left Party fears that deregulating the rental market will lead to rapid price increases and deeper segregation between rich and poor.

It is unclear what will happen next in Sweden. Lofven said last week he would wait for the vote and then "think through what is best for Sweden."

The prime minister has one week to decide whether to call an early election.

Over the weekend, Lofven held last-minute meetings seeking to secure a majority in parliament for his proposed rent reforms. On Sunday, he sought to soften the reforms by inviting landlords and tenant organizations for talks.

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However, the leader of the Left Party Nooshi Dadgostar stood by its decision to oppose Lofven and said his effort was "a political show."

"We have done something that is perceived as unusual in politics ... kept our word," she said.

Tokyo Olympics to allow limit of 10,000 local fans in venues

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — The Tokyo Olympics will allow some local fans to attend when the games open in just over a month, organizing committee officials and the IOC said on Monday.

Organizers set a limit of 50% of capacity up to a maximum of 10,000 fans for all Olympic venues.

The decision was announced after so-called Five Party talks online with local organizers, the International Olympic Committee, the International Paralympic Committee, the Japanese government and the government of metropolitan Tokyo.

The decision contradicts the country's top medical adviser, Dr. Shigeru Omi, who recommended last week that the safest way to hold the Olympics would be without fans. He had previously called it "abnormal" to hold the Olympics during the pandemic.

The Tokyo Games are set to open on July 23.

Local organizing committee president Seiko Hashimoto said it was important to acknowledge the uncertainty around the pandemic during the games.

"We need to be very flexible. If there is any abrupt change in the situation, we will hold five-party meetings again to make other decisions," Hashimoto said. "If there is an announcement of a state of emergency during the games, all the options like no-spectator games will be examined."

Fans from abroad were banned several months ago. Officials say local fans will be under strict rules. They will not be allowed to cheer, must wear masks, and are being told to go straight home afterward.

Organizers say between 3.6-3.7 million tickets are in the hands of Japanese residents.

Having fans in the venues presents a risk of spreading the COVID-19 infections, and not just at the venues, since it causes more circulation on commuter trains, in restaurants and other public spaces.

Tokyo and other areas are under "quasi-emergency" status until July 11. This replaced a tougher full state of emergency that was in effect until last weekend. The new rules will allow restaurants to serve alcohol during limited hours.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who has favored allowing fans, said before the official announcement that he would bar fans if conditions change.

"If a state of emergency is necessary, I will be flexible and open to no fans in order to achieve that the games give top priority to safety and security for the people," Suga said. "In case of a state of emergency, it is quite possible ... for safe and secure (games) I will not hesitate to have no fans."

He said he took "seriously" Omi's recommendations but did not follow them.

Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike also said before the the talks that fans may need to be banned if conditions changes.

"Under this COVID-19 pandemic, people in Tokyo, people in Japan, are feeling very uneasy. We have concerns and the experts are also making recommendations about the risk of spreading the infection," Koike said. "If there should be a major change in the sanitary situation, or infection situation, we need to revisit this matter among ourselves and we may need to consider the option of having no spectators in the venues."

In recent polls, support seems to be increasing for holding the Olympics, though opposition is strong, depending how the question is worded. An Asahi newspaper poll of June 19-20 of almost 1,500 people showed 62% supported another postponement or cancellation of the games. But about one-third supported holding the Olympics, up from 14% in May in the same poll.

In the same survey, 83% said they "feel uneasy" that the Olympics might spread the virus. The poll said 53% wanted no fans and 42% said attendance should be limited.

The seven-day average for new infections in Tokyo is about 400 daily. The curve has flattened but health

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officials fear the Olympics and new variants will drive it up.

About 6.5% of Japanese are fully vaccinated, and 16.5% have had at least one shot, according to figures from the prime minister's office. More than 14,000 deaths in Japan have been attributed to COVID-19.

Paying fortifies ransomware gangs but scant support for bans

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — If your business falls victim to ransomware and you want simple advice on whether to pay the criminals, don't expect much help from the U.S. government. The answer is apt to be: It depends.

"It is the position of the U.S. government that we strongly discourage the payment of ransoms," Eric Goldstein, a top cybersecurity official in the Department of Homeland Security, told a congressional hearing last week.

But paying carries no penalties and refusing would be almost suicidal for many companies, especially the small and medium-sized. Too many are unprepared. The consequences could also be dire for the nation itself. Recent high-profile extortion attacks led to runs on East Coast gas stations and threatened meat supplies.

The dilemma has left public officials fumbling about how to respond. In an initial step, bipartisan legislation in the works would mandate immediate federal reporting of ransomware attacks to assist response, help identify the authors and even recuperate ransoms, as the FBI did with most of the \$4.4 million that Colonial Pipeline recently paid.

Without additional action soon, however, experts say ransoms will continue to skyrocket, financing better criminal intelligence-gathering and tools that only worsen the global crime wave.

President Joe Biden got no assurances from Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva last week that cybercriminals behind the attacks won't continue to enjoy safe harbor in Russia. At minimum, Putin's security services tolerate them. At worst, they are working together.

Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said this month that she is in favor of banning payments. "But I don't know whether Congress or the president is" in favor, she said.

And as Goldstein reminded lawmakers, paying doesn't guarantee you'll get your data back or that sensitive stolen files won't end up for sale in darknet criminal forums. Even if the ransomware crooks keep their word, you'll be financing their next round of attacks. And you may just get hit again.

In April, the then-top national security official in the Justice Department, John Demers, was lukewarm toward banning payments, saying it could put "us in a more adversarial posture vis-à-vis the victims, which is not where we want to be."

Perhaps most vehement about a payment ban are those who know ransomware criminals best — cybersecurity threat responders.

Lior Div, CEO of Boston-based Cybereason, considers them digital-age terrorists. "It is terrorism in a different form, a very modern one."

A 2015 British law prohibits U.K.-based insurance firms from reimbursing companies for the payment of terrorism ransoms, a model some believe should be applied universally to ransomware payments.

"Ultimately, the terrorists stopped kidnapping people because they realized that they weren't going to get paid," said Adrian Nish, threat intelligence chief at BAE Systems.

U.S. law prohibits material support for terrorists, but the Justice Department in 2015 waived the threat of criminal prosecution for citizens who pay terrorist ransoms.

"There's a reason why that's a policy in terrorism cases: You give too much power to the adversary," said Brandon Valeriano, a Marine Corps University scholar and senior adviser to the Cyberspace Solarium Commission, a bipartisan body created by Congress.

Some ransomware victims have taken principled stands against payments, the human costs be damned. One is the University of Vermont Health Network, where the bill for recovery and lost services after an October attack was upwards of \$63 million.

Ireland, too, refused to negotiate when its national healthcare service was hit last month.

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Five weeks on, healthcare information technology in the nation of 5 million remains badly hobbled. Cancer treatments are only partially restored, email service patchy, digital patient records largely inaccessible. People jam emergency rooms for lab and diagnostic tests because their primary-care doctors can't order them. As of Thursday, 42% of the system's 4,000 computer servers still had not been decrypted.

The criminals turned over the software decryption key a week after the attack — following an unusual offer by the Russian Embassy to "help with the investigation" — but the recovery has been a painful slog.

"A decryption key is not a magic wand or switch that can suddenly reverse the damage," said Brian Honan, a top Irish cybersecurity consultant. Every machine recovered must be tested to ensure it's infection-free.

Data indicate that most ransomware victims pay. The insurer Hiscox says just over 58% of its afflicted customers pay, while leading cyber insurance broker Marsh McLennan put the figure at roughly 60% for its impacted U.S. and Canadian clients.

But paying doesn't guarantee anything near full recovery. On average, ransom-payers got back just 65% of the encrypted data, leaving more than a third inaccessible, while 29% said they got only half of the data back, the cybersecurity firm Sophos found in a survey of 5,400 IT decision-makers from 30 countries.

In a survey of nearly 1,300 security professionals, Cybereason found that 4 in 5 businesses that chose to pay ransoms suffered a second ransomware attack.

That calculus notwithstanding, deep-pocketed businesses with insurance protection tend to pay up.

Colonial Pipeline almost immediately paid last month to get fuel flowing back to the U.S. East Coast — before determining whether its data backups were robust enough to avoid payment. Later, meat-processing goliath JBS paid \$11 million to avoid potentially interrupting U.S. meat supply, though its data backups also proved adequate to get its plants back online before serious damage.

It's not clear if concern about stolen data being dumped online influenced the decision of either company to pay.

Colonial would not say if fears of the 100 gigabytes of stolen data ending up in the public eye factored into the decision by CEO Joseph Blount to pay. JBS spokesman Cameron Bruett said "our analysis showed no company data was exfiltrated." He would not say if the criminals claimed in their ransom note to have stolen data.

Irish authorities were fully aware of the risks. The criminals claim to have stolen 700 gigabytes of data. As yet, it has not surfaced online.

Public exposure of such data can lead to lawsuits or lost investor confidence, which makes it manna for criminals. One ransomware gang seeking to extort a major U.S. corporation published a nude photo of the chief executive's adult son on its leak site last week.

Rep. Carolyn Maloney, chair of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, has asked in written requests to know more about the JBS and Colonial cases as well as CNA Insurance. Bloomberg News reported that CNA Insurance surrendered \$40 million to ransomware criminals in March. The New York Democrat said "Congress needs to take a hard look at how to break this vicious cycle."

Recognizing a lack of support for a ransom ban, Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Mark Warner, D-Va., and other lawmakers want at least to compel greater transparency from ransomware victims, who often don't report attacks.

They are drafting a bill to make the reporting of breaches and ransom payments mandatory. They would need to be reported within 24 hours of detection, with the executive branch deciding on a case-by-case basis whether to make the information public.

But that won't protect unprepared victims from potentially going bankrupt if they don't pay. For that, various proposals have been put forward to provide financial assistance.

The Senate this month approved legislation that would establish a special cyber response and recovery fund to provide direct support to the most vulnerable private and public organizations hit by major cyber-attacks and breaches.

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Couric book tour this fall will be in-person, in theaters

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For her tour this fall to promote her memoir “Going There,” Katie Couric is anticipating not only the interest of her fans but a return to something like a pre-pandemic world.

Book events have remained mostly virtual even as movie theaters and concert halls have begun reopening. Couric’s 11-city tour, announced Monday by Little, Brown and Company and Live Nation, will very much be in person, and well beyond the scale of book stores and libraries and other typical settings for authors. She opens Oct. 28 at Boston’s Orpheum Theatre, two days after “Going There” is released, and her itinerary also includes the Beacon Theatre in Manhattan, Atlanta Symphony Hall and the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee.

Special guests, to be announced, will be joining her at each stop.

“Given the challenging period we’ve been through, I’m so excited to be out in the world, creating a sense of community and a place where we can all get together for meaningful conversations, and have some fun, too,” Couric said in statement.

The tour will be produced by Live Nation, the concert promoter which previously worked on an author event scaled even higher — Michelle Obama’s tour for her 2018 memoir “Becoming.”

“It is truly an honor to work with the iconic Katie Couric and present her to live audiences across the country,” Live Nation Women President and Chief Strategy Officer Ali Harnell said in a statement. “She has always provided so much inspiration to people everywhere, particularly women.”

While Obama appeared at the Forum in Los Angeles and other venues with seating capacities of 10,000 or more, Couric’s tour is more in line with Hillary Clinton’s events for her 2017 book “What Happened” or David Sedaris’ planned stops this fall for “A Carnival of Snackeries: Diaries: Volume Two.” The Orpheum in Boston, the Beacon in New York and other stops have capacities of 2,000-3,000.

Publishers so far have hesitated to announce plans for future tours, though some in-person appearances are taking place. Jennifer Weiner is scheduled to read next month at Browseabout Books in Rehoboth, Delaware, and at other stores to promote her new novel “That Summer.” T.J. Newman, author of the debut “Thriller,” will be reading in July at the Changing Hands Bookstore in Phoenix, Arizona, where she used to work, and at the Mysterious Bookshop in Manhattan.

Inflation ahead? Even a top economist says it’s complicated

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two months of sharply rising prices have raised concerns that record-high government financial aid and the Federal Reserve’s ultra-low interest rate policies — when the economy is already surging — have elevated the risk of accelerating inflation.

In May, consumer prices rose 5% from a year earlier, the largest such year-over-year jump since 2008.

Many economists see the recent spike as temporary. Others say they worry that higher consumer prices will persist. Jason Furman, a Harvard professor who was President Barack Obama’s top economic adviser, thinks the reality is more complicated. He does, however, lean toward the higher-inflation-will-persist camp.

Furman notes that while most economists expect inflation to slow from its current quickened pace, not all think it will fall back to the Fed’s preferred level of 2% a year.

The Associated Press spoke recently with Furman about why higher inflation might prove only temporary, why it might persist and whether a little more inflation is all that bad.

The interview was edited for length and clarity.

Q. WHAT’S DRIVING INFLATION UP, AND DO YOU THINK IT WILL PERSIST?

A. There’s been a lot of very temporary inflation from a set of quirks related to the economy’s reopening. For example, used car prices have absolutely soared, and other prices are getting back to where they were pre-pandemic. I don’t think anyone thinks the recent rate of price increase is going to continue. The question is, how much does it slow down? Does it slow down all the way back to the 2% increase every

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year we used to see? Or does it slow down less than that, and we're left with something more like a 3% increase every year?

Q. HOW BAD WOULD 3% INFLATION BE? IS IT SOMETHING WE REALLY NEED TO AVOID?

A. I don't actually think 3% inflation would be terrible, but it depends. If policymakers tried to lower inflation from 3% to 2%, (by raising interest rates), that could be pretty painful. If wages don't keep up with prices, that would also be troubling. But if we want to operate the economy, year in and year out, at a higher inflation rate going forward, I don't see that as a problem. But I do think it's important to make policy based on the most realistic and accurate expectations for what's happening in the future.

Q. BEYOND THE ECONOMY'S REOPENING, WHAT MIGHT DRIVE A MORE SUSTAINED BOUT OF INFLATION?

A. I think the four reasons why you might worry that inflation is going to be more persistent are, No. 1, there are some shoes that haven't dropped yet. The biggest of them being the price of shelter — that's rent. And then it's something called owner's equivalent rent, which is what it costs a homeowner to live in their home. (Both rents and home prices have risen sharply.)

Second factor is some prices are sticky. That means they don't adjust really quickly and right away. A lot of prices change once a year, and you're going to see more of those price changes over time. Wages also tend to be sticky. A lot of employers might in September decide on new wages for January.

The third factor is that it's likely that demand continues to exceed supply through the rest of the year. People have a lot of money. They're spending that money, but not everyone's back to work, which means we can't make everything that people want to buy.

And finally, and most speculatively, expectations for inflation play a big role in the dynamics of inflation. Could expectations change? Could they become unanchored if people start to expect more inflation? It would be self-fulfilling.

Q. HOW DOES THE CURRENT SITUATION COMPARE WITH THE SPIRALING INFLATION OF THE 1970s?

A. There's no danger of a repeat of the experience like the 1970s. The Fed learned that lesson. They'll never let inflation get to 10%. The 1960s is the model for what we're going through now. Inflation crept up from about 1.5% to about 5%.

One of the troubling things in the 1960s was that wages didn't keep up with prices, and so people saw their purchasing power, their real wages fall. I'm not saying that's what's going to happen now, but that is the scenario to be worried about.

Q. DO YOU THINK THE FED HAS PROPERLY ASSESSED THE RISKS?

A. They shifted policy in the right direction at their latest meeting (on June 15-16). But I think they're going to surprise themselves that they're going to end up with a very strong recovery in jobs, that we're going to end up with more inflation than we expect. And so they're going to raise rates sooner than they think they're going to.

