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“THROUGH THE EYES OF GRATITUDE,
EVERYTHING IS A MIRACLE.”

-MARY DAVIS



Have to keep up with the family tradition so Jeslyn and I had a treat at Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream store yesterday.

Today is the last day of the World Classroom Tour in the D.C. area as we go to Mt. Vernon. We should be arriving home around 3 a.m. Wednesday.



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Groton's group of the World Classroom Tour went on the tour of the Battle of Gettysburg during the American Civil War. Since the museums were closed, the Gettysburg Tour was used to fill that gap of the tour. It was a very interesting and moving tour. Seeing the battle field and having everything described as it happened puts a whole new perspective on the American Civil War.



UNITED STATES FLAG, 1861

The stars on this flag include the 11 states of the Confederacy. The U.S. government never recognized the right of the Southern states to leave the Union, and their stars remained on the American flag throughout the war.

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The Battle of Gettysburg was fought July 1–3, 1863, in and around the town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, by Union and Confederate forces during the American Civil War. The battle involved the largest number of casualties of the entire war and is often described as the war's turning point due to the Union's decisive victory and concurrence with the Siege of Vicksburg. Union Maj. Gen. George Meade's Army of the Potomac defeated attacks by Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, halting Lee's invasion of the North. General Lee's army was very, very close in winning the war. They won a major victory on day two of the war and were just within a few hundred feet of pushing the Union forces back; however, reinforcements came in the nick of time for the Union forces to stand their ground and push the Confederates away. The above is a statue of General Lee. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The terrain has been preserved of where the bloodiest battles was fought during the Civil War. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



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Bob Moore was the tour guide for the Battle of Gettysburg. (Photo lifted from video. Click on image for a 10-minute video)
https://youtu.be/pd_peKkEVjs



Several states put up memorials along the route of the Battle of Gettysburg tour. This one is of Pennsylvania. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



And yes, they did run out of ammunition so they had to revert to hand-to-hand combat. Here is a statue depicting such a scene. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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This is the Confederate side of the battle. Cannons were lined up along the edge of the rock barrier. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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If you look at the barn closely, right above the lower roof line you will see a black dot. That is a hole in the barn from one of the bullets fired during the war. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Jr Legion Defeats WIN Despite Allowing 3-Run Inning

Groton Jr Legion managed through a push by WIN in the third inning where Groton Jr Legion coughed up three runs, but Groton Jr Legion still won 17-5 on Monday. The big inning for WIN came thanks to a walk by Noah and an error on a ball put in play by Sam.

Groton Jr Legion secured the victory thanks to nine runs in the third inning. The big inning was thanks to singles by Cole S, Kaleb H, Colby D, and Cade L, a walk by Tate L, by Andrew M, and an error on a ball put in play by Jordan B.

Groton Jr Legion opened up scoring in the first inning. Braden A hit a solo homer.

Groton Jr Legion put up nine runs in the third inning. Groton Jr Legion big bats were led by Cole, Andrew, Kaleb, Tate, Jordan, and Colby, all driving in runs in the frame.

Colby was credited with the victory for Groton Jr Legion. The ace allowed two hits and five runs over two and two-thirds innings, striking out eight. Ryan G threw one and one-third innings in relief out of the bullpen. Ryan recorded the last four outs to earn the save for Groton Jr Legion.

Gage took the loss for WIN. Gage surrendered 17 runs on 13 hits over four innings, striking out two.

Groton Jr Legion socked one home run on the day. Braden went yard in the first inning.

Groton Jr Legion scattered 13 hits in the game. Colby, Braden, Tate, and Cade all had multiple hits for Groton Jr Legion. Braden and Colby each collected three hits to lead Groton Jr Legion. Groton Jr Legion stole 28 bases during the game as seven players stole more than one. Andrew led the way with seven.

Fehi went 2-for-3 at the plate to lead WIN in hits. Fehi led WIN with two stolen bases, as they ran wild on the base paths with five stolen bases.

Groton Jr Legion Defeats WIN In High-Scoring Game, 12-9

Both offenses were strong in Groton Jr Legion 12-9 victory over WIN .

Groton Jr Legion got on the board in the first inning. Jordan B drove in one when Jordan singled.

WIN scored four runs in the third inning. WIN scored its runs on a grand slam by Dawson.

Cole S took the win for Groton Jr Legion. The righthander surrendered six runs on six hits over three innings, striking out two. Jordan threw two innings in relief out of the bullpen. Jordan recorded the last six outs to earn the save for Groton Jr Legion.

Dawson took the loss for WIN. The pitcher surrendered 12 runs on ten hits over four innings, striking out five.

Groton Jr Legion tallied 11 hits in the game. Cade L, Jordan, and Tate L each racked up multiple hits for Groton Jr Legion. Cade led Groton Jr Legion with three hits in three at bats. Groton Jr Legion tore up the base paths, as two players stole at least two bases. Tate led the way with three.

Dawson went 3-for-3 at the plate to lead WIN in hits.

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Groton Jr. Teeners Can't Catch Up To Webster VFW POST 4690 14U

Groton Jr. Teeners watched the game slip away early and couldn't recover in a 6-3 loss to Webster VFW POST 4690 14U on Monday. Webster VFW POST 4690 14U took the lead on a walk in the first inning.

Groton Jr. Teeners lost despite out-hitting Webster VFW POST 4690 14U eight to four.

Webster VFW POST 4690 14U got things started in the first inning. Justin Pence drew a walk, scoring two runs.

Matthew Mount got the win for Webster VFW POST 4690 14U. The righty lasted five innings, allowing eight hits and three runs while striking out seven and walking one.

Braxton Imrie took the loss for Groton Jr. Teeners. The righthander surrendered five runs on three hits over three innings, striking out six.

Groton Jr. Teeners tallied eight hits on the day. Korbin Kucker and Brevin Fliehs each managed multiple hits for Groton Jr. Teeners. Fliehs and Kucker each managed two hits to lead Groton Jr. Teeners. Groton Jr. Teeners stole five bases during the game as two players stole more than one. Kucker led the way with two.

Groton Jr. Teeners Beats Webster VFW POST 4690 14U In Low-Scoring Affair

Both teams were strong on the pitcher's mound Monday, but Groton Jr. Teeners defeated Webster VFW POST 4690 14U 3-2. Groton Jr. Teeners pitchers allowed just one hits to Webster VFW POST 4690 14U.

Webster VFW POST 4690 14U fired up the offense in the first inning, when Matthew Mount drew a walk, scoring one run.

In the bottom of the second inning, Groton Jr. Teeners tied things up at one. Kellen Antonsen singled on a 2-2 count, scoring one run.

Groton Jr. Teeners pulled away for good with two runs in the third inning. In the third Karsten Fliehs grounded out, scoring one run and Antonsen singled on a 0-1 count, scoring one run.

Jarrett Erdmann earned the victory on the hill for Groton Jr. Teeners. The pitcher lasted four innings, allowing one hit and two runs while striking out six. Gavin Englund threw one inning in relief out of the bullpen.

Jack Shoemaker took the loss for Webster VFW POST 4690 14U. The pitcher surrendered three runs on four hits over four innings, striking out four.

Antonsen went 2-for-2 at the plate to lead Groton Jr. Teeners in hits. Groton Jr. Teeners tore up the base paths, as two players stole at least two bases. Korbin Kucker led the way with three.

Devin Snaza led Webster VFW POST 4690 14U with one hit in two at bats.

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Groton Legion Post #39 Beats LEGION Claremont Honkers Youth By 13 Runs

Groton Legion Post #39 had everything working on Monday, winning big over LEGION Claremont Honkers Youth 14-1

Groton Legion Post #39 notched six runs in the fifth inning. Jackson Cogley, Darien Shabazz, Chandler Larson, and Brodyn DeHoet each had RBIs in the frame.

Alex Morris toed the rubber for Groton Legion Post #39. The righty went five innings, allowing one run on four hits, striking out eight and walking zero.

Colin F was on the hill for LEGION Claremont Honkers Youth. The pitcher allowed eight hits and eight runs over four innings, striking out two. Jesse K threw one inning out of the bullpen.

Groton Legion Post #39 scattered 12 hits in the game. Shabazz, Peyton Johnson, and Jonathan Doeden each managed multiple hits for Groton Legion Post #39. Johnson and Shabazz each managed three hits to lead Groton Legion Post #39. Groton Legion Post #39 didn't commit a single error in the field. Pierce Kettering had the most chances in the field with eight.

Jackson Throws Shutout As Groton Legion Post #39 Defeats LEGION Claremont Honkers Youth

Jackson Cogley didn't allow a single run against LEGION Claremont Honkers Youth, throwing a complete game shutout and leading Groton Legion Post #39 to a 14-0 victory on Monday

Groton Legion Post #39 secured the victory thanks to 11 runs in the third inning. Groton Legion Post #39's offense in the inning came from singles by Brodyn DeHoet, Jonathan Doeden, DeHoet, Pierce Kettering, and Cogley, doubles by Alex Morris and Jayden Zak, a sac fly by Cogley, and an error on a ball put in play by Zak.

Groton Legion Post #39 notched 11 runs in the third inning. Morris, DeHoet, Zak, Cogley, Doeden, and DeHoet each had RBIs in the big inning.

One bright spot for LEGION Claremont Honkers Youth was a single by Ben G in the first inning.

Cogley was the winning pitcher for Groton Legion Post #39. The pitcher allowed two hits and zero runs over three innings, striking out three and walking one.

William C took the loss for LEGION Claremont Honkers Youth. William allowed 12 hits and 13 runs over two innings, striking out one and walking one.

Groton Legion Post #39 racked up 14 hits in the game. DeHoet, Kettering, Doeden, and Morris each racked up multiple hits for Groton Legion Post #39. Kettering and DeHoet all had three hits to lead Groton Legion Post #39. Groton Legion Post #39 didn't commit a single error in the field. Morris had three chances in the field, the most on the team.