Q. WOULD THAT SLOW THE ECONOMY OR POTENTIALLY CAUSE A RECESSION?

A. There's two scenarios for the Fed. The most likely one is that our unemployment rate is quite low in 2022. Inflation is running above trend. And so the choice is very easy. They've achieved roughly their maximum employment mandate. They raise rates. The bad scenario for the Fed would be the unemployment rate remains elevated and inflation is running at 3% and then their dual mandate will be pulling them in different directions. And I'm not sure how they would resolve that.

Ethiopia votes in greatest electoral test yet for Abiy

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (AP) — Ethiopia was voting Monday in the greatest electoral test yet for Prime

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Minister Abiy Ahmed as war and logistical issues meant ballots wouldn't be cast in more than 100 constituencies of the 547 across the country.

The election, delayed from last year, is the centerpiece of a reform drive by Abiy, whose rise to power in 2018 seemed to signal a break with decades of authoritarian rule and led to him winning a Nobel Peace Prize the following year. He has described the poll as "the nation's first attempt at free and fair elections."

Long lines of voters were seen in some parts of the capital, Addis Ababa, while security was stepped up across Africa's second most populous country. Military vehicles were parked in key locations in the capital. More than 37 million Ethiopians were expected to vote.

"We need a government that brings us peace, unity and that will stop the killing everywhere, and we also need to be pulled out from these ethnic divisions," voter Desalgn Shume said.

Abiy's ruling Prosperity Party, formed in 2019 by merging groups who made up the previous ruling coalition, is widely expected to cement its hold on power. The party that wins a majority of seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives will form the next government.

Opposition groups have accused Ethiopia's ruling party of harassment, manipulation and threats of violence that echo abuses of the past. Some prominent opposition parties are boycotting the election, notably in the country's most populous region, Oromia. Others say they were prevented from campaigning in several parts of the country.

"My expectation is that (the election) would hopefully, with minor difficulties, be completed in a credible way," opposition candidate Berhanu Nega with the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice party said while voting.

Ethiopia's election chief, Birtukan Midekssa, writing in *The National Interest*, acknowledged "serious challenges" but noted that more parties and candidates are contesting than ever before. "I call on the international community to support Ethiopia on its democratic journey, stressful and imperfect though it is," she wrote in the U.S.-based magazine.

Abiy also is facing growing international criticism over the war in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, sparked in part because Tigray's now-fugitive leaders objected to Ethiopia postponing the election last year while citing COVID-19. No date has been set for voting in Tigray's 38 constituencies.

Tigray's former leaders, who are fighting Ethiopian forces and those from neighboring Eritrea, have reported fierce new combat in recent days. Ethiopia's defense forces have called the fighting challenging because of the rough terrain. Thousands of civilians have been killed and famine has begun in what observers describe as a drawn-out guerrilla war.

Meanwhile, outbreaks of ethnic violence have killed hundreds of people in the Amhara, Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz regions in recent months.

One resident of the capital, who gave only his first name, Samuel, said he wouldn't be voting. "Two or three years ago I would have voted for Abiy, but now there are a lot of troubles in our country," he said.

International concern has been growing about the election. The U.S. has said it is "gravely concerned about the environment under which these upcoming elections are to be held," and the European Union said it will not observe the vote after its requests to import communications equipment were denied.

In response, Ethiopia said external observers "are neither essential nor necessary to certify the credibility of an election," although it has since welcomed observers deployed by the African Union.

The United Nations secretary-general has noted the "challenging" environment and warned against acts of violence.

"It is our duty to remain united and not the government's," one resident of the capital, Eskedar Teklegiorges, said over the weekend as hundreds of police officers paraded in a show of force ahead of the vote.

Abiy's Prosperity Party registered 2,432 candidates in the election. The next largest party, Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice, was fielding 1,385 candidates. A total of 47 parties were contesting.

"Last time we didn't have a choice, but this is totally different," voter Girmachew Asfaw said.

Companies give vaccines to workers, boosting Japan's rollout

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By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Thousands of Japanese companies began distributing COVID-19 vaccines to workers and their families Monday in an employer-led drive reaching more than 13 million people that aims to rev up the nation's slow vaccine rollout.

Yuka Daimaru, among the Suntory workers getting the shot on a sprawling office floor, was visibly relieved after spending more than a year worrying about the coronavirus.

"I was nervous, but it didn't hurt as much as I thought it would," she said. "Now I don't have to worry as much on commuter trains or at meetings."

The Tokyo-based beverage maker plans to inoculate 51,500 people, including part-time workers and employees' families, with the Moderna vaccine.

About 3,500 companies have signed up for the free vaccines, and that number is growing. The companies must present a plan to inoculate at least 1,000 people per site. But they decide whom to include, such as families, affiliate companies and suppliers.

Universities are also eligible. Smaller companies can apply through organizations, such as the local merchant association, so ideally no one falls through the cracks, according to the health ministry.

Among those taking part are major automaker Toyota Motor Corp., planning to vaccinate 80,000 people at its plants and offices.

Fast Retailing, behind the Uniqlo clothing chain, is inoculating 18,500 people, including part-timers and cleaning and cafeteria staff, starting July 1.

Online retailer Rakuten said it's vaccinating 60,000 workers and their families.

Company applications for the vaccines are accepted through February 2022.

Japan is relying totally on imported vaccines for a campaign that started in February with medical professionals. Only about 6% of Japanese are fully vaccinated. Japan has had more than 14,000 deaths from COVID-19.

Local governments and Japan's self-defense forces are also leading the vaccination campaign, but the employer-led efforts are helping accelerate the pace.

Daisuke Sen, a human resources senior general manager at Suntory Holdings, said the vaccinations at his company will be completed by the end of August.

The first day for the vaccinations came after weeks of work, especially scrambling to find doctors and nurses to carry out the shots, he said.

"Getting here means so much for me," he said.

Biden and Congress face a summer grind to create legislation

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Until recently, the act of governing seemed to happen at the speed of presidential tweets. But now President Joe Biden is settling in for what appears will be a long, summer slog of legislating.

Congress is hunkered down, the House and Senate grinding through a monthslong stretch, lawmakers trying to draft Biden's big infrastructure ideas into bills that could actually be signed into law. Perhaps not since the drafting of the Affordable Care Act more than a decade ago has Washington tried a legislative lift as heavy.

It's going to take a while.

"Passing legislation is not a made-for-TV movie," said Phil Schiliro, a former legislative affairs director at the Obama White House and veteran of congressional battles, including over the health care law.

Biden appears comfortable in this space, embarked on an agenda in Congress that's rooted in his top legislative priority — the \$4 trillion "build back better" investments now being shaped as his American Jobs and American Families plans.

To land the bills on his desk, the president is relying on an old-school legislative process that can feel out of step with today's fast-moving political cycles and hopes for quick payoffs. Democrats are anxious it is taking too long and he is wasting precious time negotiating with Republicans, but Biden seems to like

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the laborious art of legislating.

On Monday, Biden is expected to launch another week of engagement with members of both parties, and the White House is likely at some point to hear from a bipartisan group of senators working on a scaled-back \$1 trillion plan as an alternative.

At the same time, the administration is pushing ahead with the president's own, more sweeping proposals being developed in the House and Senate budget committees, tallying as much as \$6 trillion, under a process that could enable Democrats to pass it on their own. Initial votes are being eyed for late July.

"This is how negotiations work," White House deputy press secretary Andrew Bates said during last week's twists and turns of the infrastructure negotiations.

"We continue to work closely with Democrats of all views — as well as Republicans — on the path forward. There are many possible avenues to getting this done, and we are optimistic about our chances," Bates said.

During his administration, President Donald Trump had the full sweep of Republican control of the House and Senate for the first two years of his tenure, but the limits of legislating quickly became clear.

Trump tended to govern by tweet, rather than the more traditional legislative process, bursting out with policy ideas and official administrative positions often at odds with his party in Congress.

The Trump-era results were mixed, and Republicans were unable to clinch their top legislative priority, repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act. But they went on to secure a sizable achievement when Trump signed the GOP tax cuts into law at the end of 2017.

Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, who is a leader of today's bipartisan negotiations, said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press" that Trump, too, proposed an infrastructure package. If Biden sticks with the bipartisan talks he could not only fulfill a campaign promise but "keep his pledge of doing things across the aisle and getting something done," Portman said.

"Everybody wants to do infrastructure," he said.

Even as Biden reaches for a bipartisan deal, skeptical Democrats are wary of a repeat of 2009, when Barack Obama was president and they spent months negotiating the details of the Affordable Care Act with Republicans. Eventually Democrats passed the package that became known as "Obamacare" on their own.

Lawmakers also have been energized by the speed at which Congress was able to approve COVID-19 relief — the massive CARES Act at the start of the pandemic in 2020 and more recently Biden's American Rescue Plan in February. They are eager for swift action on these next proposals.

Biden's strategy this time is a two-part approach. He is trying to secure a bipartisan deal on roads, bridges and broadband — the more traditional types of infrastructure — while also pursuing the broader Democratic priorities package.

The budget committees are preparing some \$6 trillion in spending on what the White House calls the human infrastructure of Americans' lives with child care centers, community colleges and elder care in Biden's plans, adding in Democrats' other long-running ideas. Among them, expanding Medicare for seniors with vision, hearing and dental services, and lowering the eligibility age to 60.

Regardless of whether Biden succeeds or fails in the on-again-off-again talks with Republicans, Democrats will press on with their own massive package, the president at least having showed he tried.

"There are two kinds of negotiation," said Democrat Barney Frank, the former congressman and committee chairman from Massachusetts who was central to many Obama-era legislative battles. "One that will be successful and give you a good bill," he said, and the other that will be unsuccessful, but will at least "take away any stigma of being partisan."

Congress is eyeing an end-of-summer deadline to launch the budget reconciliation process, which would allow passage of the bills on majority votes, notably in the now split 50-50 Senate where 60 votes are typically required to advance legislation.

After that, the House and Senate would prepare the actual packages for votes in fall.

As the process drags on, it's a reminder that it took more than a year in Congress to pass Affordable Care Act, which was signed into law in spring 2010.

"Tweets are so easy," Schiliro said. "Legislating is different from that, so to develop good legislation

takes time.”

Iran's sole nuclear power plant undergoes emergency shutdown

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran's sole nuclear power plant has undergone an unexplained temporary emergency shutdown, the country's state TV reported.

An official from the state electric company Tavanir, Gholamali Rakhshanimehr, said on a talk show that aired on Sunday that the Bushehr plant shutdown began on Saturday and would last “for three to four days.” Without elaborating, he said that power outages could result.

This is the first time Iran has reported an emergency shutdown of the plant in the southern port city of Bushehr. It went online in 2011 with help from Russia. Iran is required to send spent fuel rods from the reactor back to Russia as a nuclear nonproliferation measure.

The report came as top diplomats said that further progress had been made at talks Sunday between Iran and global powers to try to restore a landmark 2015 agreement to contain Iranian nuclear development that was abandoned by the Trump administration. They said it was now up to the governments involved in the negotiations to make political decisions.

Earlier in the day, Tavanir released a statement saying that the Bushehr nuclear plant was being repaired, without offering further details. It said the repair work would take until Friday.

In March, nuclear official Mahmoud Jafari said the plant could stop working since Iran cannot procure parts and equipment for it from Russia due to banking sanctions imposed by the U.S. in 2018.

Bushehr is fueled by uranium produced in Russia, not Iran, and is monitored by the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency. The IAEA acknowledged being aware of reports about the plant, but declined to comment.

Construction on the plant, on the coast of the northern reaches of the Persian Gulf, began under Iran's Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in the mid-1970s. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the plant was repeatedly targeted in the Iran-Iraq war. Russia later completed construction of the facility.

The plant, which sits near active fault lines and was built to withstand powerful quakes, has been periodically shaken by temblors. There have been no significant earthquakes reported in the area in recent days.

Meanwhile, the European Union on Sunday chaired the final meeting in Vienna of the sixth round of talks between Russia, China, Germany, France, Britain and Iran.

The nations involved in the negotiations have been trying to resolve the major outstanding issues on how to return the U.S. into the landmark nuclear agreement, which then-President Donald Trump pulled Washington out of unilaterally in 2018. Trump also restored and augmented sanctions to try to force Tehran into renegotiating the pact with more concessions.

The meeting was the first since Iran's hard-line judiciary chief won a landslide victory in the country's presidential election last Friday. Some diplomats expressed concern that the election of Iran's incoming President Ebrahim Raisi could complicate a possible return to the nuclear agreement.

Vaccine hesitancy puts India's gains against virus at risk

By RAJESH KUMAR SINGH Associated Press

JAMSOTI, India (AP) — In Jamsoti, a village tucked deep inside India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, the common refrain among the villagers is that the coronavirus spreads only in cities. The deadly infection, they believe, does not exist in villages.

So when a team of health workers recently approached Manju Kol to get vaccinated, she locked up her house, gathered her children and ran to the nearby forest.

The family hid there for hours and returned only when the workers left in the evening.

“I would rather die than take the vaccine,” said Kol.

A deadly surge of coronavirus infections that ripped through India in April and May, killing more than 180,000, has tapered off and new cases have declined. But the relief could be fleeting as a significant

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amount of the population is still reluctant to get the shots. This has alarmed health experts who say vaccine hesitancy, particularly in India's vast hinterlands, could put the country's fragile gains against COVID-19 at risk.

"Vaccine hesitancy poses a risk to ending the pandemic in India," said retired virologist and pediatrician Dr. T. Jacob John. "The more the virus circulates, the more it can mutate into dangerous new variants that can undermine vaccines."

Delivering vaccines in the world's second-most populous country was always going to be challenging. Even though India did relatively well at the beginning of its mammoth vaccination drive, the campaign hit a snag almost immediately due to shortages and a complicated vaccine policy, exacerbating existing inequalities.

Only less than 5% of India's people are fully immunized. Experts caution that by the end of the year, vaccination rates must go up significantly to protect most Indians from the virus that has so far already killed more than 386,000 people — a figure considered to be a vast undercount.

Starting Monday, every adult in India will be eligible for a shot paid for by the federal government. The new policy, announced last week, ends a complex system of buying and distributing vaccines that overburdened states and led to inequities in how the shots were handed out.

There is still widespread hesitancy fueled by misinformation and mistrust, particularly in rural areas where two-thirds of the country's nearly 1.4 billion population lives.

Health workers face stiff resistance from people who believe that vaccines cause impotence, serious side effects and could even kill. Some simply say they do not need the shots because they're immune to the coronavirus.

Rumors about jabs disrupting the menstruation cycle and reducing fertility have also contributed to fear and skewed the data in favor of men. In almost every Indian state, more men are getting vaccinated than women — and that gap is widening further every day.

Quashing such rumors and conspiracy theories is a tough order for many, particularly in India's tribal-dominated districts that have recorded disproportionately lower vaccine coverage in comparison with other districts, according to official data.

Yogesh Kalkonde, a public health doctor in Gadchiroli, a tribal area in the western state of Maharashtra, said his district was overrun with the belief that the vaccine is more dangerous than the virus.

Some in the area have raised the untrue claim that the shots can cause infertility, Kalkonde said. Others simply question its effectiveness.

"We have to convince people, go door to door, and rely on people who have taken the vaccine to spread the word," he said. "It's an extremely slow process."

There is some pushback. State governments have mounted aggressive awareness campaigns through posters and radio announcements to allay some of the anxiety and confusion. Some local administrations have started giving rides to vaccination centers, especially from remote villages. Volunteers are conducting door-to-door surveys and even small rallies to encourage people to get the jab.

For months, Vibha Singh, a government-appointed nurse, has gone door-to-door in the villages of Uttar Pradesh.

"People tell us to leave or they would beat us," said Singh. "Sometimes they also throw stones and bricks at us."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other leaders have routinely spoken about the need to shun vaccine hesitancy, but health experts say more needs to be done.