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The Groton Community Transit Fundraiser was recently held. It was held at the Groton Community Center due to the heat. Volunteers Karyn Babcock with grandsons Kason and Rylan along with Eli from Texas. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



Deb Fredrickson at the greeting table. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)

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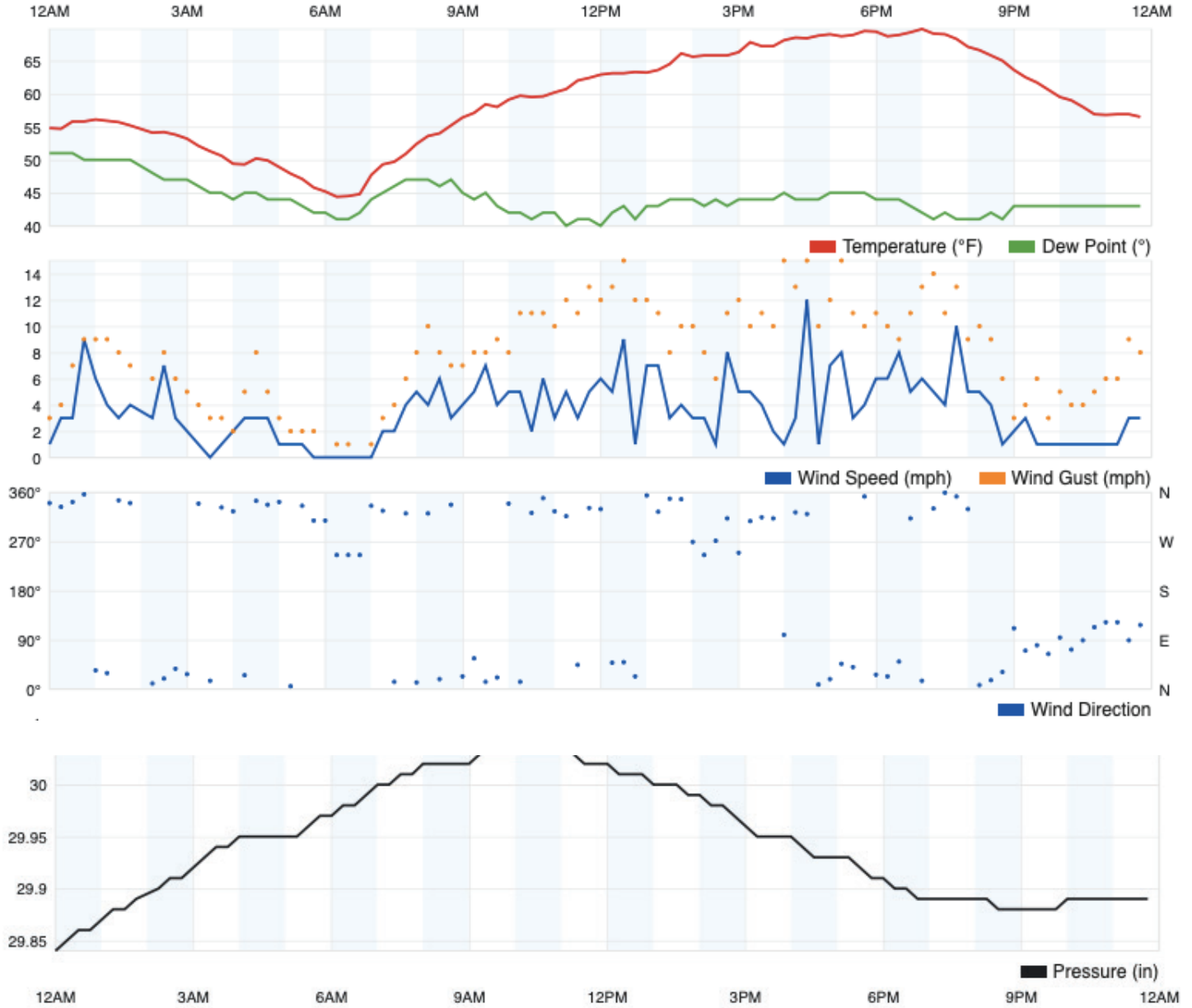
Some of the volunteers at the Transit Fundraiser. (Photos by Bruce Babcock)



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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A steady warm up peaks Wednesday with temperatures near 100 degrees, low humidity and breezy conditions. A weak front could generate some precipitation early Thursday but the better chance for storms is early Friday, though even then we don't expect significant widespread moisture.

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Today in Weather History

June 22, 1916: An estimated F2 tornado moved northeast from 4 miles east of Willow Lakes to east of Vienna, in Clark County. A farmhouse was picked up and thrown into a granary. A boy was smothered to death by grains as a barn collapsed on him, one mile south of Vienna.

June 22, 1919: The second deadliest tornado in Minnesota's history occurred on this day. 59 people were killed as an estimated F5 tornado ripped through the town of Fergus Falls, Minnesota. 400 buildings were destroyed. A blank check was found over 60 miles away, and lumber was carried 10 miles. Of the 59 victims, 35 were guests of the Grand Hotel.

June 22, 1996: From the morning through the late afternoon hours, several supercell thunderstorms moved southeast along a strong warm front from eastern Corson County to southwest Deuel County. These storms produced several tornados, large hail, very heavy rains, and damaging winds. Hail up to the size of baseballs and winds gusting to 70 mph damaged and destroyed thousands of acres of crops, broke windows in homes, buildings, and vehicles. Many roofs were damaged, and trees were downed from near Mobridge to Redfield to Toronto. The most extensive crop, building, and tree damage occurred around the areas of Redfield, Vienna, Naples, Hazel, Bryant, Henry, Lake Norden, Castlewood, Estelline, and Toronto all south of Highway 212. The hail swaths of destruction were as much as 10 miles wide in places. Some farmers said you could not tell what was planted because the crops were destroyed. Hail piles of one to two feet were reported in some areas. Also, most of the area from Redfield to Toronto received one to three inches of rain which caused some flooding problems.

1928: A farmer near Greensburg, KS looked up into the heart of a tornado. He described its walls as "rotating clouds lit with constant flashes of lightning and a strong gassy odor with a screaming, hissing sound."

2003: A hailstone measuring 7.0 inches in diameter with a circumference of 18.75 inches and weighing 1.33 pounds falls in Aurora, Nebraska. The National Weather Service reports this is the second largest hailstone ever documented in the U.S. by weight, and the largest by size at that time. The world's largest hailstone NOW was produced from storms in South Dakota; 8" in diameter and 1.9375 lbs. on July 23, 2010.

2007: The first officially documented F5 tornado in Canada struck the town of Elie, Manitoba population 500 people. Video of the storm showed a heavy van being whirled through the air. The storm also tossed an almost entire house several hundred yards through the air before it disintegrated. The tornado traveled across the landscape for about 35 minutes covering 3.4 miles and leaving a damage path 984 feet wide. Wind speeds in the tornado were later estimated at 260-316 mph. Fortunately, no fatalities or serious injuries were reported.

1947 - Twelve inches of rain fell in forty-two minutes at Holt, MO, establishing a world rainfall record. That record was tied on January 24-25, 1956, at the Kilauea Sugar Plantation in Hawaii, as their state record was established with 38 inches of rain in 24 hours. (The Weather Channel)

1981 - A young woman from Lubbock, TX, was struck by lightning. The bolt of lightning struck just above her right shoulder near her neck, and passed right to left through her body, tearing her warm-ups, causing her tennis shoes to explode, and lifting her two feet into the air. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in southern Texas produced wind gusts to 116 mph near Quemado. Thunderstorms in New York State produced 5.01 inches of rain in 24 hours at Buffalo, an all-time record for that location, and produced an inch of rain at Bath, PA. The temperature at Fairbanks AK soared to 92 degrees, establishing a record for the date. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Sixty-five cities in twenty-four states reported record high temperatures for the date. Tucson AZ reported an all-time record high of 114 degrees, surpassing the previous record of 112 degrees established a day earlier. Highs of 98 degrees at Pittsburgh, PA, and 100 degrees at Baltimore, MD, tied records for the month of June. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Record cold temperatures were reported in the High Plains Region. Rapid City, SD, reported a record low of 39 degrees, in sharp contrast to their record high of 102 degrees two days earlier, on the 20th. (The National Weather Summary)

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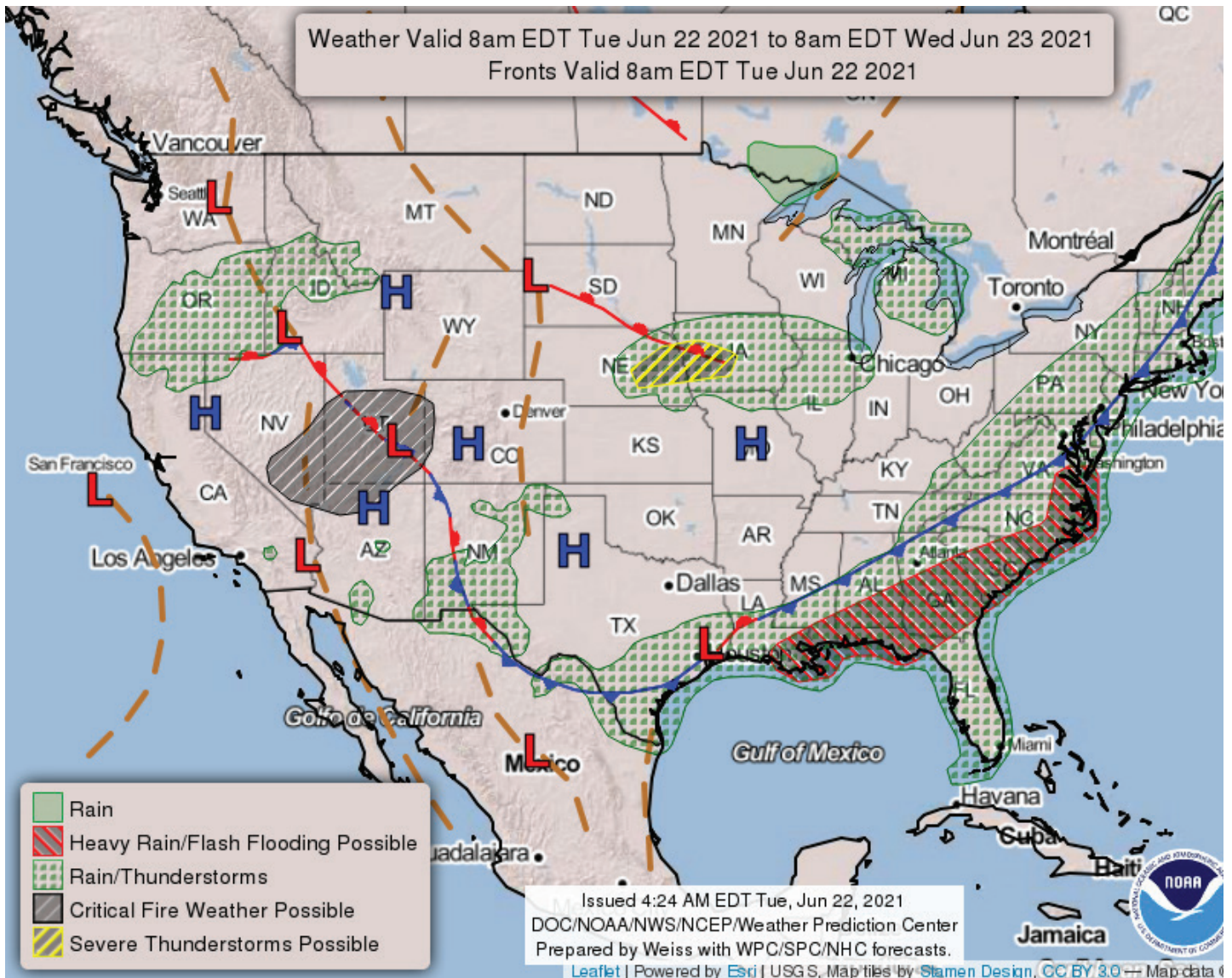
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 70 °F at 6:55 PM
Low Temp: 44 °F at 6:17 AM
Wind: 15 mph at 12:29 PM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 102° in 1911, 1922
Record Low: 39° in 1905
Average High: 82°F
Average Low: 57°F
Average Precip in June.: 2.56
Precip to date in June.: 0.60
Average Precip to date: 9.81
Precip Year to Date: 4.54
Sunset Tonight: 9:26 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:46 a.m.