"We need to explain it clearly to people, ideally through local trusted networks," said K. Srinath Reddy, president of the Public Health Foundation of India. He said state governments should bolster local self-help groups, village councils and ask local religious leaders to step in.

"It requires a conversation, not just top-down messaging," he said.

Dr. Vinod K. Paul, head of the country's COVID-19 task force, acknowledged the immediate need to address the problem but said public participation to dispel rumors and misinformation was important.

"It is the responsibility not only of the government but also the society as a whole to create such an environment in which an unfounded hesitancy is addressed," said Paul.

Virologists and public health experts say eradicating doubts about the vaccine in rural India and inoculating people quickly should be of paramount importance since the majority of Indians live in the hinterlands. Already, urban dwellers are getting the shots much faster.

"If they are protected, much of India will be protected," Reddy said of rural areas. "Their vulnerability to a sweeping pandemic is much, much more. So vaccinating them quickly must be a priority."

Not everyone is convinced.

When a team of health workers last week attempted to vaccinate Panna Lal, a resident of Sikanderpur village in Uttar Pradesh, they were met with an absolute refusal.

Lal even discouraged the rest of his family from getting the jab.

"The vaccine will not protect me," the 56-year-old told the workers. "God has sent me here safely, and he will continue to protect me."

8 kids in youth van among the 13 lives lost to Claudette

By JEFF AMY and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Eight children in a van from a youth home for abused or neglected children were killed in a fiery multi-vehicle crash on a wet interstate that also killed a man and his baby in another vehicle, the most devastating blow from a tropical depression that claimed 13 lives in Alabama as it caused flash floods and spurred tornadoes that destroyed dozens of homes.

The crash happened Saturday about 35 miles (55 kilometers) south of Montgomery on Interstate 65 after vehicles likely hydroplaned on wet roads, said Butler County Coroner Wayne Garlock.

The van, containing children ages 4 to 17, belonged to the Tallapoosa County Girls Ranch, a youth home operated by the Alabama Sheriffs Association. Michael Smith, the youth ranches CEO, said the van was heading back to the ranch near Camp Hill, northeast of Montgomery, after a week at the beach in Gulf Shores. It caught fire after the wreck and Candice Gulley, the ranch director, was the van's only survivor — pulled from the flames by a bystander.

Gulley remained hospitalized Sunday in Montgomery in serious but stable condition. "She's going to survive her physical injuries," Smith said. Two of the dead in the van were Gulley's children, ages 4 and 16. Four others were ranch residents and two were guests, Smith said.

"This is the worst tragedy I've been a part of in my life," said Smith, who drove Sunday to the ranch to talk to the remaining residents, who had returned from Gulf Shores in a separate van and did not see the wreck.

"Words cannot explain what I saw," Smith said of the accident site, which he visited Saturday. "We love these girls like they're our own children."

The crash also claimed the lives of two other people who were in a separate vehicle. Garlock identified them as 29-year-old Cody Fox and his 9-month-old daughter, Ariana, both of Marion County, Tennessee.

"He was a great guy and we're really gonna miss him," said Aaron Sanders, who worked with Fox at the emergency management agency in Marion County. He said Fox also ran a hot tub business with his father and doted on his daughter. "He just loved her to death and that was his life."

Multiple people were also injured.

The National Transportation Safety Board tweeted that it was sending 10 investigators to the area Sunday to investigate the crash, photos of which showed at least four burned vehicles, including two large trucks. It said the inquiry would focus on vehicle technologies such as forward collision warning systems, fuel tank integrity and occupant survivability.

Meanwhile, a 24-year-old man and a 3-year-old boy were also killed Saturday when a tree fell on their house just outside the Tuscaloosa city limits, said Capt. Jack Kennedy of the Tuscaloosa Violent Crimes Unit. Makayla Ross, a 23-year-old Fort Payne woman, died Saturday after her car ran off the road into a swollen creek, DeKalb County Deputy Coroner Chris Thacker told WHNT-TV.

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The deaths occurred as drenching rains from Tropical Depression Claudette pelted northern Alabama and Georgia late Saturday. As much as 12 inches (30 centimeters) of rain was reported earlier from Claudette along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Flash flood watches were posted Sunday for eastern Georgia, the southern two-thirds of South Carolina and the North Carolina coast. A tropical storm warning was in effect in North Carolina from the Little River Inlet to the town of Duck on the Outer Banks. A tropical storm watch was issued from South Santee River, South Carolina, to the Little River Inlet, forecasters said.

WBRC-TV reported that search efforts were also under way for a man believed to have fallen into the water during flash flooding in Birmingham. Crews were using boats to search Pebble Creek.

Garlock said the location of the multi-vehicle wreck is "notorious" for hydroplaning, as the northbound highway curves down a hill to a small creek. Traffic on that stretch of I-65 is usually filled with vacationers driving to and from Gulf of Mexico beaches on summer weekends.

"Butler County has had one of the most terrible traffic accidents," county Sheriff Danny Bond wrote on Facebook.

The Tallapoosa County school system said counselors would be available Sunday at the 225-student Reeltown High School, where some of the ranch residents were students. Smith said the ranch, which is Christian-based, would likely have a memorial service later, asking for prayers as he began to cry.

A GoFundMe account was set up for Tallapoosa County Girls Ranch to help offset the costs of funeral expenses, medical costs for the injured and counseling for those impacted.

Gulley had worked with children for years, beginning when she and her husband were house parents at the ranch for seven years.

"During those years, there have been 74 girls that have come through our house and called us mom and dad," she told the Opelika-Auburn News in August 2019. She said she then became a relief parent, working on fundraising and being involved in the community, before she became the ranch director.

"My heart goes out to the loved ones of all who perished," Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey said in a statement.

Claudette was beginning to re-strengthen late Sunday, with the National Hurricane Center reporting top winds at 35 mph (55 kph) in a nighttime advisory. The depression was expected to return to tropical storm status Monday over eastern North Carolina before heading out to sea in the Atlantic Ocean.

The center of Claudette's disorganized circulation was located about 65 miles (100 kilometers) northeast of Columbia, South Carolina. It was moving east-northeast at 20 mph (31 kph), the National Hurricane Center said.

Aside from rainy weather, it seemed to be business as usual along North Carolina's Outer Banks on Sunday.

At Ace Hardware in Avon, shift manager David Swartwood said they were preparing for whatever might come, but the overall sense was that it wouldn't be that bad in that area. He said winds from the south don't usually cause huge flooding problems, so "we don't really anticipate any bad scenarios."

"Everybody here has been through it many, many times, so we're used to the drill," he said. "We've been prepared."

For the hardware store, he said, that means having supplies like flashlights, batteries, tarps, generators, ropes and sandbags on hand. As of Sunday morning, there wasn't a huge rush.

At Stack 'em High in Kill Devil Hills, a restaurant that specializes in pancakes, co-owner Dawn Kiousis said Sunday morning restaurant service was busy.

"We're serving just like normal," she said.

"You keep your eye on the weather and you prepare as much stuff in advance as you can," she said. "Just know she's gonna win. Mother Nature is going to do what she's going to do, so you just prepare."

Rahm birdies last 2 holes to win US Open at Torrey Pines

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Whether it was destiny or karma was of no relevance to Jon Rahm. He won the U.S. Open on Sunday at Torrey Pines, the perfect time and the perfect place to become a major champion.

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How it unfolded was beyond his dreams.

One shot behind and running out of holes, Rahm made a sweeping, left-to-right birdie putt from 25 feet on the 17th hole to tie for the lead, and closed with another bending 18-foot birdie putt that gave him a one-shot victory over hard-luck Louis Oosthuizen.

No one had ever birdied the last two holes to win the U.S. Open by one shot in the previous 120 editions of the toughest test in golf until Rahm's storybook finish.

"It had to happen in a beautiful setting like this," he said.

At Torrey Pines, where he made a 50-foot eagle putt on the final hole to clinch his first PGA Tour victory.

On Father's Day, with his 10-week-old son in his arms and his father having flown in from Spain to witness his son winning his first major to return to No. 1 in the world.

And just two weeks after his six-shot lead was wiped out at the Memorial because of a positive COVID-19 test that knocked him out of the tournament and cut into his U.S. Open preparations.

"It felt like such a fairy tale story that I knew it was going to have a happy ending," Rahm said after those two career-changing birdies gave him a 4-under 67. "I could just tell, going down the fairway after that first tee shot, that second shot, and that birdie, I knew there was something special in the air. I could just feel it.

"I just knew that I could do it and believed it."

He picked up two prizes Sunday. First, he cradled young Kupa when he walked off the 18th green with the roars still ringing in his ears. Then, he hoisted that silver U.S. Open trophy, the first champion from Spain.

Rahm was on the practice range when Oosthuizen, who fell two shots behind with a most untimely tee shot into the canyon that led to bogey on the 17th hole, failed to hole out his wedge for eagle at the end.

"Little man, you have no idea what this means right now," Rahm said to his son. "You will soon enough."

The final round was so tight that six players had a share of the lead at some point, and there were 10 players separated by a single shot.

And then that special brand of U.S. Open chaos hit everyone but Rahm, the only contender not to drop a shot on the back nine.

Four players who were within one shot of the lead on the back nine made double bogeys, a list that included a shocking meltdown by defending champion Bryson DeChambeau.

No one was immune from trouble. Oosthuizen, who had a two-shot lead after his 30-foot birdie putt on No. 10, was the last to fall.

Trailing by one shot, Oosthuizen drove into the canyon left of the 17th fairway for a bogey that left him two shots behind, and then he missed the fairway on the par-5 18th that kept him from going for the green for a look at eagle to force a playoff.

He settled for a birdie and a 71. It was his second straight runner-up in a major, and his sixth silver medal since he won the British Open in 2010 at St. Andrews.

"Look, it's frustrating. It's disappointing," Oosthuizen said. "I'm playing good golf, but winning a major championship is not just going to happen. You need to go out and play good golf. I played good today, but I didn't play good enough."

Only two weeks ago, Rahm was on the cusp of another big win. He tied the 54-hole record at the Memorial and had a six-shot lead, only to be notified as he walked off the 18th green that he tested positive for the coronavirus and had to withdraw.

Worse yet, his parents had flown in from Spain to see their new grandson, and Rahm was in self-isolation and couldn't be there for a special moment.

Sunday made up for it. His parents were at Torrey Pines to witness a world-class performance capped off by one of the great finishes in U.S. Open history.

"I'm a big believer in karma, and after what happened a couple weeks ago, I stayed really positive knowing good things were coming," Rahm said. "I didn't know what it was going to be, but I knew we were coming to a special place.

"I just felt like the stars were aligning, and I knew my best golf was to come."

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For so much of the back nine, it was utter chaos with blunders that can define a U.S. Open.

DeChambeau, trying to become only the fourth player since World War II to win back-to-back in the U.S. Open, took the lead with an 8-iron that stopped inches away from a hole-in-one on the par-3 eighth. He had gone 30 consecutive holes without a bogey.

And then his lack of accuracy off the tee cost him. A bogey on No. 11. A bogey from deep rough on No. 12. And then on the par-5 13th, DeChambeau went from deep rough to deep rough to bunker, blasting out of the sand over the green next to a beer box, making double bogey.

He took a quadruple-bogey 8 on the 17th hole with a shot in the canyon and a shank. He shot 44 on the back nine for a 77.

"I didn't get off the rails at all. It's golf," DeChambeau said. "I've had plenty of times where I hit it way worse than today and I won. It's just one of those things where I didn't have the right breaks happen at the right time."

Mackenzie Hughes, one shot behind going to the back nine, had his tee shot on the par-3 11th bounce off a cart path and get stuck in a tree, leading to a double bogey that ended his chances. Former PGA champion Collin Morikawa chopped his way down the 13th for double bogey that took him from one shot behind to out of the mix.

Rory McIlroy wasn't immune, either. With a chance to end his seven-year drought in the majors, McIlroy made a careless three-putt for bogey on the 11th when he was one shot behind, and then caught a bad lie in the bunker that led to double bogey on No. 12.

Rahm's passion was on a full display when those winning putts dropped. When it was over, he never looked more at peace with that U.S. Open trophy at his side.

"This one is very, very incredible, very hard to believe, that this story can round up and end up so good," he said. "It almost feels like it's a movie that's about to end and I'm going to wake up soon."

Fear shakes Mexico border city after violence leaves 18 dead

By ALFREDO PEÑA Associated Press

CIUDAD VICTORIA, Mexico (AP) — Fear has invaded the Mexican border city of Reynosa after gunmen in vehicles killed 14 people, including taxis drivers, workers and a nursing student, and security forces responded with operations that left four suspects dead.

While this city across the border from McAllen, Texas is used to cartel violence as a key trafficking point, the 14 victims in Saturday's attacks appeared to be what Tamaulipas Gov. Francisco García Cabeza de Vaca called "innocent citizens" rather than members of one gang killed by a rival.

Local businessman Misael Chavarria Garza said many businesses closed early Saturday after the attacks and people were very scared as helicopters flew overhead. On Sunday, he said "the people were quiet as if nothing had happened, but with a feeling of anger because now crime has happened to innocent people."

"It's not fair," said taxi driver Rene Guevara, adding that among the dead were two of his fellow taxi drivers whom he defended and said were not involved in crime.

The attacks took place in several neighborhoods in eastern Reynosa, according to the Tamaulipas state agency that coordinates security forces, and sparked a deployment of the military, National Guard and state police across the city. Images posted on social media showed bodies in the streets.

Authorities say they are investigating the attacks and haven't provided a motive.

But the area's criminal activity has long been dominated by the Gulf Cartel and there have been fractures within that group. Experts say there has been an internal struggle within the group since 2017 to control key territories for drug and human trafficking. Apparently, one cell from a nearby town may have entered Reynosa to carry out the attacks.

Olga Ruiz, whose 19-year-old brother Fernando Ruiz was killed by the gunmen, said her sibling was working as a plumber and bricklayer in a company owned by his stepfather to pay for his studies.

"They killed him in cold blood, he and two of his companions," said Olga Ruiz, adding that the gunmen arrived where her brother was fixing a drain.

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"They heard the gunshots from afar and my stepfather told him: 'son, you have to take shelter.' So he asked permission to enter a house but my brother and his companions were only about to enter when the vehicles arrived," Ruiz said. "They stopped in front of them and started to shoot."

On Saturday, authorities detained a person who was transporting two apparently kidnapped women in the trunk of a car.

Security is one of the great challenges facing the government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. He has assured Mexicans that he is fighting the root causes of the violence and since the beginning of his administration in December 2018, he has advocated "hugs, not bullets" in dealing with criminals. He also says he is fighting corruption to stop the infiltration of organized crime among authorities.

But the violence continues.

"Criminal organizations must receive a clear, explicit and forceful signal from the Federal Government that there will be no room for impunity, nor tolerance for their reprehensible criminal behavior," said García Cabeza de Vaca of the rival National Action Party. "In my government there will be no truce for the violent."

But García Cabeza de Vaca himself is being investigated by the federal prosecutor's office for organized crime and money laundering - accusations he says are part of plan by López Obrador's government to attack him for being an opponent.

Tamaulipas - the state where the Zetas cartel arose and where the Gulf Cartel continues to operate - has seen several of its past governors from the Institutional Revolutionary Party accused of corruption and links to organized crime. One former governor, Tomás Yarrington, was extradited to the United States from Italy in 2018 on drug trafficking charges.

Officials: Deadly Pride parade crash appears unintentional

By KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — A member of a men's chorus group unintentionally slammed into fellow chorists at the start of a Pride parade in South Florida, killing one member of the group and seriously injuring another, the group's director said Sunday, correcting initial speculation that it was a hate crime directed at the gay community.