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DESTINATION AND DIRECTION

It was the end of our summer break, and my roommate and I were returning for our final year in seminary. After driving several miles I asked, "Fritz, why is the sun shining in our eyes when we are supposed to be going west?"

Suddenly he realized that instead of turning right at the end of our driveway, he had turned left, and we were going east and not west. Realizing our mistake, we laughed at ourselves, turned the car around and headed in the right direction.

No one can travel in the wrong direction and expect to reach the right destination. A wise Psalmist once wrote, "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face to shine on us so that Your ways may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations."

God has made His ways known through Jesus Christ, His Son who said, "I am the way!" Every person on earth is going "somewhere" but if they refuse His "where" they will end up "nowhere" and spend eternity in hell.

Some of those we know are traveling the "Religion Roadway." They have respect for what is sacred but have not accepted God's Son as their Savior and made Him their Lord. They are depending on "something" to get them "somewhere" in life but do not know that there is "Someone" who can save them and give them eternal life.

Everyone we know is on their way going somewhere depending on something to get them some place. But it is our responsibility to show them the right way – His way!

Prayer: Father, may we accept our responsibility as Your disciples to present the right "Way" to those who are lost. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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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

US official to address legacy of Indigenous boarding schools

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland and other federal officials are expected Tuesday to announce steps the federal government plans to take to reconcile the troubled legacy of boarding school policies on Indigenous families and communities.

A member of New Mexico's Laguna Pueblo and the first Native American to serve as a Cabinet secretary, Haaland is scheduled to outline a path forward while addressing members of the National Congress of American Indians during the group's midyear conference.

Starting with the Indian Civilization Act of 1819, the U.S. enacted laws and policies to establish and support Indian boarding schools across the nation. For over 150 years, hundreds of thousands of Indigenous children were taken from their communities and forced into boarding schools that focused on assimilation.

The recent discovery of children's remains buried at the site of what was once Canada's largest Indigenous residential school has magnified interest in that legacy both in Canada and the United States.

In Canada, more than 150,000 First Nations children were required to attend state-funded Christian schools as part of a program to assimilate them into society. They were forced to convert to Christianity and were not allowed to speak their native languages. Many were beaten and verbally abused, and up to 6,000 are said to have died.

After reading about the unmarked graves in Canada, Haaland recounted her own family's story in a recent opinion piece published by the Washington Post.

Past efforts by the federal government to "eradicate our culture and erase us as a people" is a history that needs to be acknowledged, she wrote.

Haaland cited statistics from the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, which reported that by 1926, more than 80% of Indigenous school-age children were attending boarding schools that were run either by the federal government or religious organizations. Besides providing resources and raising awareness, the coalition has been working to compile additional research on U.S. boarding schools and deaths that many say is sorely lacking.

Experts say removing children from their families and homes has had multigenerational effects on Indigenous communities, from the loss of Native languages and cultural resources to cycles of violence and abuse.

"It is a history that we must learn from if our country is to heal from this tragic era," Haaland wrote.

Haaland said her grandmother told her about being loaded on a train with other children from her village and being shipped off to boarding school.

"She spoke of the loneliness she endured," Haaland recalled. "We wept together. It was an exercise in healing for her and a profound lesson for me about the resilience of our people, and even more about how important it is to reclaim what those schools tried to take from our people."

Many of the schools were maintained by the Interior Department, which Haaland now leads.

Haaland has suggested that investments planned by the Biden administration and efforts to strengthen tribal sovereignty can help to heal the wrongs.

Health care groups propose easing medical pot certifications

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's largest health care providers proposed Monday that lawmakers drop part of the requirement for people seeking medical marijuana identification cards to obtain a physician's recommendation to use the drug.

Under the proposal, physicians would still need to certify that patients have conditions such as severe pain, seizures or multiple sclerosis that would qualify them for a medical marijuana ID. But they would not

need to specifically recommend that medical marijuana be used to treat the condition.

The proposal was welcomed by medical marijuana advocates, who have worried that patients will have a difficult time getting medical pot recommendations from physicians. Doctors have expressed hesitancy about recommending medical marijuana as the state prepares to legalize it.

Although a voter-passed law legalizing medical marijuana takes effect July 1, the full medical cannabis program is still in flux. The state has until November to start issuing ID cards, meaning people wouldn't be able to legally buy medical cannabis until then. In the meantime, state lawmakers are planning changes to the law.

Sarah Aker, the director of fiscal policy at the South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations, said there has been "a lot of concern from physicians" over the certifications for medical marijuana. She said doctors are hesitant to recommend pot because there is a lack of comprehensive research on its medical benefits, but they might be more comfortable writing certifications if they didn't specifically recommend using cannabis.

Jeremiah Murphy, a lobbyist for the Cannabis Industry Association of South Dakota, said medical marijuana advocates would support dropping that part of the recommendation requirement. But he opposed two other potential changes to the law that legislators discussed: restricting patients' ability to grow cannabis at home and allowing local governments to enter the medical marijuana business by obtaining retail licenses from the state.

Meanwhile, several Native American tribes in the state are planning to enter the cannabis industry, giving people an opportunity to purchase marijuana on tribal lands where it has been legalized. Ross Garelick Bell, a lobbyist for the Crow Creek Sioux, Oglala Lakota and Yankton Sioux, said tribal governments are hoping to make their own marijuana programs "cohesive" with South Dakota's regulations.

However, it remains unclear what South Dakota's final medical cannabis laws will be. Republican lawmakers oscillated between reminding themselves they had a duty to carry out the will of the voters and entertaining warnings that medical marijuana legalization will have severe repercussions. Lawmakers listened for over an hour as Dr. Kenneth Finn, a doctor from Colorado who has been an outspoken critic of marijuana legalization, warned of increases in pot use among children and a bump in emergency room visits for people who react poorly to the drug.

Although lawmakers have treaded lightly regarding the new law that passed with 70% of the vote, they have made it clear that they will make at least some changes to it.

Republican Rep. Fred Deutsch said, "Do we tweak the law or do we put up some major guardrails?"

More rain needed to make up for current deficit in Minnesota

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Sunday's rain in Minnesota will help ease drought conditions and elevated fire danger, but experts say it's not nearly enough to make up for the current rainfall deficit.

The entire state is classified as abnormally dry and more than half of Minnesota is experiencing drought. The St. Croix River at Stillwater and the Minnesota River at Henderson are among the waterways with near record-low water levels, Minnesota Public Radio reported.

National Weather Service meteorologist Lee Britt in Duluth said that prior to Sunday, the rain that fell in Minnesota this month had been hit-or miss.

"What we have seen is just, you know, spotty storms, and while storms do generate a lot of rainfall, it's just in such an isolated location it's not enough to really get a large-scale area out of the drought category," he said. "So what you need is widespread rainfall lasting for extended periods of time."

St. Cloud, Duluth, Rochester and the Twin Cities, as well as Sioux Falls, South Dakota are running more than 2 inches (5 centimeters) below normal rainfall for the month of June.

"In order for us to get out of the drought, we would need 3 to 6 inches of rainfall. So while this rainfall will help, it's not going to push us out of the drought we've seen," he said.

Before Sunday, the Twin Cities received only four-tenths of an inch of rain in June.

Palestinians, settlers clash in tense Jerusalem neighborhood

By LAURIE KELLMAN and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Palestinians and Jewish settlers hurled stones, chairs and fireworks at each other overnight in a tense Jerusalem neighborhood where settler groups are trying to evict several Palestinian families, officials said Tuesday.

The threatened evictions fueled protests and clashes in the runup to last month's 11-day Gaza war and pose a test for Israel's new governing coalition, which includes three pro-settler parties but is hoping to sideline the Palestinian issue to avoid internal divisions.

Israeli police and border officials said they arrested four suspects in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. It was unclear who started the brawl. The officials said someone launched fireworks at police forces and residents' houses and that "several Molotov cocktails were thrown and stones were thrown." One woman was reportedly injured when she was hit in the back by a stone, police said.

The Red Crescent emergency service said its crews treated 20 Palestinians, including 16 suffering from pepper spray and tear gas and others wounded by rubber-coated bullets. Two other people were wounded, including an elderly man who was hit in the head, it said.

The Red Crescent said settlers threw stones at one of its ambulances and Israeli forces sprayed skunk water on a second ambulance belonging to the service.

The eruption of violence is the latest friction in Sheikh Jarrah, where weeks of unrest captured international attention ahead of the 11-day Israel-Hamas war last month. The cease-fire took effect on May 21, but the long-running campaign by Jewish settlers to evict dozens of Palestinian families continues.

And so the cycle of tension endures, in a stark early test for Israel's new coalition government, which is just over a week old.

At the helm under a rotation agreement is Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, head of the right-wing Yamina party. In two years, he'll be replaced by Yair Lapid, leader of centrist Yesh Atid. And leading the opposition is Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu, ousted from the premiership after holding the post for 12 years.

An intervention by Israel's attorney general at the height of the unrest has put the most imminent evictions on hold. But rights groups say evictions could still proceed in the coming months as international attention wanes, potentially igniting another round of bloodshed.

The settlers have been waging a decades-long campaign to evict the families from densely populated Palestinian neighborhoods in the so-called Holy Basin just outside the walls of the Old City, in one of the most sensitive parts of east Jerusalem.

Israel captured east Jerusalem, home to holy sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, in the 1967 war and annexed it in a move not recognized internationally. Israel views the entire city as its capital, while the Palestinians want east Jerusalem as the capital of their future state.

The settlers say the homes are built on land that was owned by Jews prior to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation. Israeli law allows Jews to reclaim such property, a right denied to Palestinians who lost lands and homes in the same conflict.

UEFA declines Munich application for rainbow-colored stadium

By CIARÁN FAHEY AP Sports Writer

MUNICH (AP) — UEFA has declined the Munich city council's application to have its stadium illuminated in rainbow colors for Germany's final European Championship group game against Hungary on Wednesday.

The governing body said in a statement Tuesday that it understands the intention behind the proposal but "must decline this request" because of its political context — "a message aiming at a decision taken by the Hungarian national parliament."

Munich Mayor Dieter Reiter's application on behalf of the council made clear it wanted to protest a law passed by Hungarian lawmakers last week that prohibits sharing with minors any content portraying homosexuality or sex reassignment. The law was denounced as anti-LGBT discrimination by human rights groups.

Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó blasted the German plan on Monday.

"In Hungary we have passed a law to protect Hungarian children, and now in Western Europe they are griping about it," Szijjártó said in Luxembourg. "They want to express this by including politics in a sporting event, which has nothing to do with the passing of national laws."

UEFA said it believes "that discrimination can only be fought in close collaboration with others" and it proposed that Munich illuminates the stadium with the rainbow colors on June 28 for Christopher Street Day or between July 3-9 for the Christopher Street Day week in the city.

The body said these dates "align better with existing events."

German soccer federation spokesman Jens Grittner had already suggested Monday that it might also be an option to display the colors in the days after Hungary's visit. Munich will host a quarterfinal match at Euro 2020 on July 2.

But the delayed action undermines the Munich's city's planned protest against what it calls "the homophobic and transphobic legislation of the Hungarian government."

Hungary's National Assembly approved the bill against sharing LGBT content with minors in a 157-1 vote last week, when one independent lawmaker voted against it and all other opposition parties boycotted the voting session in protest.

"This legislation represents a new mark in the invisibility and disenfranchisement of lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender and intersex people (LGBTI) and adds to the systematic restriction of the rule of law and fundamental freedoms that have been practiced for years in Hungary," the Munich council said in its application, which had cross-party support.

UEFA said it understood the council's intention to send a message to promote diversity and inclusion but stressed that it was "a politically and religiously neutral organization."

On Sunday, UEFA gave the go-ahead for Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer to continue wearing a captain's armband with the rainbow colors at the tournament.

"What does the rainbow stand for?" German government spokesman Steffen Seibert asked on Monday. "It stands for how we want to live: With respect for each other, without the discrimination that has long excluded minorities. And surely the vast majority of people can relate to that."

EU investigates Google's conduct in digital ad tech sector

LONDON (AP) — European Union regulators have launched a fresh antitrust investigation of Google, this time over whether the U.S. tech giant is stifling competition in digital advertising technology.

The European Commission said Tuesday that it has opened a formal investigation into whether Google violated the bloc's competition rules by favoring its own online display advertising technology services at the expense of rival publishers, advertisers and advertising technology services.

The commission, the EU's executive arm and the bloc's top antitrust enforcer, is looking in particular at whether Google is restricting access by third parties to user data for ad purposes on websites and apps.

"Online advertising services are at the heart of how Google and publishers monetize their online services," said Margrethe Vestager, the EU commission's competition chief and executive vice president for digital. Google collects data to be used for targeted advertising while it also sells advertising space and acts as a middleman between online advertisers and publishers, she said.

"We are concerned that Google has made it harder for rival online advertising services to compete in the so-called ad tech stack," Vestager said.

An email seeking comment was sent to Google's press office.

Watchdog: Nursing home deaths up 32% in 2020 amid pandemic

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Deaths among Medicare patients in nursing homes soared by 32% last year, with two devastating spikes eight months apart, a government watchdog reported Tuesday in the most comprehensive look yet at the ravages of COVID-19 among its most vulnerable victims.

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The report from the inspector general of the Department of Health and Human Services found that about 4 in 10 Medicare recipients in nursing homes had or likely had COVID-19 in 2020, and that deaths overall jumped by 169,291 from the previous year, before the coronavirus appeared.

"We knew this was going to be bad, but I don't think even those of us who work in this area thought it was going to be this bad," said Harvard health policy professor David Grabowski, a nationally recognized expert on long-term care, who reviewed the report for The Associated Press.

"This was not individuals who were going to die anyway," Grabowski added. "We are talking about a really big number of excess deaths."

Investigators used a generally accepted method of estimating "excess" deaths in a group of people after a calamitous event. It did not involve examining individual death certificates of Medicare patients but comparing overall deaths among those in nursing homes to levels recorded the previous year. The technique was used to estimate deaths in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria in 2017 and in New York City after the first coronavirus surge last spring. It does not attribute a cause of death but is seen as a barometer of impact.

Death rates were higher in every month last year when compared with 2019. The report documented two spikes with particular implications for government policy and for protecting the most vulnerable in future outbreaks of life-threatening illnesses. In April of last year, a total of 81,484 Medicare patients in nursing homes died. Then eight months later, after lockdowns and frantic efforts to expand testing — but before vaccines became widely available — nursing home patients accounted for a staggering 74,299 deaths in December.

"This is happening long after it was clear that nursing homes were particularly vulnerable," said Nancy Harrison, a deputy regional inspector general who worked on the report. "We really have to look at that. Why did they remain so vulnerable?" Federal investigators are still drilling down to try to document the chain of causes and effects.

Tuesday's report was the most comprehensive yet from the government because it included statistics for the early part of last year, during the initial coronavirus surge. Medicare did not require nursing homes to report COVID-19 cases and deaths occurring before May 8, more than four months into the pandemic year.

In another new finding, the report showed that cases and deaths among Asian American patients tracked with the more severe impacts seen among Blacks and Latinos. Indeed, Asian Medicare enrollees in nursing homes saw the highest increase in death rates, with 27% dying in 2020 compared to 17% the previous year. For whites, the death rate grew to 24% in 2020 from 18% in 2019, a significant increase but not as pronounced.

Death rates for Hispanic and Black patients were 23% last year, up from 15% in 2019.

The inspector general's office based its analysis on Medicare billing data, also including patients in Medicare Advantage plans sold by private insurers. Medicare covers the vast majority of nursing home patients, and the report included long-term residents as well as those temporarily at a facility for rehab care.

Health economist Tamara Konetzka of the University of Chicago, who also reviewed the report for AP, said building an estimate from individual death certificates would have faced another set of challenges. Especially in the first wave of the pandemic, many who died would not necessarily have been tested for COVID-19, for example.

"By looking at excess deaths you can get away from some of the measurement issues and say how much worse things were in 2020 than in 2019," explained Konetzka, who has testified before Congress on the impact of COVID-19 in nursing homes.

The inspector general's findings about Asians highlight a riddle for researchers, said Konetzka. The reasons for higher cases and deaths among Blacks, Hispanics and Asians may not necessarily be tied to race and ethnicity. Instead, minority patients may be clustered in homes located in communities with more severe outbreaks.

The report also found that low-income nursing home patients covered by Medicare and Medicaid together were much more likely to have gotten COVID-19. The infection rate for that group reached 56%, and 26% died.

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Some states suffered worse impacts. By the end of December more than half of the Medicare patients in nursing homes in Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana and New Jersey had or likely had COVID-19.

Across the U.S., the coronavirus found ideal conditions to spread among frail nursing home patients living in close quarters. Many researchers believe it's likely staffers unwittingly brought the virus in from surrounding communities.

Although facilities locked down in March of last year, government efforts to help were haphazard. The industry complained of chronic shortages of protective gear, including basics like masks and gowns.

The Trump administration initially delegated responsibility for testing to states before belatedly marshaling more federal resources. HHS later laid the groundwork for vaccinations under the Trump administration, and the Biden administration followed through. As vaccination rates rose, nursing home cases plummeted, allowing facilities to again permit family visits.

The country can't move on yet, said deputy inspector general Harrison. "Hopefully, COVID will go away," she said. "But once that happens, there will always be infectious diseases, and we all need to ask ourselves what we can do to protect vulnerable nursing home residents going forward."

Iran's election unsettles Biden's hope for a nuclear deal

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Biden administration officials are insisting that the election of a hard-liner as Iran's president won't affect prospects for reviving the faltering 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran. But there are already signs that their goal of locking in a deal just got tougher.

Optimism that a deal was imminent faded as the latest talks ended Sunday without tangible indications of significant progress. And on Monday, in his first public comments since the vote, incoming Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi rejected a key Biden goal of expanding on the nuclear deal if negotiators are able to salvage the old one.

At the same time, Raisi is likely to raise the Iran's demands for sanctions relief in return for Iranian compliance with the deal, as he himself is already subject to U.S. human rights penalties.

"I don't envy the Biden team," said Karim Sadjapour, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace who has advised multiple U.S. administrations on Iran. "I think the administration now has a heightened sense of urgency to revise the deal before Raisi and a new hard-line team is inaugurated."