Wilton Manors Vice Mayor Paul Rolli and Fort Lauderdale Mayor Dean Trantalis said the early investigation shows it was an accident. The 77-year-old driver was taken into custody, but police said no charges have been filed and the investigation is ongoing.

The elderly driver had ailments that prevented him from walking, according to a statement Sunday from Fort Lauderdale Police, who said he was cooperating with the investigation and there was no evidence drugs or alcohol was involved.

"The early investigation now indicates it looks like it was a tragic accident, but nobody's saying finally what it is," Rolli told The Associated Press in a phone interview.

The driver and the victims were a part of the Fort Lauderdale Gay Men's Chorus family, a small 25-member group of mostly older men.

"Our fellow Chorus members were those injured and the driver is also a part of the Chorus family. To my knowledge, this was not an attack on the LGBTQ community," President Justin Knight said in a statement Sunday, calling it "an unfortunate accident."

Rolli was on the float in front of the chorus truck along with Fort Lauderdale Mayor Dean Trantalis and other city officials at a staging area where the floats were being readied. Trantalis said the driver of a pickup truck suddenly accelerated when he was told he was next in the parade, crashing into the victims.

The driver continued across all lanes of traffic, ultimately crashing into a fence on the other side of the street, police said.

Rolli was on the other side of the float and didn't witness the crash, but jumped off immediately and ran to the victims. In the confusion, it was unclear what happened.

"People were really distraught and some people were crying," said Rolli, who explained that the crash happened in an area where the floats were lining up, so there weren't as many parade-goers. "I was get-

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ting phone calls from people I knew at the other end waiting for the parade saying, 'Is this true? Is that true, do we have anything to worry about?' You don't know at that point."

Fort Lauderdale Police said no arrests have been made saying they are conducting a thorough investigation with the FBI, noting in a statement they are "considering and evaluating all possibilities."

Trantalis, who is Fort Lauderdale's first openly gay mayor, initially told reporters the act was deliberate, adding to the confusion Saturday night.

"It terrorized me and all around me ... I feared it could be intentional based on what I saw from mere feet away," he said in a Twitter statement Sunday. "As the facts continue to be pieced together, a picture is emerging of an accident in which a truck careened out of control."

Wilton Manors is a tight-knit community near Fort Lauderdale with a vibrant downtown filled with cute shops, where people line up for Rosie's famous hamburgers or to gossip and drink at Georgie's Alibi Monkey Bar.

Photos and video from the scene showed Democratic U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz in tears while in a convertible at the parade.

In a statement Saturday night, Wasserman Schultz said she was safe but "deeply shaken and devastated that a life was lost."

"I am so heartbroken by what took place at this celebration," she said. "May the memory of the life lost be for a blessing."

A spokesman for the chorus said the director did not want to give interviews, adding that many members of the small group witnessed the fatal crash and were deeply shaken.

"The reason people like Wilton Manors is the whole community is one big family and that's how we treat each other ... and this has really rattled a lot of people," said Rolli. "Even if it's an accident, just the loss of a life."

June is Pride Month, commemorating a June 1969 uprising that followed a police raid targeting gay patrons at the Stonewall Inn in New York. It was a catalyst for the gay rights movement.

The Latest: Rahm closes with two birdies to win U.S. Open

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The Latest on the U.S. Open (all times local):

5:24 p.m.

Jon Rahm is the first Spaniard to win the U.S. Open. Two monumental birdie putts clinched it.

Rahm birdied his final two holes to shoot a 4-under 67 and win the U.S. Open by a shot over Luis Oosthuizen.

Trailing Oosthuizen by a shot when he stepped to the 17th tee, Rahm tied for the lead with a 24-foot birdie putt on the par-4. He hit his second shot on the par-5 18th hole into a bunker right of the green and blasted it out to 18 feet.

Rahm curled the putt into the hole and pumped his fist as the crowd roared. He becomes a major champion for the first time on his first Father's Day since son Kepa was born before the Masters.

The victory comes three weeks after Rahm tested positive for COVID-19 and had to pull out of the Memorial with a six-shot lead.

Oosthuizen still had a chance after Rahm's closing birdie, but bogeyed No. 17 after pulling his tee shot left into the canyon. He birdied No. 18 to shoot a 70 and finish at 5 under.

4:44 p.m.

Jon Rahm has made a putt to remember. It may be the one everyone remembers.

Rahm got up and down from a greenside bunker on Torrey Pines' par-5 18th hole, sinking an 18-foot birdie putt to take a one shot lead in the final round of the U.S. Open.

Rahm moved into a tie with Luis Oosthuizen at 5 under with a 24-foot birdie putt on the par-4 17th and hit his drive on 18 into the fairway. His second shot drifted in the wind into the bunker and he played safely out to the right to avoid going in the water.

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The speedy putt curled down the hill into the hole, setting off a roar at Torrey Pines and a big fist pump from Rahm.

The Spaniard is playing for the first time since learning he had tested positive for COVID-19 after his third round at the Memorial three weeks ago.

4 p.m.

An old-style U.S. Open has broken out at Torrey Pines, a course littered with carnage. Four players who were one shot out of the lead on the back nine have all made double bogey.

Collin Morikawa chopped his way through the rough on the 13th for a double bogey. Mackenzie Hughes had a tee shot bounce off a cart path and get stuck in the tree left of the 11th green for a double bogey. Rory McIlroy had a shot plug into the side of a bunker on No. 12 and he advanced it only a few feet into thick rough. He made double bogey.

And then Bryson DeChambeau got into the act.

His disregard for accuracy cost him on the par-5 13th when he went from deep rough to deep rough to the bunker short of the green. Then he hammered it over the green next to a cardboard beer box. He made double bogey.

DeChambeau was tied for the lead after 10 holes. He was four shots behind three holes later.

Louis Oosthuizen had a one-shot lead over Jon Rahm heading to the final hour. McIlroy still had time to make a run. Harris English was in the clubhouse at 3-under par and not about to leave the golf course.

3:37 p.m.

Tree trouble has put a dent in Mackenzie Hughes' U.S. Open chances.

Trailing leader Luis Oosthuizen by two shots, Hughes pulled his tee shot left into a tree left of the par-3 11th hole.

It never came down.

After consulting with a rules official, Hughes took a drop and hit the ball onto the green. He two putted for double bogey, dropping him to 4 under.

Oosthuizen, who had a two-shot lead, bogeyed the same hole after flaring a shot to the right. He's at 5 under, one ahead of Jon Rahm.

3:15 p.m.

Finally, some separation at the U.S. Open.

Louis Oosthuizen and Bryson DeChambeau were tied for the lead at Torrey Pines when it changed quickly. DeChambeau missed his tee shot well to the right on the par-3 11th and made bogey. That ended his streak of 30 consecutive holes at par or better.

Behind him, Oosthuizen poured in a 30-foot birdie putt at No. 10 to reach 6 under. That gave him a two-shot lead.

Collin Morikawa was part of that chasing pack until he chopped up the 13th hole. From 50 yards short of the green playing his fourth shot, Morikawa hit it over the green and made a double bogey to fall four shots behind.

3:03 p.m.

Reigning champion Bryson DeChambeau and Luis Oosthuizen share the U.S. Open lead as the contenders have turned to the back nine at Torrey Pines.

DeChambeau moved into the lead at 5 under by nearly acing the par-3 eighth hole. Oosthuizen, one of the overnight leaders, joined him on a 16-foot birdie putt on the par-5 10th.

They've got several big-name players lurking right behind.

Major champions Brooks Koepka, Rory McIlroy and Collin Morikawa are one back. Jon Rahm and Mackenzie Hughes also are at 4 under.

2:20 p.m.

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Get ready for a wild ride to the finish in the final round of the U.S. Open.

Four players are tied for the lead at 4 under and six more are a shot back.

The leaders include major champions Bryson DeChambeau, Rory McIlroy and Luis Oosthuizen. They're joined by Russell Henley after he bogeyed the long par-4 sixth hole.

The group at 3 under includes two-time U.S. Open champion Brooks Koepka, Collin Morikawa and Jon Rahm.

1 p.m.

Jon Rahm is making an early move as the final group has teed off at the U.S. Open.

Rahm opened the final round at Torrey Pines with consecutive birdies, hitting his approach to 3 feet on the par-4 second hole. That moved him to 4 under, one off the lead.

Mackenzie Hughes, Luis Oosthuizen and Russell Henley held the overnight lead at 5 under. Henley bogeyed the opening hole to drop back.

Justin Thomas had consecutive birdies at Nos. 4 and 5 to move to 2 under, join Xander Schauffele, who birdied No. 1.

Collin Morikawa also birdied the second hole to move to 2 under.

11:15 a.m.

Phil Mickelson now has played 30 times in the U.S. Open and he only has a silver medal — six of them — to show for it.

His week at Torrey Pines ended with a 40 on the back nine for a closing 75, putting him at 11-over 295 for the week. Since the last of his six runner-up finishes at Merion in 2013, he has either missed the cut or finished over par in the U.S. Open.

At least he gets more chances. By winning the PGA Championship last month, the 51-year-old Mickelson is exempt from qualifying for the U.S. Open through 2025.

The leading groups are still just under two hours away from teeing off. No one has broken par among the 11 players who have finished. Patrick Reed and Hideki Matsuyama are finishing up their rounds and both appear headed for sub-70 scores.

Mackenzie Hughes and Louis Oosthuizen are tied for the lead and in the final group. Russell Henley also is tied. He plays with Rory McIlroy in the penultimate group.

'The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard' hits top mark at box office

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — "The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard" struck the top box office target.

The Lionsgate's film starring Ryan Reynolds, Samuel L. Jackson and Salma Hayek brought in \$11.6 million domestically to claim the No. 1 spot in its debut. The action-comedy — which appeared in 3,331 locations — is the follow up the 2017 breakout hit "The Hitman's Bodyguard."

The "Hitman" sequel notched "A Quiet Place Part II," which took hold of the second spot in its fourth weekend of release. The Paramount horror-thriller, which stars Emily Blunt and was directed by John Krausinski, earned \$9.4 million. The film became the first of the pandemic era to reach \$100 million domestically.

This weekend, "Godzilla vs. Kong" became the second movie of the pandemic to cross \$100 million. The film has garnered more \$442.5 million worldwide.

Meanwhile, the Jon M. Chu-directed "In the Heights" continued to struggle. The adaption of Lin-Manuel Miranda's Broadway musical dropped a few slots to sixth this weekend.

The Warner Bros. film earned more than \$4.2 million, a 63% drop from the previous week. The critically-acclaimed musical film has recently been called out for its lack of dark-skinned, Black Latinos in leading roles.

However, Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for Comscore, believes the movie fell victim to lofty expectations. He said musicals often take a while to develop an audience.

"There were so many things going on with this film," Dergarabedian said. "There were very high ex-

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pectations when it opened last weekend. And because of the strong reviews, I think there were some overblown expectations. With the big projections, people were emotionally tied to the movie. The box office projections were overblown. That set unrealistic expectations."

"Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway" placed third in the box office with \$6.1 million, while "The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It" claimed the fourth spot with \$5.15 million. It barely edged the Emma Stone-led "Cruella," which came in fifth with \$5.1 million.

"Spirit Untamed," "12 Mighty Orphans," "The House Next Door: Meet the Blacks 2" and "Wrath of Man" rounded out the top 10.

Dergarabedian expects a big weekend for Universal Pictures' "Fast and Furious" new installment "F9," which releases in domestic theaters June 25. The film starring Vin Diesel, Michelle Rodriguez, Tyrese Gibson, Ludacris and Jordana Brewster has already earned nearly \$300 million internationally.

"This is about winning over audiences who watched a lot of content on the small screen," he said. "Now, they will be able to see a movie that has been long delayed, but is tailor made for the big screen and that theater communal experience. Escapism will be the watch word when it comes to Furious 9."

Police: Oregon suspect forced woman to drive him 2K miles

NORTH BEND, Oregon (AP) — A man sought in the killings of his father and two other people in a small Oregon city forced a woman to drive him more than 2,000 miles (3,219 kilometers) to Wisconsin, where he surrendered to police, authorities said Sunday.

Oen Evan Nicholson approached Laura Johnson, 34, after she returned to her parking spot during a her lunch break on Friday in Springfield, Oregon, and forced her to drive him in her car, police said. Authorities were notified Sunday morning that Nicholson had surrendered to police peacefully in Milwaukee but did not release details about how he gave himself up.

Johnson was not hurt and was returning to Oregon, Springfield police said in a statement.

"He approached her in her vehicle with a gun," Johnson's father, Dennis Johnson, told KEZI-TV. "They said she was forced to drive 33 hours to where they're at. She was able to talk him into turning himself in."

Nicholson is suspected of killing his father, Charles Simms Nicholson, whose body was found in a trailer in an RV campground of The Mill Casino in the coastal city of North Bend, about 110 miles (177 kilometers) southwest of Springfield, on Friday.

While driving his father's pickup truck, Nicholson is suspected of hitting and killing Anthony Oyster, 74, at the campground and critically injuring his wife, Linda Oyster, 73, Coos County District Attorney R. Paul Frasier said.

Shortly after, Nicholson is also suspected of shooting and killing resident Jennifer L. Davidson, 47, at a marijuana dispensary in North Bend, Frasier said.

The pickup was found Friday crashed and burned about 30 miles (48 kilometers) west of Springfield. A witness reported an armed man got out and ran into the woods, prompting a unsuccessful search, police said.

Nicholson was charged with first-degree murder in the deaths of his father, Oyster and Davidson as well as second-degree attempted murder, first-degree assault and failing to help a person injured in a traffic accident, Frasier said.

Nicholson will appear in court in Milwaukee in the coming days before returning to Oregon to face the charges, Frasier said. It was not clear if Nicholson has a lawyer who could speak on his behalf.

Israeli PM: World powers must 'wake up' on Iran nuclear deal

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's new Prime Minister Naftali Bennett opened his first Cabinet meeting on Sunday by slamming Iran's newly-elected president and calling on world powers to "wake up" to the perils of returning to a nuclear agreement with Tehran.

Later in the day, Bennett warned Gaza's militant Hamas rulers that Israel would not tolerate even minor

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attacks from the territory in the wake of last month's 11-day war, saying "our patience is running out." But Israel also said it would allow limited agricultural exports from Gaza for the first time since the war was halted by an informal cease-fire.

Iran's hard-line judiciary chief, Ebrahim Raisi, was elected Saturday with 62% of the vote amid historically low turnout. He is sanctioned by the U.S. in part over his involvement in the mass execution of thousands of political prisoners in 1988, at the end of the Iran-Iraq war. Raisi has not commented specifically on the event.

At the Cabinet meeting in Jerusalem, Bennett said Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had chosen the "hangman of Tehran" to be the country's next president, a man "infamous among Iranians and across the world for leading the death committees that executed thousands of innocent Iranian citizens throughout the years."

Raisi's ascendancy comes at a sensitive time for the region, as Iran and world powers ramp up efforts to resurrect Tehran's tattered 2015 nuclear deal, which granted Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program.

For weeks, Iranian and American diplomats have been negotiating a return to the accord in Vienna through European intermediaries. Talks resumed Sunday, the first round since the election that put hard-liners firmly in control across Iran's government.

Israel was staunchly opposed to the landmark nuclear deal and welcomed then-President Donald Trump's decision to unilaterally withdraw the U.S. from it. Since then, the agreement has unraveled, with Iran abandoning all its limitations on enrichment after the Trump administration restored crippling economic sanctions. Tehran is currently enriching uranium at its highest levels ever, though still short of weapons-grade levels.

Although the White House has yet to weigh in on Iran's election, President Joe Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said on Sunday that the outcome was unlikely to affect nuclear negotiations because Iran's supreme leader wants the deal restored.

"The person who makes the decision about whether Iran will go back into the Iran nuclear deal, will assume its nuclear obligations under international law, is not the president of Iran, it is the supreme leader of Iran, and that person did not change from before the election," Sullivan said on CNN's "State of the Union."