President Joe Biden and his team have made a U.S. to return to the deal one of their top foreign policy priorities. The deal was one of President Barack Obama's signature achievements, one that aides now serving in the Biden administration had helped negotiate and that Donald Trump repudiated and tried to dismantle as president.

Despite Raisi's impending presidency, Biden administration officials insist prospects for reaching an agreement are unaltered. They argue that Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who signed off on the 2015 deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, will make any final decisions regardless of who is president.

"The president's view and our view is that the decision leader is the supreme leader," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday. "That was the case before the election; it's the case today; it will be the case probably moving forward."

"Iran will have, we expect, the same supreme leader in August as it will have today, as it had before the elections, as it had in 2015 when the JCPOA was consummated for the first time," State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

But hopes for substantial progress fizzled last week ahead of the Iranian election amid a flurry of speculation about the impact of the vote on the indirect talks between Iran and the U.S. in Vienna. Diplomats and others familiar with the talks had thought the last round, the sixth, could produce at least a tangible result even if it fell short of a full deal.

Now, that round has ended and a seventh round has yet to be scheduled as Raisi, Iran's conservative judiciary chief, brandished an absolute rejection of anything more than Iran's bare minimum compliance

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with the 2015 agreement in exchange for a lifting all of U.S. sanctions.

In his public comments Monday, Raisi brushed aside U.S. calls for Iran to agree to follow-on discussions on expanding the initial nuclear deal to include its ballistic missile program and its support for regional groups that the U.S. designates terrorist organizations.

"It's nonnegotiable," Raisi said'

Iran experts agree it will be a tough, if not impossible, for Biden to get Iran to go beyond the nuclear agreement.

"I'm very skeptical that once we've lifted the sanctions to get them to return they'll feel any incentive to come back and negotiate more concessions," Sadjapour said. "And, if we coerce them with sanctions to come back to the table, they'll argue that we've abrogated our end of the nuclear deal. Again."

Critics of the nuclear deal maintain that the administration has already given away too much in exchange for too little by signaling its desire to repudiate Trump's repudiation of the nuclear deal. And, they say that even if Iran agrees to some sort of additional talks, the pledge will be meaningless.

"It was pretty obvious that the Iranians were never going to negotiate in good faith beyond the JCPOA," said Rich Goldberg, a Trump administration National Security Council official who has espoused a hard line on Iran.

"But now, even if the administration gets some sort of face-saving language from the Iranians about future talks, Raisi has already said they're not interested. The jig is up," he said. "You can't come back to a skeptical Congress, allies and deal opponents and say the promise means anything it means when Raisi has already said it doesn't."

But administration officials are adamant that as good as the nuclear deal is, it is insufficient and must be improved on.

"We do see a return to compliance as necessary but insufficient, but we also do see a return to compliance as enabling us to take on those other issues diplomatically," Price said, adding that the point had been made clear to the the Iranians "in no uncertain terms."

An additional complication is that Raisi will become the first serving Iranian president sanctioned by the U.S. government even before entering office, in part over his time as the head of Iran's internationally criticized judiciary — a situation that could complicate state visits and speeches at international forums such as the United Nations.

Psaki and Price both said that the U.S. will continue to hold Raisi accountable for human rights violations for which he was sanctioned by the Trump administration.

Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal in 2018 and set about a "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran that included re-instating all the sanctions eased under the agreement along with adding a host of new ones.

GOP ready to block elections bill in Senate showdown

By BRIAN SLODYSKO, CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Democrats' expansive elections and voting bill is all but certain to be rejected in a key test vote in the Senate, providing a dramatic example of Republicans' use of the filibuster to block legislation and forcing hard questions for Democrats over next steps.

The far-reaching proposal, at nearly 900 pages, is viewed by backers as the civil rights issue of the era, legislation that is suddenly of the highest priority after the 2020 election as states impose restrictive new laws that could make it more difficult to vote. In the evenly split Senate, Republicans are united in opposition, seeing the bill as federal overreach and denying Democrats the 60 votes that would be needed to overcome the filibuster and begin debate.

"Are you afraid to debate?" Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Monday ahead of the vote. "We're about to find out."

Months in the making, Tuesday's showdown over the For the People Act, as it is called, is hardly the end of the road but the start of long campaign ahead. President Joe Biden has vowed what the White House calls the "fight of his presidency" over ensuring Americans' access to the polls. At stake is not only election

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rules that make it easier to vote but also Democrats' own ability to confront the limits of bipartisanship and decide whether or not the filibuster rules should change.

Republican leader Mitch McConnell blasted the legislation ahead of the debate as a "disastrous proposal" that will get "no quarter" in the Senate.

The party that controls Washington has been preparing for this moment for months, even as lawmakers faced their own internal divisions over the sprawling bill, which would remove hurdles to voting erected in the name of election security, curtail the influence of big money in politics and reduce partisan influence over the drawing of congressional districts.

As recently as last week, Sen. Joe Manchin, a moderate West Virginia Democrat, said he couldn't support the bill without changes he wanted as a way to draw Republican support.

Manchin remained a holdout late Monday following a meeting with Biden at the White House, where the two discussed voting rights. The senator would not say whether he would vote with his party in trying to advance the bill, explaining he was still reviewing the final version. "I have to see the rest of it tonight," he said at the Capitol.

Manchin proposed his own changes last week as he tried to trim back some areas and expand others, adding provisions for a national voter ID requirement, which is anathema to many Democrats, and dropping a proposed public financing of campaigns.

The proposed Manchin changes were largely well received, welcomed by Biden's administration as a "step forward," while earning the nod of approval from one of the party's key voting rights advocates, former Georgia governor's race candidate Stacey Abrams.

It did little, however, to garner the bipartisan support Manchin was hoping for. Senate Republicans said they would likely reject any legislation that expands the federal government's role in elections.

"I keep thinking there's a few who want to," Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., who authored the legislation in the Senate, said during a conference call Monday night with the group Our Revolution. "But when McConnell lowered the boom," he continued, "we couldn't get a single Republican to join us."

The rock-solid opposition from the GOP senators brings to a head questions over the filibuster, the decades-old Senate rule that requires 60 votes for most bills to advance.

While some Democrats want to change the Senate's rules to push the elections bill and other priorities past the filibuster, Manchin and others including Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., are opposed to taking that next move. Biden, too, has said in the past that he wants to leave the filibuster intact.

"The filibuster compels moderation and helps protect the country from wild swings," Sinema wrote Monday in an opinion piece for The Washington Post. She welcomed a fulsome debate "so senators and our constituents can hear and fully consider the concerns and consequences."

Pressure to change the rule is mounting, though. For now, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the administration's hope is that the chamber's 50 Democrats are aligned and that an unsuccessful vote will prompt the search for a new path.

The White House didn't give its full support to the Manchin alternative. But Psaki said the president "is appreciative of the efforts by Sen. Manchin and others to continue to make progress on voting rights, which he feels is a huge priority."

Ensuing the bill's passage is taking on fresh urgency as former President Donald Trump continues to challenge the outcome of the 2020 election and is urging on the new laws in the Republican-led states.

State officials who certified the results of the 2020 election have dismissed Trump's false claims of voter fraud, and judges across the country have dismissed multiple lawsuits filed by Trump and his allies. Trump's own attorney general said at the time there was no evidence of widespread fraud that would change the outcome.

The changes being enacted in many of the Republican states are decried by voting rights advocates who argue the restrictions will make it more difficult for people to cast ballots, particularly minority residents in cities who tend to support Democrats.

As the Senate action churns, more changes could be coming to the bill.

Democrats want to protect against intimidation at the polls in the aftermath of the 2020 election. They

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propose enhancing penalties for those who would threaten or intimidate election workers and creating a "buffer zone" between election workers and poll watchers, among other possible changes.

Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., a lead sponsor of the bill, said the effort underway is to "respond to the growing threat of election subversion in GOP-led states across the country."

Democrats also want to limit the ability of state officials to remove a local election official without cause. Georgia Republicans passed a state law earlier this year that gives the GOP-dominated legislature greater influence over a state board that regulates elections and empowers it to remove local election officials deemed to be underperforming.

"The dangers of the voter suppression efforts we're seeing in Georgia and across the nation are not theoretical, and we can't allow power-hungry state actors to squeeze the people out of their own democracy by overruling the decisions of local election officials," said Sen. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga., who is working to advance the proposal in the Senate.

Kim sister derides US official, dismisses chances for talks

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un dismissed prospects for an early resumption of diplomacy with the United States, saying Tuesday that U.S. expectations of talks would "plunge them into a greater disappointment."

Kim Yo Jong's blunt statement indicates that the diplomatic impasse over North Korea's nuclear program is likely to continue unless the North suffers greater pandemic-related economic difficulties and needs urgent outside assistance, some experts said.

Hope for a restart of nuclear talks flared briefly after Kim Jong Un said last week that his country must be ready for both dialogue and confrontation, though more for confrontation. U.S. National Security adviser Jake Sullivan called Kim's comments an "interesting signal."

On Tuesday, Kim Yo Jong derided Sullivan's response.

"It seems that the U.S. may interpret the situation in such a way as to seek a comfort for itself," the official Korean Central News Agency quoted her as saying. "The expectation, which they chose to harbor the wrong way, would plunge them into a greater disappointment."

Shin Beomchul, an analyst with the Seoul-based Korea Research Institute for National Strategy, said North Korea has been communicating the same message for months -- that it has no intention to return to talks unless the United States offers meaningful concessions, likely in the form of eased economic sanctions. The Biden administration, for its part, doesn't want to budge either, he said.

"Both parties are locked in a waiting game -- North Korea wants the United States to make concessions first, and the United States has no intentions to match a level of action the North is demanding," Shin said.

On Monday, during a visit to Seoul, Sung Kim, the top U.S. envoy on North Korea affairs, said Washington is willing to meet the North "anywhere, anytime without preconditions." But he stressed that the Biden administration would continue to pressure North Korea with sanctions over its nuclear and missile ambitions.

Just before Kim Yo Jong's statement was released on Tuesday, Sung Kim met South Korean Unification Minister Lee In-young and said Washington and Seoul remain committed to seeking the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula through diplomacy. Lee said he hoped North Korea would return to the negotiating table at an early date and called the current situation "a very good chance" to resume talks.

Sung Kim later met South Korean President Moon Jae-in, and the two said they would strive to resume U.S.-North Korea talks, Moon's office said. The South Korean government didn't immediately comment on Kim Yo Jong's statement.

As a precondition for the talks' resumption, North Korea has repeatedly called on the United States to lift its "hostile policy" toward it, an apparent reference to the U.S.-led sanctions and regular military drills with South Korea. But experts say the Biden administration won't ease sanctions or make other major concessions before North Korea takes concrete steps toward denuclearization.

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North Korea may only ease its stance if it can no longer endure its ongoing economic hardship, some experts said. Kim Jong Un has admitted North Korea faces what he described as its "worst-ever" crises, due to drastically reduced international trade caused by pandemic-related border closings, mismanagement, the economic sanctions and crop-killing storms last year.

The deadlock "could be prolonged unless there's a change in the conditions facing the North, such as greater economic or pandemic-related difficulties," Shin said.

Analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at the private Sejong Institute in South Korea said Kim Yo Jong's statement suggested North Korea isn't ready to rejoin talks anytime soon.

"A mutual distrust and antagonism run so deep that the resumption of the North Korea-U.S. talks is difficult. Even if the U.S. and North Korea meet, it'll never be easy to find common ground," Cheong said.

Last Thursday, Kim Jong Un ordered officials to prepare for both dialogue and confrontation, "especially to get fully prepared for confrontation," in order to protect national security and dignity.

In an interview with ABC News, Sullivan said Sunday that "His comments this week we regard as an interesting signal. And we will wait to see whether they are followed up with any kind of more direct communication to us about a potential path forward."

U.S. officials have suggested Biden will take the middle ground between former President Donald Trump's direct dealings with Kim and ex-President Barack Obama's policy of "strategic patience." Details of Biden's North Korea policy haven't been publicly released.

U.S.-led diplomacy aimed at stripping North Korea of its nuclear program has stalled since February 2019, when the Americans rejected a North Korean demand for major sanctions relief in exchange for a partial surrender of its nuclear capabilities during a summit between Kim and Trump.

Spain's Cabinet aims for a fresh start by pardoning Catalans

MADRID (AP) — The Spanish Cabinet is meeting Tuesday to issue pardons for nine imprisoned Catalans who spearheaded the 2017 effort to establish an independent republic in the affluent northeastern region, a move that Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez says is needed to bring reconciliation.

The measure has been opposed by Spain's right wing and many on the left, becoming a risky political gamble for Sánchez, the Socialist leader.

But his minority left-wing coalition needs the Catalan legislators' support to pass new budgets and significant laws. And the prime minister has insisted that a hardline approach or the inaction of previous conservative administrations didn't solve the deepening conflict.

"With this action, we materially get nine people out of prison, but we symbolically add millions and millions of people to coexistence," the prime minister said on Monday in Barcelona, the Catalan regional capital, during a speech announcing the pardons.

A statement from the prime minister's office on Tuesday added that the government "has decided to confront the problem and to look for concord, opening a way for reconciliation and reunion."

Europe's leading human rights body, the Council of Europe, backed the pardons in a resolution passed by its assembly late on Monday. But the non-binding recommendations also chided Spain for curtailing the free speech of the Catalan politicians. Spain's Foreign Ministry responded by saying that the separatists were convicted by independent courts for breaking laws and not for just expressing their desire for independence.

Tensions over secession in the Catalan-speaking region of 7.5 million grew in earnest a decade ago amid recession-driven economic hardship and discontent over a conservative administration opposition to greater autonomy.

They came head to head in October 2017, when separatists passed a unilateral independence declaration based on the results of a referendum deemed illegal by Spain's top courts. The vote was boycotted by the unionist side and was held amid a police crackdown to stop it.

Australian prison to be evacuated after mice move in

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By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — A plague of mice that has ravaged vast swathes of eastern Australia has forced the evacuation of a prison while authorities repair gnawed electrical wiring and clear dead and decaying mice from walls and ceilings.

Around 200 staff and 420 inmates will be transferred from the Wellington Correctional Center in rural New South Wales state to other prisons in the region during the next 10 days while cleaning and repairs take place, Corrective Services Commissioner Peter Severin said on Tuesday.

"The health, safety and wellbeing of staff and inmates is our No. 1 priority so it's important for us to act now to carry out the vital remediation work," Severin said.

Millions of mice have caused havoc in the grain-growing region of Australia's most populous state for months, devouring crops and haystacks as well as invading homes, businesses, schools, hospitals and prisons.

The most common complaint about the plague is an ever-present stench of mice urine and decaying flesh. People report being bitten by mice in bed. Mouse carcasses and excrement in roof guttering are polluting farmers' water tanks and causing sickness.

The remediation work at the prison will include investigating ways to protect the facility from future mice plagues, which are a phenomenon largely unique to Australia.

Plagues usually happen when rain follows several years of drought. The current plague is the worst that many can remember in some areas.

Severin said the mice infestation was worst in prison buildings that weren't built from concrete.

"The mice have got into ... wall cavities, into roof spaces. They're dead but then they start obviously decaying and then the next problem is mites," Severin told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

Government mouse researcher Steve Henry said mice numbers had begun to plateau as the species always stops breeding during the Southern Hemisphere winter.

But numbers could explode again if conditions are right in the spring.

Hungary's immunity cards allow packed stands, raise concerns

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Tens of thousands of soccer fans packed the Puskas Arena in Budapest last week to attend Euro 2020 matches. It was the first full-house international soccer event in Europe in more than a year — made possible largely by Hungary's adoption of government-issued immunity cards.

The only one of the tournament's 10 host countries to allow full crowds in stadiums, Hungary has conducted one of Europe's most successful COVID-19 vaccination drives. The immunity cards attest that their bearers have received at least one vaccine dose or recovered from COVID-19, and allow them access to sports events as well as to services and venues such as hotels, spas, concerts, theaters and indoor restaurant dining.

Yet while the cards have allowed many to regain many aspects of pre-pandemic life, others worry that their use could impact fundamental rights.

"There was a lot of anxiety in society on potential discrimination," said David Vig, director of rights group Amnesty International Hungary. "(The government) said, 'There will be a distinction between people: Those who have the vaccination card, and those who do not.'"

Hungary's procurement of vaccines from Russia and China, as well as through the European Union, quickly gave it the second highest vaccination rate in the 27-member bloc after Malta. More than 66% of adults have received at least one dose of a vaccine, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

But in recent weeks, as most of those willing to be vaccinated have already got a jab, the pace of vaccination has slowed dramatically. Government figures show that some 2 million people still do not have an immunity card, which restricts them from many opportunities available to cardholders.

These continued restrictions for the unvaccinated underlie the government's strategy of providing incen-

tives for inoculation, Vig said.

"The vaccination card and the strategy behind it was good from the government's perspective. That is, it kind of pushed people towards vaccination," he said.

But in a statement in April, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union argued that the cards discriminate against those who "due to their state of health, cannot be vaccinated temporarily or permanently," such as women in certain stages of pregnancy, or those with chronic conditions that make vaccination inadvisable.

Those people, and others who could not complete the mandatory online vaccine registration for lack of internet access, face discrimination, the group argued.

While more than 60,000 fans were permitted into the Puskas Arena last week for Euro 2020 matches, Hungary's government has continued to limit other public events such as protests for those without immunity cards, citing pandemic concerns.

In early June, several thousand people rallied in Budapest against plans by right-wing Prime Minister Viktor Orban to host a Chinese university in the capital. Protest organizers, in an effort to skirt rules capping outdoor events at 500 people for non-cardholders, split the march into several smaller groups.

It is instances like these, Vig said, that demonstrate that the government has used the pandemic and immunity cards to curtail fundamental rights despite dramatically improving pandemic indicators in recent weeks.

"More than 50-55% of society was already vaccinated, (but) demonstrations were still impossible. ... That is a very clear violation of international human rights standards," Vig said, adding, however, that such limits on protests were later repealed.

"The government has some power to restrict these rights for a certain amount of time if it is necessary and if the restrictions are proportionate with ... the aim that they want to achieve, but not for a prolonged or an unlimited time," he said.

Akos Sipos, 45, a Budapest web analyst, said he is uncomfortable showing his personal identification alongside his immunity card when entering public venues, granting access to his personal information to those checking the card.

"I don't feel that it's a good thing if I have to show my identity card to a security guard if I want to eat a pizza somewhere," Sipos told The Associated Press.

"They have no business knowing when I was born" or other personal data, he said.

Still, he accepted that such measures are required to keep the pandemic under control.

"I understood this whole card thing as a necessary evil," he said. "Those who have been vaccinated definitely have to be tracked somehow."

Duterte threatens to arrest Filipinos who refuse vaccination

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — The Philippine president has threatened to order the arrest of Filipinos who refuse COVID-19 vaccination and told them to leave the country if they would not cooperate with the efforts to contain the pandemic.

President Rodrigo Duterte, who is known for his public outbursts and brash rhetoric, said in televised remarks Monday night that he has become exasperated with people who refuse to get immunized then help spread the coronavirus.

"Don't get me wrong. There is a crisis being faced in this country. There is a national emergency. If you don't want to get vaccinated, I'll have you arrested and I'll inject the vaccine in your butt," Duterte said.

"If you will not agree to be vaccinated, leave the Philippines. Go to India if you want or somewhere, to America," he said, adding he would order village leaders to compile a list of defiant residents.

A human rights lawyer, Edre Olalia, raised concerns over Duterte's threat, saying the president could not order the arrest of anybody who has not clearly committed any crime.

Duterte and his administration have faced criticism over a vaccination campaign saddled with supply problems and public hesitancy. After repeated delays, vaccinations started in March.

Duterte blamed the problems on wealthy Western countries cornering vaccines for their own citizens,

leaving poorer countries like the Philippines behind.

The Philippines is a COVID-19 hotspot in Asia, with more than 1.3 million cases and at least 23,749 deaths.