Bennett said Raisi's election was "the last chance for the world powers to wake up before returning to the nuclear agreement and to understand who they're doing business with. These guys are murderers, mass murderers."

Israel, which is believed to have its own undeclared nuclear arsenal, has long opposed arch-enemy Iran's nuclear program and has vowed to prevent Tehran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Iran insists its nuclear program is intended for peaceful purposes.

Earlier this month, Israel's outgoing Mossad intelligence chief signaled that Israel was behind a string of recent attacks targeting the country's nuclear program.

Bennett heads a broad coalition of parties ranging from hard-line Jewish nationalists to liberal factions and a small Islamist party. His government was sworn in last week, sending Benjamin Netanyahu to the opposition after a record 12 years as prime minister.

Later on Sunday, at a memorial ceremony for Israelis killed in the 2014 Gaza war, Bennett warned Hamas that Israel "will not tolerate violence, we will not tolerate a drizzle."

He appeared to be referring to incendiary balloons launched from Gaza in recent days that have set fields ablaze inside Israel. Last week, Israel launched airstrikes on two occasions in response to the balloons sent by activists mobilized by Hamas.

Last month's Gaza war was halted by an informal cease-fire. Egyptian mediators have met with Israeli and Hamas officials in recent weeks to try and shore it up. Hamas is demanding the lifting of an Israeli-Egyptian blockade imposed on the territory when it seized power from rival Palestinian forces in 2007.

Israel says the blockade is needed to keep Hamas from importing military resources, while the Palestinians and human rights groups view it as collective punishment of the territory's more than 2 million

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Palestinian residents.

COGAT, the Israeli military body that oversees civilian affairs in Gaza, said that starting Monday it would allow the "limited export of agricultural produce" from Gaza for the first time since the war ended.

Far right falters as conservatives lead French regional vote

By ALEX TURNBULL and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Marine Le Pen's far-right party stumbled, French President Emmanuel Macron's centrists crashed and incumbent conservatives surged ahead in the first round of regional elections Sunday that were dominated by security issues and a record-low turnout.

What was meant to be a vote centered on local concerns like transportation, schools and infrastructure turned into a dress rehearsal for next year's presidential vote, as would-be presidential hopefuls seized on the regional campaign to test ideas and win followers. Macron's rivals on left and right notably denounced his government's handling of the pandemic.

The wrangling appeared to turn off some voters, and less than 34% showed up, according to polling agencies. Politicians across the spectrum pleaded with the stay-at-home voters to wake up for the decisive second round June 17.

Le Pen called the low turnout "a civic disaster that deformed the electoral reality of the country, and produces a misleading vision of the current political forces."

The result is a clear setback for Le Pen's National Rally, though it came in second place in most regions, according to early official results and polling agency projections. It is hoping to win control of a region for the first time to boost her decade-long effort to legitimize a party long seen as an anti-democratic, anti-Semitic pariah.

It had been riding high in pre-election polls and had steered campaign discourse toward its favored subjects of policing and immigration – though both are issues handled by the central government and not regional councils. The party dominated the first round of the last regional elections in 2015, but collapsed in the runoff as parties and voters banded together against it.

The result is also a deep embarrassment for Macron, whose young Republic on the Move party had hoped to establish a regional foothold for the first time but failed to excite voters.

Projections from three polling agencies show the conservative Republicans party, which currently runs seven of mainland France's 13 regions, won the most overall votes Sunday, at between 27-29%.

They were followed by the National Rally at 18-19%, then the Socialist Party and its allies, the Greens party, Macron's Republic on the Move and far-left France Unbowed. Early official results from each region reflected a similar breakdown.

Parties that win more than 10% of the vote advance to the runoff, which will determine the number of seats each party gets on regional councils.

Many polling stations stood largely empty as voting kicked off in schools and community centers from Marseille on the Mediterranean coast to Le Touquet on the English Channel. Those who did show up to vote had to stay masked and socially distanced and carry their own pens to sign voting registries.

The posturing by potential presidential contenders frustrated voters like Patrice Grignoux, a 62-year-old tech consultant casting his ballot in Paris.

"The presidential election is a world in itself," he told The Associated Press. "When you take Brittany or the Paris region, it's totally different. The north is also completely different. ... There are issues you find at a regional level but have nothing to do with national issues."

A key battle was in the Hauts-de-France, a swath of northern France that includes the port of Calais, where five of Macron's government ministers joined the campaign – but his party didn't even reach the runoff, according to early results.

Another race to watch is the region that includes Provence, the French Riviera and part of the Alps, where National Rally candidate Thierry Mariani appeared to have a slimmer-than-expected lead over the conservative incumbent. Mariani has said he wants more police and no more public funding for groups

promoting individual communities, which many see as targeting Muslim associations or LGBTQ movements.

Macron's party didn't exist the last time voters chose regional leaders in 2015. It's facing disillusionment with Macron's policies, including from rural voters who supported the yellow vest uprising against perceived economic injustice.

The virus played only a minor role in the voting. As infections have ebbed and vaccinations spread, the French government recently reopened long-shuttered restaurants, shops and travel possibilities. Beginning Sunday, the prime minister scrapped an unpopular overnight coronavirus curfew, just in time for the election.

Officials say deadly Pride parade crash was not intentional

By KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — A member of a men's chorus group unintentionally slammed into fellow chorists at the start of a Pride parade in South Florida, killing one member of the group and seriously injuring another, the group's director said Sunday, clarifying initial speculation that it was a hate crime directed at the gay community.

Wilton Manors Vice Mayor Paul Rolli and Fort Lauderdale Mayor Dean Trantalis said the early investigation shows it was an accident. The 77-year-old driver was taken into custody, but police said no charges have been filed and the investigation is ongoing.

The elderly driver had ailments that prevented him from walking, according to a statement Sunday from Fort Lauderdale Police, who said he was cooperating with the investigation and there was no evidence drugs or alcohol was involved.

"The early investigation now indicates it looks like it was a tragic accident, but nobody's saying finally what it is," Rolli told The Associated Press in a phone interview.

The driver and the victims were a part of the Fort Lauderdale Gay Men's Chorus family, a small 25-member group of mostly older men.

"Our fellow Chorus members were those injured and the driver is also a part of the Chorus family. To my knowledge, this was not an attack on the LGBTQ community," President Justin Knight said in a statement Sunday, calling it "an unfortunate accident."

Rolli was on the float in front of the chorus truck along with Fort Lauderdale Mayor Dean Trantalis and other city officials at a staging area where the floats were being readied. Trantalis said the driver of a pickup truck suddenly accelerated when he was told he was next in the parade, crashing into the victims.

The driver continued across all lanes of traffic, ultimately crashing into a fence on the other side of the street, police said.

Rolli was on the other side of the float and didn't witness the crash, but jumped off immediately and ran to the victims. In the confusion, it was unclear what happened.

"People were really distraught and some people were crying," said Rolli, who explained that the crash happened in an area where the floats were lining up, so there weren't as many parade-goers. "I was getting phone calls from people I knew at the other end waiting for the parade saying, 'Is this true? Is that true, do we have anything to worry about?' You don't know at that point."

Fort Lauderdale Police said no arrests have been made saying they are conducting a thorough investigation with the FBI, nothing in a statement they are "considering and evaluating all possibilities."

Trantalis, who is Fort Lauderdale's first openly gay mayor, initially told reporters the act was deliberate, adding to the confusion Saturday night.

"It terrorized me and all around me ... I feared it could be intentional based on what I saw from mere feet away," he said in a Twitter statement Sunday. "As the facts continue to be pieced together, a picture is emerging of an accident in which a truck careened out of control."

Wilton Manors is a tight-knit community near Fort Lauderdale with a vibrant downtown filled with cute shops, where people line up for Rosie's famous hamburgers or to gossip and drink at Georgie's Alibi Monkey Bar.

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Photos and video from the scene showed Democratic U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz in tears while in a convertible at the parade.

In a statement Saturday night, Wasserman Schultz said she was safe but "deeply shaken and devastated that a life was lost."

"I am so heartbroken by what took place at this celebration," she said. "May the memory of the life lost be for a blessing."

A spokesman for the chorus said the director did not want to give interviews, adding that many members of the small group witnessed the fatal crash and were deeply shaken.

"The reason people like Wilton manors is the whole community is one big family and that's how we treat each other ... and this has really rattled a lot of people," said Rolli. "Even if it's an accident, just the loss of a life."

June is Pride Month, commemorating the June 1969 police raid targeting gay patrons at the Stonewall Inn in New York that led to an uprising of LGBTQ Americans and served as a catalyst for the gay rights movement.

Diplomats: Progress made in Vienna at Iran nuclear talks

By PHILIPP JENNE and KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — Top diplomats said Sunday that further progress had been made at talks between Iran and global powers to try to restore a landmark 2015 agreement to contain Iranian nuclear development that was abandoned by the Trump administration. They said it was now up to the governments involved in the negotiations to make political decisions.

It was the first official meeting since Iran's hard-line judiciary chief won a landslide victory in the country's presidential election last week.

Some diplomats expressed concern that Iran's election of Ebrahim Raisi as president could complicate a possible return to the nuclear agreement.

Enrique Mora, the European Union official who chaired the final meeting of the sixth round of talks between Russia, China, Germany, France, Britain and Iran, told reporters that "we are closer to a deal, but we are not still there."

"We have made progress on a number of technical issues," Mora added. "We have now more clarity on technical documents — all of them quite complex — and that clarity allows us to have also a great idea of what the political problems are."

He did not elaborate.

Top Russian representative Mikhail Ulyanov said the members of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, "took stock of the significant progress made at the Vienna talks, including at the sixth round, and decided to make a break to allow participants to consult with their capitals in preparation for what is supposed to be the final round of negotiations."

"There are a few controversial points which require political decisions. Apparently diplomatic efforts to find common language have been almost fully exhausted. So the time has come for political decisions," Ulyanov added.

The nations involved in the negotiations have been trying to resolve the major outstanding issues on how to return the U.S. into the landmark agreement, which then-U.S. President Donald Trump pulled Washington out of unilaterally in 2018. Trump also restored and augmented sanctions to try to force Iran into renegotiating the pact with more concessions.

Ulyanov said after heading back to report on the talks' results to their respective governments, he expected the diplomats to return for the final round of talks in Vienna in about 10 days and said they could finalize negotiations by mid-July.

"I believe we have all chances to arrive at the final point of our negotiations, maybe even by mid-July, unless something extraordinary and negative happens," he said.

In a written statement after the talks Sunday, the E3 European senior diplomats urged speedy decision-

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making in the capitals involved in the talks.

"Delegations will now travel to capitals in order to consult with their leadership," the diplomats wrote without giving their names, as is customary. "We urge all sides to return to Vienna and be ready to conclude a deal. The time for decision is fast approaching."

Iran's deputy foreign minister for political affairs said Sunday before the meeting that "we think almost all the agreement documents are ready," according to semi-official Iranian news agency Mehr.

"Of the main issues that remain disputed, some have been resolved and some remain, but it has taken on a very precise form and it is quite clear what the dimensions of these disputes are," Seyyed Abbas Araghchi said.

The U.S. did not have a representative at the table in Vienna. However, President Joe Biden's administration has signaled willingness to rejoin the Iran deal under terms that would broadly see the United States scale back sanctions and Iran return to its 2015 nuclear commitments. A U.S. delegation in Vienna is taking part in indirect talks with Iran, with diplomats from the other world powers acting as go-betweens.

Sunday's meeting was overshadowed by the election of Raisi in Iran, which puts hard-liners firmly in control of the government at a time when Tehran is enriching uranium at its highest levels ever, though still short of weapons-grade levels. Tensions remain high with Iran and both the U.S. and Israel, which is believed to have carried out a series of attacks targeting Iranian nuclear sites as well as assassinating the scientist who created its military atomic program decades earlier.

Raisi is the first Iranian president sanctioned by the U.S. government even before entering office, over his involvement in the 1988 mass executions, as well as his time as the head of Iran's internationally criticized judiciary — one of the world's top executioners.

In Jerusalem, new Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett warned Sunday that Raisi's election as Iranian president was "the last chance for the world powers to wake up before returning to the nuclear agreement and to understand who they're doing business with."

"These guys are murderers, mass murderers: a regime of brutal hangmen must never be allowed to have weapons of mass destruction that will enable it to not kill thousands, but millions," he said.

Israel has long stated that it opposes arch-enemy Iran's nuclear program and said it would prevent Tehran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Iran insists its nuclear program is intended for peaceful purposes.

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said Sunday he hoped the election of the new Iranian president would not be an obstacle to reaching a deal in Vienna.

"We are very close. We have been working for two months," Borrell told reporters during a visit in the Lebanese capital of Beirut. "So I hope that the results of the elections is not going to be the last obstacle that will ruin the negotiation process."

Suspect arraigned in killing of American student in Russia

MOSCOW (AP) — A court in central Russia on Sunday arraigned a suspect on murder charges in the death of an American woman who was studying at a local university.

The body of 34-year-old Catherine Serou was found Saturday in a wooded area near the city of Nizhny Novgorod, 400 kilometers (250 miles) east of Moscow. She had been missing since Tuesday.

Her mother, Beccy Serou, of Vicksburg, Mississippi, told U.S. National Public Radio that her daughter had last texted her: "In a car with a stranger. I hope I'm not being abducted."

State news agency RIA-Novosti cited the local court as saying the suspect gave her a ride in his car, then took her to the wooded area and beat her and stabbed her "in the course of a dispute." Russian news reports have identified the suspect as Alexander Popov and said he had a record of violent crimes.

He faces up to life in prison if convicted of murder.

Serou moved from California to Russia in 2019 to study law at Lobachevsky University in Nizhny Novgorod, news reports said.

Beccy Serou told NPR that her daughter was in a hurry to get to a clinic Tuesday and may have gotten into a passing car.

"I think that when she saw that the person wasn't driving to the clinic, but instead was driving into a forest, she panicked," Becca Serou said.

Take 2: Spacewalking astronauts install new solar panel

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Spacewalking astronauts equipped the International Space Station with the first in a series of powerful new solar panels Sunday, overcoming suit problems and other obstacles with muscle and persistence.

It took two spacewalks for French astronaut Thomas Pesquet and NASA astronaut Shane Kimbrough to install and unfurl the panel to its full 63 feet (19 meters) in length.

The solar wing unrolled like a red carpet once the final set of bolts was released, relying solely on pent-up energy. The slow but steady extension took 10 minutes, with station cameras providing live TV views.

"It is beautiful," Pesquet called out.

"Well done, both of you," Mission Control replied once the operation was complete. "That was great to see."

As the 6 1/2-hour spacewalk concluded, Kimbrough, who has three children, wished "Happy Father's Day" to all the flight controller dads. "Thanks for working with us on a Sunday."

The astronauts started Sunday's spacewalk picking up where they left off Wednesday, when a string of problems prevented them from unrolling the high-tech solar panel.

"Remember: You are butterflies with biceps today," astronaut Megan McArthur radioed from inside.

After pushing and tugging, the spacewalkers managed to unfold and align the solar panel so both halves were now end to end, resembling a roll of paper towels. Their shout of "Woo-hoo!" was met with applause in Mission Control.

The two had to wait until they were back on the night side of Earth — and the station's old solar panels were no longer soaking up sunlight and generating power — before making the final power connections. Otherwise, they could be shocked.

While awaiting darkness, the camera-and-light assembly on Kimbrough's helmet came loose, even though he'd switched to a different suit to avoid the trouble he encountered last time. Pesquet did his best to secure it with wire ties, as the minutes ticked by. His effort paid off, and the final step — the actual unfurling — went off without a hitch.

This new solar wing — with five more to come — will give the aging station a much needed electrical boost, as demand for experiments and space tourists grows.

NASA originally allotted two spacewalks for the job — one for each solar panel being installed. But managers added a third spacewalk, given all the earlier problems. Pesquet and Kimbrough will go back out Friday to complete work on the second panel delivered by Space X earlier this month.

This first pair will augment the space station's oldest solar wings, which are degrading after 20 years of continuous operation.

SpaceX will deliver two more pairs over the next year.

Although smaller than the originals, the new solar panels supplied by Boeing can generate considerably more power. The space station needs this reenergizing if NASA hopes to keep the space station running the rest of this decade, with private guests paying millions of dollars to come aboard.

A Russian film crew is scheduled to launch to the orbiting outpost this fall from Kazakhstan, followed by a string of rich businessmen. SpaceX is providing the rides from Cape Canaveral.

On Wednesday, the display control panel on Kimbrough's suit conked out and he had to return to the air lock to reset it. Then his cooling system registered a momentary pressure spike. Engineers are still evaluating what went wrong.

"Space is hard," Kimbrough tweeted last week.

Libyan guards accused of sexually assaulting minors

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By SAMY MAGDY and RENATA BRITO Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — When Libyan security forces rescued her earlier this year, the young Somali woman thought it would be the end of her suffering. For more than two years, she had been imprisoned and sexually abused by human traffickers notorious for extorting, torturing and assaulting migrants like her trying to reach Europe.

Instead, the 17-year-old said, the sexual assaults against her have continued, only now by guards at the government-run center in the Libyan capital Tripoli where they are being kept.

She and four other Somali teenagers undergoing similar abuses are pleading to be released from the Shara al-Zawiya detention center. It is one of a network of centers run by Libya's Department for Combating Illegal Immigration, or DCIM, which is supported by the European Union in its campaign to build Libya into a bulwark against mainly African migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

"While it is not the first time I suffer from sexual attacks, this is more painful as it was by the people who should protect us," the 17-year-old said, speaking to The Associated Press by a smuggled mobile phone.

"You have to offer something in return to go to the bathroom, to call family or to avoid beating," she said. "It's like we are being held by traffickers." The Associated Press does not identify victims of sexual assault, and the young woman also asked not to be named, fearing reprisals.

Smugglers and traffickers in Libya — many of them members of militias — have long been notorious for brutalizing migrants. But rights groups and U.N. agencies say abuse also takes place in the official DCIM-run facilities.

"Sexual violence and exploitation are rife in several detention centers (for migrants) across the country," said Tarik Lamloum, a Libyan activist working with the Belaady Organization for Human Rights.

The U.N. refugee agency has documented hundreds of cases of women raped while in either DCIM detention or traffickers' prisons, with some even being impregnated by guards and giving birth during detention, said Vincent Cochetel, the agency's special envoy for the Central Mediterranean.

The group of teens are the only migrants being kept at Shara al-Zawiya, a facility where usually migrants stay only short periods for processing. Human rights organizations say they have been trying to secure their release for weeks.

After their rescue from traffickers in February, the 17-year-old was brought along with eight other young female migrants to Shara al-Zawiya. Four of the others were later released under unclear circumstances.

One night in April, around midnight, she asked a guard to let her go to the bathroom. When she finished, the guard attacked her and grabbed her breasts forcefully, she recalled.

"I was petrified and didn't know what to do," she told AP. The guard touched the rest of her body including her intimate parts, then unzipped his pants and tried to strip her clothes in an attempt to rape her, she said. He continued his assault while she cried, struggled and pleaded for him to get off her.

"He only stopped when he was done on my clothes," she said. "I was lucky that he was done quickly."

The guard then ordered her to clean her clothes that had been covered in his semen, she recalled, breaking down in tears.

Terrified, she returned to her cell and told one of the other girls what had happened. She soon learned she wasn't the only victim. All the girls, aged 16 to 18, had experienced similar or worse abuse by guards, she said.

A 16-year-old in the same cell told the AP she started coming under sexual harassment a few days after arriving at the center. When she pleaded with a guard to call her family, he gave her a phone and let her out of her cell to call her mother. Once she hung up, he stood behind her and grabbed her breasts, she said.

She removed his hands and started to cry. The guard only stopped after realizing other employees were at the center, she said.

"Every day they do this," she said. "If you resist, you will be beaten or deprived of everything."

The Libyan government has not responded to requests for comment by the AP.

At least two of the girls attempted to kill themselves in late May following alleged beatings and attempted rapes, according to local rights group Libyan Crimes Watch and U.N. agencies.

One of them, a 15-year-old, was taken to the hospital on May 28 and treated by the international aid group Doctors Without Borders only to be returned to the detention center.

Maya Abu Ata, a spokeswoman for MSF Libya, confirmed that the group's staff treated the two at its clinic. MSF is the abbreviation for the French name of the group, Medecins Sans Frontieres.

The MSF teams "advocated for their release from detention and lobbied protection actors and different interlocutors, however, these attempts were unsuccessful," she said.

The UNHCR said it was working with Libyan authorities for the release of the five young women still held at Shara al-Zawiya and their subsequent evacuation from Libya.

The case of the teens in Shara al-Zawiya also renews questions about the EU's role in the cycle of violence trapping migrants and asylum seekers in Libya. The EU trains, equips and supports the Libyan Coast Guard to intercept people trying to cross the Central Mediterranean to Europe. At least 677 people are known to have either died or gone missing taking this route on unseaworthy boats so far this year.

Nearly 13,000 men, women and children have been intercepted by the Libyan Coast Guard and returned to Libyan shores from the start of the year up to June 12, a record number. Most are then placed in DCIM-run centers.

At some of the 29 DCIM-run centers around the country, rights groups have documented a lack of basic hygiene, health care, food and water as well as beatings and torture. DCIM receives support, supplies and training, including on human rights, through the EU's 4.9 billion-euro Trust Fund for Africa.

Libya has been applauded by the West for a cease-fire reached last year and the appointment of an interim government earlier this year, prompting visits by European leaders and the reopening of some embassies. Despite seemingly growing political stability, activists and human rights organizations say their access to migrants in detention centers is becoming more restricted.

"The guns are silent, a cease-fire is in place ... but human rights violations are continuing unabated," said Suki Nagra, representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Libya, who is following the reports of abuse at Shara al-Zawiya.

Even when cases are documented and alleged perpetrators arrested, they are often released due to the lack of witnesses willing to testify for fear of reprisals. For example, Abdel-Rahman Milad, who was under U.N. sanctions and was arrested last year on charges of human trafficking and fuel smuggling, walked free in April without trial.

Trump cowboy seeks 2nd act in politics after Capitol breach

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

TULAROSA, N.M. (AP) — He rodeoed in a Buffalo Bill-style Wild West show, carried his message on horseback from the Holy Land to Times Square and was invited to the White House to meet the president.

But luck may have run out for this cowboy pastor who rode to national political fame by embracing President Donald Trump with a series of horseback caravans and came crashing down with a defiant stand Jan. 6 against President Joe Biden's election.

Today, Couy Griffin is divorced, disparaged by family and confronts a political recall drive, a state corruption investigation and federal charges.

And yet he remains determined. He sees himself as governor one day.

The first-term county commissioner forged a group of rodeo acquaintances in 2019 into a promotional Cowboys for Trump posse to spread his conservative message about gun rights, immigration controls and abortion restrictions.

Trump's election defeat has left the 47-year-old father in a lonely fight for his political life after preaching to crowds at the U.S. Capitol siege, promising to take his guns to Biden's inauguration and landing in jail for over a week.

In Washington, prosecutors unveiled photographs of Griffin climbing a toppled fence and another barrier to access the Capitol steps.

Public defense attorneys say a close reading of the law shows the area wasn't off limits. They say Griffin

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didn't partake in violence and was well within his free speech rights as he voiced election grievances and attempted to lead a prayer with a bullhorn.

Griffin is one of thousands of Trump loyalists in public office who are charting an uncertain future ahead of the 2022 election cycle. He's part of a smaller cadre who flirted with insurrection on Trump's behalf and may still pay a high price. In all, more than 400 people were charged in the insurrection, which left five dead and dozens of officers injured.

Griffin has been rebuked by some Republicans over his racial invective. He's also been suspended from Facebook and banished from Native American lands in his district as he contests charges of breaking into the Capitol grounds and disrupting Congress that could carry a one-year sentence. A recall effort is underway, amid a bevy of lawsuits.

Still, loyal constituents are easy to come by in a rural county steeped in the anti-establishment, pro-gun culture that dominates southern New Mexico.

"He means no malice on anybody," said George Seeds, outside the New Heart Cowboy Church in Alamogordo where Griffin once served as pastor. "His concern is the direction of this country, where it's going."

Defiance of federal government and its oversight of public lands are staples of politics in Otero County, which spans an area three times the size of Delaware, from the dunes of White Sands National Park to the peaks of the Lincoln National Forest.

Banned from Washington until testimony or trial, Griffin has returned to the routines of home in a tidy double-wide trailer in Tularosa, working most days as a stone mason. A donkey named Henry brays from a side yard.

In a conversation with The Associated Press, Griffin says he learned to love the spotlight during five years as an expert rodeo hand in a Wild West show at Paris' Disneyland park.

His rides with Cowboys for Trump through numerous states were a reprise of proselytizing trips he made from Ireland to Jerusalem, before social media, to hand out the Gospel of John.

The group captivated the public imagination with its first outing, a 2019 flag-waving ride down the shore of the Potomac River to Arlington National Cemetery.

Ramie Harper, a 67-year-old former bull rider from Fruitland, took a break from making custom hats to join the caravan.

"They loved it," Harper said. "We was on 'Fox & Friends' the next day."

With calls for an independent investigation of the Capitol siege blocked by Senate Republicans, Griffin is out on bail and speaking his mind.

He's an advocate for stricter state voting laws and a die-hard opponent of COVID-19 restrictions who says "hell no" to taking the vaccine.

Griffin still wears a monogrammed Cowboys for Trump shirt to commission meetings. But his allegiance to Trump has wavered.

"I don't have the same confidence in him," Griffin said. "Whenever you say, 'China stole the election. ... The election was stolen from me,' and then you just walk away? That's hard for me to accept."

He says his obsession with politics has taken a toll, contributing to his 2019 divorce and tensions with relatives.

"I've had my own family say some pretty nasty things," Griffin said. "It's been real hard."

With Trump or without, Griffin still ascribes to unsubstantiated claims of massive 2020 election fraud.

He yearns to someday run for governor even though state GOP leaders are openly scornful and Democrats hold every statewide elected office.

More immediately, Griffin is eyeing an open 2022 sheriff's race in another New Mexico county where he grew up. His grandfather Wee Griffin held the Catron County post from 1963 to 1966. Trump won there in 2020 with 73% of the vote.

Griffin has cast Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham as his political nemesis on issues of gun control, abortion and pandemic restrictions. He'd like to reinvent the sheriff's role as a brake on the governor's power.

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"The county sheriff's sole duty and responsibility is to protect our individual rights," he said. "You think that the governor hates me as a county commissioner — put a gun and a badge on me, and we'll see."

Jeff Swanson, chairman of the Otero County Democratic Party, says Griffin's divisive remarks hinder county efforts to secure state infrastructure spending, and he has engaged in intimidation by recording Cowboys for Trump videos from his office with a shotgun within view.

In Alamogordo, Griffin's rhetoric on race has steeled the determination of opponents who want him out of office.

Griffin delivered a scathing rebuke last year as the NFL announced game-opening renditions of "Lift Every Voice and Sing," also known as the Black national anthem.

"They want to destroy our country," Griffin said in a video monologue. "I got a better idea. Why don't you go back to Africa and form your little football teams. ... You can play on an old beat-out dirt lot."

Everette Brown, a Marine veteran and information technology specialist at Holloman Air Force Base who is Black, said that comment shows politics have changed Griffin, whom he once respected.

"I'm a big boy. I can handle a lot. And that was one that got me," said Brown, part of a committee seeking to recall Griffin.

For now, Griffin has halted the petition with an appeal to the state Supreme Court, which hasn't decided whether to intervene. Meanwhile, state prosecutors are investigating allegations Griffin used his office in coordination with Cowboys for Trump for personal financial gain, and signed a child-support check to his ex-wife from his Cowboys for Trump account.

Griffin has acknowledged using the county building for promotional videos but said he never claimed they were affiliated with Otero County. He also says Cowboys for Trump is a for-profit company, not a political group.

Donnie Reynolds, a 51-year-old sales associate at an Alamogordo hardware store, says Griffin is being targeted for ties to Trump.

He says Griffin is right about lots of things, like the need for a border wall.

"They're going find out he didn't have anything to do with these types of things," he said. "They're going to eat some crow."

AP Interview: Former president says US failed in Afghanistan

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghanistan's former president said Sunday the United States came to his country to fight extremism and bring stability to his war-tortured nation and is leaving nearly 20 years later having failed at both.

In an interview with The Associated Press just weeks before the last U.S. and NATO troops leave Afghanistan, ending their 'forever war,' Hamid Karzai said extremism is at its "highest point" and the departing troops are leaving behind a disaster.

"The international community came here 20 years ago with this clear objective of fighting extremism and bringing stability ... but extremism is at the highest point today. So they have failed," he said.

Their legacy is a war-ravaged nation in "total disgrace and disaster."

"We recognize as Afghans all our failures, but what about the bigger forces and powers who came here for exactly that purpose? Where are they leaving us now?" he asked and answered: "In total disgrace and disaster."

Still, Karzai, who had a conflicted relationship with the United States during his 13-year rule, wanted the troops to leave, saying Afghans were united behind an overwhelming desire for peace and needed now to take responsibility for their future.

"We will be better off without their military presence," he said. "I think we should defend our own country and look after our own lives. ... Their presence (has given us) what we have now. ... We don't want to continue with this misery and indignity that we are facing. It is better for Afghanistan that they leave."

Karzai's rule followed the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001 by a U.S.-led coalition that launched its in-

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vasion to hunt down and destroy the al-Qaida network and its leader, Osama bin Laden, blamed for the 9/11 attacks on America.

During Karzai's rule, women re-emerged, girls again attended school, a vibrant, young civil society emerged, new high-rises went up in the capital Kabul and roads and infrastructure were built. But his rule was also characterized by allegations of widespread corruption, a flourishing drug trade and in the final years relentless quarrels with Washington that continue even until today.

"The (US/NATO military) campaign was not against extremism or terrorism, the campaign was more against Afghan villages and hopes; putting Afghan people in prisons, creating prisons in our own country ... and bombing all villages. That was very wrong."

In April, when President Joe Biden announced the final withdrawal of the remaining 2,500-3,500 troops, he said America was leaving having achieved its goals. Al-Qaida had been greatly diminished and bin Laden was dead. America no longer needed boots on the ground to fight the terrorist threats that might emanate from Afghanistan, he said.

Still, the U.S.'s attempts to bring about a political end to the decades of war have been elusive. It signed a deal with the Taliban in February 2020 to withdraw its troops in exchange for a Taliban promise to denounce terrorist groups and keep Afghanistan from again being a staging arena for attacks on America.

There is little evidence the Taliban are fulfilling their part of the bargain. The United Nations claims the Taliban and al-Qaida are still linked. The architect of the U.S. deal and current U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad says some progress has been made but without offering any details.

Karzai has had harsh words and uncompromising criticism of U.S. war tactics over the past two decades in Afghanistan. Yet he has become a linchpin of sorts in a joint effort being launched by the United States and Britain to get a quarrelsome Afghan leadership in Kabul united enough to talk peace with the Taliban. The insurgent group has shown little interest in negotiating and instead has stepped up its assaults on government positions.

The Taliban have made considerable strides since the May 1 start of the U.S. and NATO withdrawal. They have overrun dozens of districts, often negotiating their surrender from Afghan national security forces.