Newly sanctified Tunisian cemetery for migrants filling fast

By MEHDI AL-AREM and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

ZARZIS, Tunisia (AP) — Most of the headstones have dates but no names. Row after row of palest white, practically gleaming in the Mediterranean sun.

The cemetery in Zarzis is nearly exactly as Rachid Koraïchi pictured it when he sketched his vision of the "Garden of Africa" that would be the final resting place for hundreds of anonymous men, women and children whose bodies have washed up on the shores of this coastal Tunisian city in recent years.

For him, it was a duty "to make a burial ground, one with presence and intelligence, so that one day the families, the fathers, the mothers, the tribes and the countries know that their children are in a heavenly place, the first step to heaven," Koraïchi told The Associated Press.

Zarzis is a port city where migrants bound for Europe frequently wind up after their boats go astray in the Mediterranean's uncertain currents. One of its cemeteries is already filled with those who died trying to make the crossing. Zarzis residents refused to bury migrants in the local Muslim cemeteries.

So Koraïchi decided that the newly dead needed their own burial ground and he bought a plot of land in honor of his brother, who himself drowned in the Mediterranean while trying to migrate to Europe. "They died in the same waters, they died in the same sea and were taken by the same salt," he said.

His cemetery officially opened June 9 with a plan for 600 graves, but he had already been accepting bodies since 2019, soon after he bought the land. It is already one-third full. Koraïchi pays for the burials out of his own pocket.

He planted a small garden in the midst of an olive orchard, dotted with pomegranate trees and fragrant jasmine and interspersed with glazed tiles and winding walkways.

In all, around 600 sets of remains are interred in the two cemeteries for migrants. Only three have names.

"For too long, humanity has shown its powerlessness, even indifference, when men and women drown and there are too many who look away," Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO's director general, said on a visit to the region June 9 to donate a statue to the cemetery.

As for the belongings that wash up in Zarzis after the shipwrecks, many of them are collected in a nearby museum. Clothes, toys, scraps of identity documents — in all more than 125,000 shards of lives lost trying to reach Europe over more than two decades.

Mohsen Lihidheb, the museum's founder, is particularly troubled by the shoes, worn over months and years of walking.

"These are the shoes used during the crossing of the Libyan desert which was not easy," he said. "They did not manage to get new shoes in the rich countries, but died in the sea wearing these shoes."

Since the beginning of this year, 677 people have died on the stretch of central Mediterranean coastline from Libya into Tunisia trying to reach Europe, according to the International Organization for Migration. That figure has risen considerably since last year's slowdown in migration due to the pandemic, despite Europe's efforts to block departures.

Australia fights UN downgrade of Great Barrier Reef health

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australia said Tuesday it will fight against plans to downgrade the Great Barrier Reef's World Heritage status due to climate change, while environmentalists have applauded the U.N. World Heritage Committee's proposal.

The committee said in a draft report on Monday that "there is no possible doubt" that the network of colorful corals off Australia's northeast coast was "facing ascertained danger."

The report recommends that the world's most extensive coral reef ecosystem be added to UNESCO's

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List of World Heritage in Danger, which includes 53 sites, when the World Heritage Committee considers the question in China in July.

The listing could shake Australians' confidence in their government's ability to care for the natural wonder and create a role for UNESCO headquarters in devising so-called "corrective measures," which would likely include tougher action to reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions.

Any downgrade of the reef's World Heritage status could reduce tourism revenue that the natural wonder generates for Australia because fewer tourists would be attracted to a degraded environment and dead coral.

Reef cruise operators said the report was wrong and that tourists continued to be awed by dazzling coral and multicolored fish. But some tourists said the reef had seemed more colorful during visits decades ago.

Environment Minister Sussan Ley said she and Foreign Minister Marise Payne had called UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay to express the government's "strong disappointment" and "bewilderment" at the proposal.

Australia, which is one of 21 countries on the committee, will oppose the listing, Ley said.

"This decision was flawed. Clearly there were politics behind it," Ley told reporters. "Clearly those politics have subverted a proper process and for the World Heritage Committee to not even foreshadow this listing is, I think, appalling."

The network of 2,500 reefs covering 348,000 square kilometers (134,000 square miles) has been World Heritage-listed since 1981.

But its health is under increasing threat from climate change and rising ocean temperatures.

The report found the site had suffered significantly from coral bleaching events caused by unusually warm ocean temperatures in 2016, 2017 and last year.

Australian Marine Conservation Society environmental consultant Imogen Zethoven welcomed the committee's recognition that "Australia hasn't done enough on climate change to protect the future of the reef."

The reef would become the first site to be added to the List of World Heritage in Danger primarily for climate change reasons, Zethoven said.

"It would be a very significant step for the World Heritage Committee to make this decision and one that we really hope that it does make because it will open up a lot of potential change," she said.

Richard Leck, a spokesman for the environmental group WWF, said listing the reef as in-danger would be "a real shock" to many Australians.

In 2014, Australia was warned that an "in danger" listing was being considered rather than being proposed for immediate action.

Australia had time to respond by developing a long-term plan to improve the reef's health called the Reef 2050 Plan.

The committee said this week that plan "requires stronger and clearer commitments, in particular towards urgently countering the effects of climate change."

Ley said climate change policy debate should be restricted to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change.

"I know ... that climate change is the biggest threat to the reef and in no way am I stepping away from that recognition and countries including European countries have got strong views about what policies different countries should have on climate change and I understand that as well, but this is not the convention in which to have those conversations," Ley said, referring to the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

Observers say the swearing in on Tuesday of new Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce, who opposes action on climate change that increases prices, signals Australia is likely to set less ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Terry Hughes, director of the Australian Research Council's Center for Excellence in Coral Reef Studies, said Australia's refusal to commit to a net zero carbon emissions target by 2050 made the country a "complete outlier."

"This draft decision from UNESCO is pointing the finger at Australia and saying: 'If you're serious about

saving the Great Barrier Reef, you need to do something about your climate policies," Hughes told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

Serbian Roma girl band sings for women's empowerment

By JOVANA GEC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Their songs are about "women chained" in abuse witnessed by generations, or teenage brides being forced into marriage by their fathers. And they tell women to seek love, fight back and stand up for their right to be equal with men.

A female Roma band in Serbia is using music to preach women's empowerment within their community, challenging some deeply rooted traditions and centuries-old male domination.

Formed in 2014, "Pretty Loud" symbolically seeks to give a louder voice to Roma girls, encourage education and steer them away from the widespread custom of early marriage. The band has gained popularity and international attention, performing last year at the Women of the Year Festival in London.

"We want to stop the early marriages ... we want the girls themselves, and not their parents, to decide whether they want to marry or not," said Silvia Sinani, one of the band members. "We want every woman to have the right to be heard, to have her dreams and to be able to fulfil them, to be equal,"

Sinani, 24, said that the idea for an all-female band was born at education and artistic workshops run for Roma, or Gypsies, by a private foundation, Gypsy Roma Urban Balkan Beats. The girls initially danced in GRUBB's boys' band and then decided they wanted one of their own, she said.

"They (GRUBB) named us 'Pretty Loud' because they knew that women in Roma tradition are not really loud," she said.

The band's music, a combination of rap and traditional Roma folk beat, mainly targets a younger generation of girls who are yet to make their life choices — the band itself includes 14-year-old twin sisters. The songs tackle women's position in their community, and seek to boost their self-awareness.

The quest is essential in a community where early marriages are widespread — a UNICEF study published last year showed that over one third of girls in Roma settlements in Serbia aged 15-19 are already married. Of them, 16% were married before they were 15.

Alarmed, Serbian authorities, too, have formed a state commission to try to reverse the trend.

"I am an example of early marriage," said band member Zlata Ristic, now 27, who gave birth to a baby boy at the age of 16. "Nobody forced me into it but I have realized I should not have done it."

Now a single mother, Ristic said she wants other women in similar situations to know that their lives are not over once they have children, and that they can still pursue their dreams.

"My biggest reward is when 14-year-old girls write to me and say they want to become one of us, that they now attend school thanks to us, that they have improved their grades," she said.

Among the most underprivileged ethnic communities in Serbia and Europe more widely, the Roma largely live in segregated settlements on society's fringes, facing poverty, joblessness and prejudice.

Activists have warned that the COVID-19 pandemic has further fueled the social isolation of marginalized groups and increased their poverty. Disruptions of regular schooling due to the virus lockdowns have made it even harder for Roma children to stay in the system.

At the GRUBB center in Belgrade's Zemun district, several children could be seen working with young instructors in an improvised classroom. The girls from "Pretty Loud" teach at music and dance workshops run by GRUBB, which was established in Serbia in 2006.

Diana Ferhatovic, 18, first came to the center four years ago, initially seeking help with school lessons before joining the music program and finding her way into "Pretty Loud." Their performance in London last March — just as the COVID-19 pandemic was starting — was unforgettable, she said.

"I had a kind of positive jitters, we all did at first, the whole group," Ferhatovic said. "Then we blew them off their feet."

In times of crises, Lebanon's old must fend for themselves

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Tiny and bowed by age, Marie Orfali makes the trip five times a week from her Beirut apartment to the local church, a charity and a nearby soup kitchen to fetch a cooked meal for her and her 84-year-old husband, Raymond.

Their only support — Raymond's \$15,000 one-time end-of-service payment from when he retired more than 20 years ago — long ago ran dry.

They have since depended on charity to cover almost everything: rent, cleaning supplies, pain killers and food for their white dog Snoopy. But charity covers less and less as Lebanon's currency collapses. The cash they get from a benefactor and the church every month, once amounting to \$400, is now barely worth \$40.

The 76-year-old Marie broke down in tears when asked how she's doing. "I've become scared, I've become jittery," she said. "I sit and cry and think, I want money. I want to get stuff for the house."

With virtually no national welfare system, Lebanon's elderly are left to fend for themselves amid their country's economic turmoil. In their prime years, they survived 15 years of civil war that started in 1975 and bouts of instability. Now, in their old age, many have been thrown into poverty by one of the world's worst financial crises in the past 150 years.

Lebanon has the greatest number of elderly in the Middle East — 10% of the population of 6 million is over 65. Around 80% of the population above the age of 65 have no retirement benefits or health care coverage, according to the U.N.'s International Labor Organization.