But in many instances the fighting has been intense. Just last week a brutal assault by the Taliban in northern Faryab province killed 22 of Afghanistan's elite commandos, led by a local hero Col. Sohrab Azimi, who was also killed and widely mourned.

"The desire of the Afghan people, overwhelmingly, all over the country is for peace," said Karzai, who despite being out of power since 2014 has lost little of his political influence and is most often at the center of the country's political machinations.

Diplomats, Western officials, generals, tribal elders and politicians on all ends of Afghanistan's political spectrum regularly beat a path to Karzai's door in the heart of the Afghan capital.

As the final military withdrawal is already more than 50% complete, the need for a political settlement or even a visible path to an eventual settlement would seem to be taking on greater urgency even as Afghans by the thousands are seeking an exit. They say they are frustrated by relentless corruption, marauding criminal gangs — some linked to the powerful warlords in Kabul — and worsening insecurity. Few see a future that is not violent.

Karzai had a message for both sides in the conflict: "The two Afghan sides, none of them should be fighting." While accusing both Pakistan, where the Taliban leadership is headquartered, and the United States of stoking the fighting, Karzai said it is up to Afghans to end decades of war.

To Pakistan's military and civilian leadership, Karzai said Afghanistan wants "a civilized relationship... if Pakistan adopts an attitude away from the use of extremism against Afghanistan, this relationship can grow into a beautiful relationship, into a very fruitful relationship for both sides."

To the warring sides in Afghanistan, Karzai said: "I'm very emphatic and clear about this, both sides should think of the lives of the Afghan people and the property... fighting is destruction."

"The only answer is Afghans getting together. ... We must recognize that this is our country and we must stop killing each other."

Jordan's unprecedented palace drama moves to the courtroom

By KARIN LAUB Associated Press

AMMAN, Jordan (AP) — Jordan's version of a trial of the century gets under way Monday when a relative of King Abdullah II and a former chief of the royal court are to be ushered into the defendants' cage at the state security court to face charges of sedition and incitement.

They are accused of conspiring with a senior royal — Prince Hamzah, a half-brother of the king — to foment unrest against the monarch while soliciting foreign help.

The palace drama erupted into the open in early April, when Hamzah was placed under house arrest. It has since broken taboos in Jordan and sent jitters through foreign capitals, with Western powers rallying behind Abdullah, an indispensable ally in an unstable region.

The case exposed rivalries in Jordan's traditionally discreet Hashemite dynasty and spawned unprecedented public criticism of the monarch. The defendants are the most senior establishment figures to appear before the security court, which typically goes after drug offenders or suspected militants.

"As far as I know, there has not been a case this big in the history of Jordan," said defense lawyer Ala Khasawneh. The state news agency Petra said the trial starts Monday.

The 41-year-old Hamzah is the central figure, though he is not facing charges. In clashing narratives, he is either a champion of ordinary Jordanians suffering from economic mismanagement and corruption, or a disgruntled royal who never forgave Abdullah for taking away his title of crown prince in 2004 in favor of the king's oldest son.

The indictment, leaked to state-linked media, alleges Hamzah "was determined to achieve his personal ambition" of becoming king. It says the prince and the defendants — Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, a royal, and Bassem Awadallah, a former royal adviser — conspired to stir discontent.

Security agencies began monitoring them in mid-March, at a time of public uproar over an oxygen outage at a hospital in the town of Salt that killed eight coronavirus patients.

Hamzah met with bereaved families just after the king visited Salt. The indictment alleged that the prince "took advantage" of the families' pain to spread a populist message.

Hamzah's popularity stems from ties he has nurtured with Jordan's tribes, the bedrock of Hashemite rule. Atef Majali, a tribal leader in the town of Karak, said he and other sheikhs have met with the prince more than a dozen times over the years, but denied the king was criticized at these events.

The indictment alleged that Hamzah and the two defendants were working on social media messages the prince was to post, with the aim of "inciting some groups in society against the ruling system and state agencies."

Hamzah has denied sedition claims, saying he is being punished for calling out corruption and mismanagement.

On April 3, the day he was placed under house arrest, more than a dozen tribal and public figures were arrested, including his chief aide. Only Awadallah and bin Zaid remain in detention.

The prince is not in legal trouble, with the king saying the matter is being dealt with by the family and that his half-brother remains under his care. The royal court has declined comment when asked if Hamzah can leave his Amman palace or communicate with others. Atef Majali said Hamzah's staff was not allowed back to work.

Khasawneh, who represents bin Zaid, a distant cousin of the king, said his client is "in shock" and plans to plead not guilty. In addition to sedition and incitement, Bin Zaid is also charged with narcotics possession after two pieces of hashish were allegedly found in his home.

The lawyer said he plans to call Hamzah to the stand — potentially amplifying the sensationalist nature of the trial. It's not clear if the palace, eager to tamp down the crisis, would allow the prince to make his case on such a public stage.

Khasawneh said his client plans to fight the charges and brushed aside questions about a possible plea deal. During security court trials, defendants stand in a courtroom cage. Awadallah and bin Zaid are expected to be confined to the cage as well, wearing the blue uniforms of detainees, said former state security court president Mohammad al-Afeef, who represents Awadallah. The defendants, who are held at an intelligence compound in Amman, face up to 20 years in prison.

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In the days leading up to the trial, a broader narrative has surfaced, though it is only alluded to in the indictment.

In this version, the alleged conspirators sought foreign help to exploit the king's perceived vulnerability at a time when he was under pressure from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia to accept a now-defunct Trump administration Mideast plan often referred to as the Deal of the Century. Jordan has expressed concern that the plan would weaken the monarch's historic role as guardian of major Muslim and Christian sites in contested Jerusalem and a pillar of Hashemite claims to legitimacy.

Allegations about foreign outreach focus on Awadallah, who holds Jordanian, U.S. and Saudi citizenship, once served as the king's official envoy to Saudi Arabia and has close ties to Saudi Arabia's powerful crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman.

In Jordan, Awadallah has been widely blamed for economic policies seen as mainly benefiting the rich and has been dogged by corruption suspicions. In Riyadh, he had been visibly involved in efforts to draw foreign investments.

The indictment alleges that Hamzah and bin Zaid invited Awadallah to join them because of his foreign ties. At one point, Hamzah allegedly asked Awadallah: "If something happened to me in Jordan, will the Saudi officials help me or not?"

Saudi Arabia, a major financial backer of Jordan, immediately sent its foreign minister to the kingdom after the crisis erupted, publicly reaffirming support for the king.

Mohammed Momani, a member of Jordan's senate and a former information minister, maintained that there was a link between the alleged sedition plot and regional politics.

"When you see that Jordan is under pressure from its major allies because of the Deal of the Century, then you probably saw this as an opening or as a possibility or an opportunity to solicit some support from the outside world," alleged Momani, who said he was briefed on the investigation.

Momani alleged that bin Zaid had approached a foreign embassy, "trying to ask them for their reaction" if the alleged conspirators put their plan into motion. He did not identify the embassy.

Jordanian officials have said the alleged plot was uncovered in time but posed a threat to stability.

Critics said claims of a threat seem overblown, noting that any plot would have required the backing of the security forces.

"I cannot find any evidence that would lead to this kind of trial," political analyst Amer Sabaileh said. He and Momani are among 92 members of a political reform committee formed by the king to deal with the crisis.

Sabaileh said the saga may have caused lasting damage.

"It has opened the Hashemites' door for ordinary people to look inside, and I think this is not good, regardless of how it happened," he said. "It's better for this family to be united and not to show that there is this kind of competition or sense of revenge."

'It lessens my bills': \$500 payments tested in upstate NY

By MICHAEL HILL Associated Press

Annette Steele isn't destitute or unemployed. But for a year she'll be receiving \$500 per month in no-strings-attached payments as part of an experimental universal basic income program in upstate New York.

Places from Compton, California, to Richmond, Virginia, are trying out guaranteed income programs, which gained more attention after the pandemic idled millions of workers.

Steele, a special education school aide, is getting her payments through a program in Ulster County, which covers parts of the Catskill Mountains and the Hudson River Valley.

During the pilot program, funded by private donations, 100 county residents making less than \$46,900 annually will get \$500 a month for a year. The income threshold was based on 80% of the county's average median income, meaning it includes both the poor and a slice of the middle class — people who face financial stress but might not ordinarily qualify for government aid based on income.

For researchers, the pilot could give them a fuller picture of what happens when a range of people are

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sent payments that guarantee a basic living.

For Steele, 57, it's a welcome financial boost that helped her pay for car insurance and groceries.

"It lessens my bills," said Steele, who lives in the village of Ellenville with her retired husband. "People think because you've been working so many years, that you make this tremendous amount of money. But no, actually."

Less than 100 miles (160 kilometers) north of New York City, Ulster County is a popular destination for weekenders headed to Woodstock or the Catskill Mountains. Its big city, Kingston, is small, with 23,000 people.

Basic income programs elsewhere tend to focus on cities. In contrast, this upstate program stretches out over a mix of places: a city, small towns and remote areas many miles from bus lines and supermarkets.

"Showing that this approach will work not just in urban areas, but for rural parts of the country — which we know is one of our big national problems — I think there's great opportunity there," said Ulster County Executive Patrick Ryan.

Ryan saw cash payments as a way to help local families struggling to get ahead, or even get by, as the pandemic ebbs. Many people in the county were already stretched thin by housing costs before the pandemic, when a large influx of New York City residents led to skyrocketing real estate prices, he said.

The first payments were made in mid-May. Recipients of the money can spend it as they wish, but will be asked to participate in periodic surveys about their physical health, mental health and employment status.

The Center for Guaranteed Income Research at the University of Pennsylvania, which the school formed with the Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, is evaluating the pilot program.

Recipient Eric Luna, a 26-year-old electrical lab technician, said the money will help pay the bills at the home he recently helped his parents buy in Wallkill. But he also hopes to set some aside, possibly for a master's degree.

"I'm also learning how to save money as well," he said. "So this will be a learning experience."

There were more than 4,200 applicants for the program in a county of 178,000 people. Center for Guaranteed Income Research co-founder Stacia West, who is evaluating more than 20 such pilot programs, is interested in seeing how spending compares to cities like Stockton, California, where more than a third went for food.

"Knowing what we know about barriers to employment, especially in rural areas, we may see more money going toward transportation than we've ever seen before in any other experiment," said West, also a professor at the University of Tennessee College of Social Work. "But it remains to be seen."

Proponents of guaranteed incomes say recipients can decide how to spend the money best — be it food, job searches or to replace a refrigerator. The money can complement the existing social safety net, they say, or can be used as an emergency response when the economy starts tanking.

The end goal for a number of advocates is a universal basic income, or UBI, which would distribute cash payment programs for all adults.

The UBI idea helped fuel a stronger-than-expected Democratic presidential primary run last year by Andrew Yang, who proposed \$1,000 a month for every American adult.

Yang, who has a second home in Ulster County, is now running for New York City mayor with a basic income proposal to help lower-income residents.

Officials say Yang hasn't been involved in Ulster's program, but that the nonprofit he founded, Humanity Forward, was helpful in sharing experiences on starting a UBI pilot.

Critics of cash transfer programs worry about their effectiveness and cost compared to aid programs that target funds for food, shelter or for help raising children.

Drake University economics professor Heath Henderson is concerned the programs miss needier people less likely to apply, including those without homes.

While there are times people might benefit from a cash infusion, the money is unlikely to address the structural issues holding people back, like inadequate health care and schools, he said.

"If we keep thinking about remedying poverty in terms of just throwing cash at people, you're not think-

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ing about the structures that kind of reproduce poverty in the first place and you're not really solving the problem at all," Henderson said.

New leaders, new era: US-Israel relations reach crossroads

By MATTHEW LEE and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Their countries at crossroads, the new leaders of the United States and Israel have inherited a relationship that is at once imperiled by increasingly partisan domestic political considerations and deeply bound in history and an engrained recognition that they need each other.

How President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Naftali Bennett manage that relationship will shape the prospects for peace and stability in the Middle East.

They are ushering in an era no longer defined by the powerful personality of long-serving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who repeatedly defied the Obama administration and then reaped the rewards of a warm relationship with President Donald Trump.

Bennett's government says it wants to repair relations with the Democrats and restore bipartisan support in the U.S. for Israel. Biden, meanwhile, is pursuing a more balanced approach on the Palestinian conflict and Iran.

The relationship is critical to both countries. Israel has long regarded the United States as its closest ally and guarantor of its security and international standing while the U.S. counts on Israel's military and intelligence prowess in a turbulent Middle East.

But both Biden and Bennett are also restrained by domestic politics.

Bennett leads an uncertain coalition of eight parties from across Israel's political spectrum whose main point of convergence was on removing Netanyahu from power after 12 years. Biden is struggling to bridge a divide in his party where near-uniform support for Israel has eroded and a progressive wing wants the U.S. to do more to end Israel's half-century occupation of lands the Palestinians want for a future state.

Shortly after taking office, the new Israeli foreign minister, Yair Lapid, recognized the challenges Israel faces in Washington.

"We find ourselves with a Democratic White House, Senate and House and they are angry," Lapid said upon taking the helm at Israel's foreign ministry a week ago. "We need to change the way we work with them."

A key test will be on Iran. Biden has sought to return to the Iran nuclear deal that President Barack Obama saw as a signature foreign policy achievement. Trump withdrew from the pact to cheers from pro-Israel U.S. lawmakers and Israel. Though Iran has not yet accepted Biden's offer for direct negotiations, indirect discussions on the nuclear deal are now in a sixth round in Vienna.

The new Israeli government remains staunchly opposed to Biden's efforts to resurrect the deal. But it maintains it will discuss the issue behind closed doors rather than staging public confrontations, such as Netanyahu's controversial address slamming the agreement to the U.S. Congress in 2015.

In a conversation with Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday, Lapid said the two agreed on a "no surprises" policy and to keep lines of communication open.

Eytan Gilboa, an expert on U.S.-Israeli relations at Israel's Bar-Ilan University, says that rather than trying to scuttle any agreement with Iran, the new government will press the U.S. administration to keep some sanctions on Iran in place and seek "strategic compensation" for Israel as part of any return to the deal.

Resolving differences over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be another significant challenge for the two leaders.

Biden has already moved to reverse Netanyahu-backed Trump policies that alienated the Palestinians and caused a near total rupture in official U.S.-Palestinian contacts. Almost immediately after taking office, Biden restored Trump-slashed U.S. assistance to the Palestinians, which in just four months totals more than \$300 million. He announced his administration's intent to re-open the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem, closed by Trump, that handled relations with the Palestinians. And, administration officials have spoken of the imperative that Israelis and Palestinians enjoy equal measures of security and prosperity.

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Yet, neither Biden nor Blinken has signaled any move to alter Trump's most significant pro-Israel steps. Those include his abandonment of longstanding U.S. policy that settlements are illegitimate under international law, his recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and his recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, territory seized from Syria in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The administration also hopes to expand Arab-Israeli normalization agreements that the Trump administration forged in its final months in office.

In a call on Bennett's first day in office, Biden affirmed his "steadfast support for the U.S.-Israel relationship" and "unwavering commitment to Israel's security." He pledged to work together on all security matters, including Iran.

Biden's support for Israel's heavy airstrikes during last month's war with Gaza's militant Hamas rulers, who fired thousands of rockets at Israel, angered progressive Democrats in Congress. With newfound strength in numbers, they are demanding that the administration do more to support the Palestinians and that conditions be placed on the massive amount of military aid the U.S. provides Israel.

While well-established Democratic lawmakers remain unstintingly supportive of Israel and its absolute right to defend itself, the growing number of progressive voices in their caucus have turned the issue into a political hot potato. The change in Israel's government is unlikely to ease their calls for action as Israeli-Palestinian violence has continued in recent days.

Yet, the Biden administration has already urged the new Israeli government to ease tensions with the Palestinians. In two phone conversations with Lapid over the last week, Blinken has spoken of "the need to improve Israeli-Palestinian relations in practical ways" and pledged to deepen Arab-Israeli ties.

It's not clear that the new government will be responsive.

Centrist members like Lapid and Defense Minister Benny Gantz clearly want to adopt a more cooperative approach with the Biden administration, while Bennett and his right-wing partners face pressure from their base to maintain Netanyahu's hardline approach, not only on Iran but on the conflict with the Palestinians.

The former prime minister, already eyeing a return to office, has branded Bennett as weak and inexperienced, and will probably pounce on any perceived capitulations.

The Israeli government already faces tough decisions, including whether to evacuate an unauthorized settlement outpost established last month and whether to intervene in the legal process through which settler organizations are trying to evict dozens of Palestinian families from their homes in east Jerusalem.

The Biden administration is pressing Israel to refrain from any unilateral steps — such as settlement expansion or evictions — that could hinder the eventual revival of the peace process, which has been moribund for more than a decade. But Washington has yet to issue public condemnations of settlement activity beyond general calls for both sides to refrain from unilateral steps that could inflame tensions or harm prospects for an eventual peace deal.

Bennett is a strong supporter of the settlements and is opposed to Palestinian statehood, but he is also seen by many as a pragmatist. He may be able to turn his weakness into a strength, arguing that any major concession — to the Palestinians or the settlers — risks bringing down the government and returning Netanyahu to power.

"The forces that brought this coalition to power are strong enough in my judgment to sustain the pressure from the right and probably also American pressure to make a major change in the policies toward the Palestinians," Gilboa said.

Australia accused of 'excessive and unnecessary' secrecy

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australia's suppression of information seen as pivotal to a free and open media is at the center of accusations that the country has become one of the world's most secretive democracies.

Last week, a former Australian spy was convicted over his unconfirmed role as a whistleblower who revealed an espionage operation against the government of East Timor.

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It's the latest high-profile case in a national system in which secrecy laws, some dating back to the colonial era, are routinely used to suppress information. Police have also threatened to charge journalists who exposed war crime allegations against Australian special forces in Afghanistan, or bureaucrats' plan to allow an intelligence agency to spy on Australian citizens.

Australians don't even know the name of the former spy convicted Friday. The Canberra court registry listed him as "Witness K." His lawyer referred to him more respectfully as "Mr. K" in court.

K spent the two-day hearing in a box constructed from black screens to hide his identity. The public and media were sent out of the courtroom when classified evidence was discussed, which was about half the time.

The only sign that anyone was actually inside the box was when a voice said "guilty" after K was asked how he pleaded.

The Australian government has refused to comment on allegations that K led an Australian Secret Intelligence Service operation that bugged government offices in the East Timorese capital in 2004, during negotiations on the sharing of oil and gas revenue from the seabed that separates the two countries.

The government canceled K's passport before he was to testify at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague in 2014 in support of the East Timorese, who argued the treaty was invalid because Australia failed to negotiate in good faith by engaging in espionage.

There was no evidence heard in open court of a bugging operation, which media reported was conducted under the guise of a foreign aid program.

K was given a three-month suspended sentence. If he'd been sent to prison, there were court orders designed to conceal his former espionage career by restricting what he could tell friends and associates to explain his predicament.

He had faced up to two years in prison. Since his offense, Australia has continued to tighten controls on secrecy, increasing the maximum sentence to 10 years.

As lacking in transparency as K's prosecution was, it was a vast improvement on Australia's treatment of another rogue intelligence officer known as Witness J.

J has been described by the media as possibly the only person in Australian history to be tried, sentenced and imprisoned in secret. But no one seems to know for sure.

As with K, it is illegal to reveal J's identity.

J pleaded guilty in a closed courtroom in the same Canberra court complex in 2018 to charges related to mishandling classified information and potentially revealing the identities of Australian agents. He spent 15 months in prison.

The secret court hearing and imprisonment only became public in late 2019 because J took court action against the Australian Capital Territory government, claiming his human rights were violated by police who raided his prison cell in search of a memoir he was writing.

Outraged lawyers then called for the first major review of the nation's secrecy laws since 2010. Whistleblowers as well as journalists currently are under threat from more than 70 counterterrorism and security laws passed by Parliament since the 9/11 attacks in the U.S.

Andrew Wilkie, a former government intelligence analyst whistleblower who's now an independent federal lawmaker, is a vocal critic of national security being used as an excuse to pander to paranoia and shield embarrassment.

Wilkie opposed the prosecution of K and his former lawyer Bernard Collaery. Collaery is fighting a charge that he conspired with K to reveal secrets to East Timor, and wants his trial to be open.

"I am in no doubt that one of the reasons for the secrecy around the K and Collaery matter is the enormous political embarrassment that we were spying on one of the poorest countries in the world to get an upper hand in a business negotiation," Wilkie said.

Wilkie quit his intelligence job in the Office of National Assessments days before Australian troops joined U.S. and British forces in the 2003 Iraq invasion. He publicly argued that Iraq didn't pose sufficient threat to warrant invasion and that there was no evidence linking Iraq's government to al-Qaida.

"I basically accused the government of lying," Wilkie said.

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Although the government attempted to discredit him, Wilkie said he was never threatened with prosecution for revealing classified information.

For many, Australian authorities took a step too far in June 2019 in their bid to chase down whistleblowers, intimidate journalists and protect government secrets.

Police raided the home of News Corp. journalist Annika Smethurst, and the next day the headquarters of the Australian Broadcasting Corp. Both media outlets had used leaked government documents as the basis of public interest journalism.

The search warrants were issued under Section 70 of the Crimes Act 1914, which prohibited a government employee from sharing information without a supervisor's permission.

That section has since been replaced under national security legislation that expanded the crime to include a government employee sharing opinions or reporting conversations between others.

Media law experts Johan Lidberg and Denis Muller said Australia is the only country within the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance – which includes the United States, Britain, Canada and New Zealand – that gives its security agencies the power to issue search warrants against journalists in the hunt for public interest whistleblowers in the name of national security.

Police decided in May last year that they had insufficient evidence to charge Smethurst, the journalist, over an article published in April 2018. She had reported that two government department bosses planned to create new espionage powers that would allow an intelligence agency to legally spy on Australian citizens.

Prosecutors also decided in October last year that the "public interest does not require a prosecution" of ABC reporter Dan Oakes over a television investigation broadcast in July 2017 that alleged Australian troops killed unarmed men and children in Afghanistan in potential war crimes.

But David McBride, a former Australian army lawyer who admits leaking classified documents to the ABC, is fighting multiple charges. He calculates he faces up to 50 years in prison for being a whistleblower.

There have been two parliamentary inquiries into press freedom since the police raids, but progress toward change has been criticized as slow and weak.

The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, which has rubber-stamped many of the problem security laws, said many submissions for change warned that "the balance in legislation and culture within the Australian government has tipped away from transparency and engagement to excessive and unnecessary secrecy."

A Senate committee inquiry into press freedom last month made several recommendations, mostly for more government investigation. The committee asked whether secret information offenses should be amended to include a harm requirement, and whether journalists should still have to prove that an unauthorized disclosure was in the public interest.

Wilkie, the lawmaker, argues Australia has drifted into becoming a "pre-police state" through its embrace of secrecy.

"It's now unremarkable when a government cloaks something in a national security need for secrecy," Wilkie said. "We don't bat an eyelid anymore. We should be outraged."

US sends Taiwan 2.5 million vaccine doses, tripling pledge

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — The U.S. sent 2.5 million doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to Taiwan on Sunday, tripling an earlier pledge in a donation with both public health and geopolitical meaning.

The shipment arrived on a China Airlines cargo plane that had left Memphis the previous day. Health Minister Chen Shih-chung and Brent Christensen, the top U.S. official in Taiwan, were among those who welcomed the plane on the tarmac at the airport outside of the capital, Taipei.

Chen said that America was showing its friendship as Taiwan faces its most severe outbreak. "When I saw these vaccines coming down the plane, I was really touched," he said over the noise inside a building where the boxes of vaccines, some with U.S. flags on them, had been brought on wheeled dollies.

Taiwan, which had been relatively unscathed by the virus, has been caught off guard by a surge in new cases since May and is now scrambling to get vaccines. The COVID-19 death toll on the island of 24 mil-

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lion people has jumped to 549, from only about a dozen prior to the outbreak.

The U.S. donation also signals its support for Taiwan in the face of growing pressure from China, which claims the self-governing island off its east coast as its territory. The U.S. does not have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan under what is known as the one-China policy, but is legally bound by its own laws to ensure that Taiwan can defend itself.

"These vaccines are proof of America's commitment to Taiwan," said Christensen, the director of the American Institute in Taiwan, the de facto U.S. Embassy. "Taiwan is a family member to the world's democratic countries."

The U.S. promised 750,000 vaccine doses for Taiwan earlier this month, sending Sen. Tammy Duckworth and two of her Senate colleagues to the island aboard a military transport plane to make the announcement. Taiwan has ordered 5.05 million doses directly from Moderna but so far received only 390,000, including a second shipment that arrived Friday.

Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen said the U.S. had decided to increase the donation through efforts on both sides over the past two weeks.

In a Facebook post, Tsai joined the U.S. in drawing attention to their shared democratic systems. China, which has been ruled single-handedly by the Communist Party since 1949, says Taiwan must eventually come under its control and reserves the right to use force if necessary.

"Whether it is for regional peace and stability or the virus that is a common human adversary, we will continue to uphold common ideas and work together," Tsai wrote in Chinese.

She has accused China of blocking Taiwan from getting the Pfizer vaccine through BioNTech, the German co-developer. Chinese officials have repeatedly denied the charge, and say China is willing to provide vaccines to Taiwan. Taiwanese law, however, bans the import of Chinese-made medicine.

The U.S. donation follows Japan's shipment of 1.24 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine in early June. Taiwan has ordered 10 million doses from AstraZeneca but has yet to receive most of them.

The outbreak, which has eased somewhat, has spurred the government to try to expand testing and vaccination. Health authorities on Sunday reported 107 new locally spread cases, the lowest in more than two months.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, June 21, the 172nd day of 2021. There are 193 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 21, 1964, civil rights workers Michael H. Schwerner, Andrew Goodman and James E. Chaney were slain in Philadelphia, Mississippi; their bodies were found buried in an earthen dam six weeks later. (Forty-one years later on this date in 2005, Edgar Ray Killen, an 80-year-old former Ku Klux Klansman, was found guilty of manslaughter; he was sentenced to 60 years in prison, where he died in January 2018.)

On this date:

In 1788, the United States Constitution went into effect as New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify it.

In 1942, German forces led by Generaloberst (Colonel General) Erwin Rommel captured the Libyan city of Tobruk during World War II. (Rommel was promoted to the rank of Field Marshal; Tobruk was retaken by the Allies in November 1942.)

In 1943, Army nurse Lt. Edith Greenwood became the first woman to receive the Soldier's Medal for showing heroism during a fire at a military hospital in Yuma, Arizona.

In 1954, the American Cancer Society presented a study to the American Medical Association meeting in San Francisco which found that men who regularly smoked cigarettes died at a considerably higher rate than non-smokers.

In 1963, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini was chosen during a conclave of his fellow cardinals to suc-

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ceed the late Pope John XXIII; the new pope took the name Paul VI.

In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Miller v. California*, ruled that states may ban materials found to be obscene according to local standards.

In 1977, Menachem Begin (men-AH'-kem BAY'-gihn) of the Likud bloc became Israel's sixth prime minister.

In 1982, a jury in Washington, D.C. found John Hinckley Jr. not guilty by reason of insanity in the shootings of President Ronald Reagan and three other men.

In 1989, a sharply divided Supreme Court ruled that burning the American flag as a form of political protest was protected by the First Amendment.

In 1997, the WNBA made its debut as the New York Liberty defeated the host Los Angeles Sparks 67-57.

In 2002, one of the worst wildfires in Arizona history grew to 128,000 acres, forcing thousands of homeowners near the community of Show Low to flee.

In 2010, Faisal Shahzad (FY'-sul shah-ZAHD'), a Pakistan-born U.S. citizen, pleaded guilty to charges of plotting a failed car bombing in New York's Times Square. (Shahzad was later sentenced to life in prison.)

Ten years ago: The Food and Drug Administration announced that cigarette packs in the U.S. would have to carry macabre images that included rotting teeth and gums, diseased lungs and a sewn-up corpse of a smoker as part of a graphic campaign aimed at discouraging Americans from lighting up. Amid street protests, Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou survived a confidence vote.

Five years ago: Hillary Clinton, during a visit to the battleground state of Ohio, said Donald Trump would send the U.S. economy back into recession, warning that his "reckless" approach would hurt workers still trying to recover from the 2008 economic turbulence. North Korea fired two suspected powerful new Musudan midrange ballistic missiles, according to U.S. and South Korean military officials, the communist regime's fifth and sixth such attempts since April 2016. The Obama administration approved routine commercial use of small drones in areas such as farming, advertising and real estate after years of struggling to write rules to protect public safety.

One year ago: An initially peaceful protest in Portland, Oregon, against racial injustice turned violent, as police used flash-bang grenades to disperse demonstrators throwing bottles, cans and rocks at sheriff's deputies. Spectators in Raleigh, North Carolina, cheered as work crews finished the job started by protesters and removed a Confederate statue from atop a 75-foot monument. NASCAR said a rope shaped like a noose had been found in the garage stall of Bubba Wallace, the only full-time Black driver in NASCAR's elite Cup Series, at a race in Talladega, Alabama. (Federal authorities found that the rope had been hanging there for months, and that it was not a hate crime.) New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said the American Museum of Natural History would remove from its entrance a statue depicting Theodore Roosevelt on horseback with a Native American man and an African man standing alongside; critics said it symbolized colonial expansion and racial discrimination.

Today's Birthdays: Composer Lalo Schifrin is 89. Actor Bernie Kopell is 88. Actor Monte Markham is 86. Songwriter Don Black is 83. Actor Mariette Hartley is 81. Comedian Joe Flaherty is 80. Rock singer-musician Ray Davies (The Kinks) is 77. Actor Meredith Baxter is 74. Actor Michael Gross (Baxter's co-star on the sitcom "Family Ties") is 74. Rock musician Joe Molland (Badfinger) is 74. Rock musician Don Airey (Deep Purple) is 73. Rock musician Joey Kramer (Aerosmith) is 71. Rock musician Nils Lofgren is 70. Actor Robyn Douglass is 69. Actor Leigh McCloskey is 66. Cartoonist Berke Breathed is 64. Actor Josh Pais is 63. Country singer Kathy Mattea is 62. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown is 61. Actor Marc Copage (koh-PAJ') is 59. Actor Sammi Davis is 57. Actor Doug Savant is 57. Country musician Porter Howell is 57. Actor Michael Dolan is 56. Writer-director Lana Wachowski is 56. Actor Carrie Preston is 54. Actor Paula Irvine is 53. Rapper/producer Pete Rock is 51. Country singer Allison Moorer is 49. Actor Juliette Lewis is 48. Actor Maggie Siff is 47. Musician Justin Cary is 46. Rock musician Mike Einziger (Incubus) is 45. Actor Chris Pratt is 42. Rock singer Brandon Flowers is 40. Britain's Prince William is 39. Actor Jussie Smollett is 39. Actor Benjamin Walker is 39. Actor Michael Malarkey is 38. Pop singer Kris Allen (TV: "American Idol") is 36. Pop/rock singer Lana Del Rey is 36. Actor Jascha Washington is 32. Country musician Chandler Baldwin (LANCO) is 29. Pop singer Rebecca Black is 24.