Family members and charities, traditionally the prime source of support, are struggling with increasing needs as unemployment rises.

Any dollar savings the elderly had from a lifetime of work are locked up in banks, inaccessible in the banking crisis. The savings lost nearly 90% of their value as the local currency collapsed against the dollar. Imported medicine and basic goods are in jeopardy, and a once reliable health care system is crumbling.

"I don't have money to buy clothes or shoes," Marie said, whispering. She didn't want Raymond to hear her complain. He recently went through a COVID-19 infection and brain surgery and gets agitated, and it's only worsened by lockdowns and the financial crisis.

Raymond worked for 26 years as an orderly at one of Beirut's hospitals, and Marie as a custodian at a university.

Now they live among piles of their belongings in a rented apartment in east Beirut, trinkets filling the shelves and pictures of Jesus and the holy family adorning every wall. The black suits that Raymond once wore to parties — he was a lively dancer — still hang over his bed. A bag of bread is under the bed for easy access. He moves around the apartment with a walker. Their five children are struggling as well and can't help.

Over the past two years, more elderly have taken to the streets, searching through trash or begging, said Joe Taoutel, who runs Rafiq el-Darb, or Friends until the End, the charity where Marie gets some of the meals each week.

Taoutel delivers home meals to more than 60 elderly families, up from five before the crisis.

"Those who used to give are now in need," said Taoutel. "At first, groups would help their sects. Now, needs have increased, and no one can replace the state."

Lebanon is one of only 16 countries in the world with no pension scheme for private sector workers in case of old age, disability and death, according to the ILO. The national social security program covers only 30% of the labor force, mainly giving one-time payments at retirement, and is dangerously underfunded.

To rub salt in the wound, a massive explosion in Beirut last summer devastated parts of the city where hundreds of homes of Lebanon's older Christian population stood, temporarily or permanently displacing them.

The government is struggling to provide for a population where now 55% live under the poverty line since the crisis began in late 2019. The World Bank has given Lebanon a loan of \$246 million to offer cash assistance to about 160,000 Lebanese families — but disbursement has been delayed. The financial

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institution said it had no data for how many of the elderly are under the poverty line.

As the economy falters, more young Lebanese are migrating, leaving behind aging parents.

The U.N. estimates that by 2030, those above 65 may make up more than 15% of Lebanon's population, a trend that could be accelerated with the brain drain and a deteriorating health care system.

"The elderly and those with disabilities are remaining. If society is not aware of this problem, I think we're heading toward more crises," said Mustafa Helweh, head of Social Services Medical Association, a rehabilitation hospital and nursing home in Tripoli, northern Lebanon.

Thousands of foreign domestic workers — the backbone of the elderly care system — left as dollars became scarce. The overwhelmed health care system is no longer considered reliable.

At the height of the pandemic, nursing homes were considered a high risk around the world. In Lebanon, some families saw them as the answer.

Helweh's 104-year-old facility accommodates up to 300, a mix of elderly, mentally ill and people with disabilities. It halted admissions and visits at the start of the pandemic.

When it reopened six months later, 42 new patients were admitted, an unexpected rush. With currency depreciation, a private room now costs the equivalent of only about \$100 a month. The facility is refitting part of the basement for more rooms, but a plan for a 72-bed annex never took off. Foreign funds were stuck in the bank, and bureaucracy delayed government approval.

Private donations made up for shortages, though families were asked to look for medicines in short supply or bring in adult diapers, now five times more expensive. Nurses looked for jobs elsewhere as salaries couldn't keep up with inflation.

Suleiman Ali Yousef, an 81-year-old merchant, arrived nearly two months ago.

Yousef and his wife contracted coronavirus together last year. Unlike everything they did together the past 50 years, she passed away alone. His health weak, Yousef needed care. His children admitted him.

A self-made man, Yousef said he survived the treacherous business world with quick wits and good connections. He imported cheap goods from Europe during the civil war.

His wife managed the savings, and they lived well, never needing financial help from family. He only stopped working because of a stroke two years ago.

Now half his savings are stuck in the bank. The other half is merchandise stored at a warehouse. He has no social insurance.

"I never cost the state anything in my life. I worked and paid for everything," he said from his bed. "It must offer me a service. I am sick."

He despairs at finding himself alone and in need. "I don't want to go back to being a young man. No, thank you! But I want to take care of myself."

Back in the Orfalis apartment, Raymond said he can't afford to hire help. He can barely afford his pain killers.

His equally aging wife is his only caregiver. She changes his diapers and responds to his bell rings in the middle of the night from the room next door.

"She is suffering with me. I don't want her to suffer," he said, weeping. "I have nothing. Just God. May He take me back and relieve me."

Amid clamor to increase prescribed burns, obstacles await

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — In the 1950s, when University of California forestry professor Harold Biswell experimented with prescribed burns in the state's pine forests, many people thought he was nuts.

"Harry the Torch," "Burn-Em-Up Biswell" and "Doctor Burnwell" were some of his nicknames from critics, who included federal and state foresters and timber groups.

Six decades after Biswell preached an unpopular message to those who advocated full-on fire suppression, he is seen not as crazy but someone whose ideas could save the U.S. West's forests and ease wildfire dangers.

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Millions of acres have become overgrown, prone to wildfires that have devastated towns, triggered massive evacuations and blanketed the West Coast in thick smoke.

Today, officials want to sharply increase prescribed fires — those set intentionally and under carefully controlled conditions to clear underbrush, pine needle beds and other surface fuels.

Last month, four Democratic U.S. senators — Ron Wyden of Oregon, Joe Manchin of West Virginia, Maria Cantwell of Washington and Dianne Feinstein of California — introduced legislation that requires federal land managers to significantly increase the number and size of prescribed fires on federal lands. Wyden said it would more than double funding for prescribed burns.

“We would have a technically skilled prescribed fire workforce,” Wyden said in a phone interview. “We would streamline the smoke regulations in winter months.”

Wyden and the Biden administration are also seeking creation of a 21st century Civilian Conservation Corps, to provide more boots on the ground to work on forest health.

In New Mexico, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed legislation on March 18 that will clear the way for more prescribed fires by establishing liability standards for landowners who conduct them and creating a certification program.

In Oregon, a bill from state Sen. Jeff Golden would enact rules for prescribed fires and a certified burn manager program. He envisions Oregon having as many as hundreds of trained managers to supervise prescribed fires.

“I don’t see that we have any option other than to increase the prescribed burns,” said Golden, who is from the Rogue Valley, where wildfires tore into two towns last year. “We’ve got, across the Western U.S., a buildup of decades of fuels, and it’s going to burn.

“So do you want to burn in a planned, strategic way that has an element of control to it, or do you want it to burn in megafires, with all the costs — human, animal, environmental costs — that that entails?”

It took years for forest managers to come around to accept and then finally embrace prescribed burning. In the first half of the 20th century, fire was seen as the enemy, with federal and state forest managers believing prescribed burning damaged the environment, particularly timber, a commercial resource. But in the late 1960s and 1970s, federal forest managers began employing prescribed burns.

Yet scaling up the practice has been slow. From 1995 through 2000, an average of 1.4 million federal acres (566,560 hectares) were treated with prescribed fire each year, far short of the 70 million acres (28 million hectares) that in 2001 were in critical need of fuel reduction to avoid high-severity wildfires, biologist David Carle said in his 2002 book “Burning Questions: America’s Fight with Nature’s Fire.” Another 141 million acres (57 million hectares) also needed treatment.

Several cold realities are stacked against the latest plans: The periods between wildfire seasons when prescribed burning can happen safely are shrinking; some forests are too overgrown to ignite without thinning; and prescribed fires can shroud nearby towns.

“We have to be mindful of not pouring smoke into communities because that’s a violation of the Clean Air Act,” said Tim Holschbach, deputy chief of policy and planning with Oregon’s Department of Forestry.

Furthermore, many landowners are reluctant to use prescribed fire because of fears of getting hit with steep costs.

Some states can hold burners liable for any property damage caused by an escaped prescribed fire. Others use so-called simple negligence standards, which require the burner to practice reasonable care. A plaintiff would need to prove negligence for the burner to be responsible for damages and firefighting suppression costs. Gross negligence standards make it harder to hold people accountable, requiring plaintiffs to show burners acted with reckless disregard if fires get out of control.

To encourage prescribed burning on private lands, Oregon will explore shifting from simple to gross negligence. Gov. Kate Brown signed legislation on June 11 that directs a state agency, in consultation with stakeholders, to study whether states with such standards experience more prescribed fires and more out-of-control fires. The review must also examine the accessibility of insurance coverage for prescribed fires.

One of the most destructive escaped fires occurred in 2012, when the Colorado State Forest Service conducted a 50-acre (20-hectare) prescribed burn near the small town of Conifer, southwest of Denver.

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After the fire seemed to be out, high winds whipped it back to life.

Ann Appel, 51, was among worried residents who dialed 911.

"It's blowing smoke right over my house," she told an emergency dispatcher.

"Yeah, it's about 5 acres (2 hectares) and growing, so they've got crews on the way," the dispatcher replied.

Appel thanked the operator and hung up. Her body was later found in the ashes of her home.

Two other people also died in the fire, which ultimately consumed 6 square miles (15.5 square kilometers) and destroyed two dozen homes.

Colorado's immunity law capped liability at \$600,000 per incident, but after the fire, the Legislature removed the cap for controlled burns in cases where victims claim the state acted negligently. The state paid a total of \$18 million in compensation to two dozen parties. The largest settlement, \$4.8 million, went to Appel's husband and estate.

Prescribed burning has prevented disasters, and high rebuilding costs. In 2017, a wildfire threatened the resort town of Sisters, Oregon, but firefighters were able to control it because months earlier, crews removed trees and brush with machines, then ignited prescribed burns.

"The fire came to a halt, both because it had less fuels and also because in the thinned, more natural forest, there was a lot more space for the firefighters," noted Democratic Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon, who is pushing for more funding for forest treatment.

Scott Stephens, a professor of wildland fire science at the University of California, Berkeley, wants a big increase in prescribed burns, along with mechanical forest thinning, but predicts it will be gradual due to both a lack of people trained in it and of political and societal support.

That prescribed burning is now widely seen as a remedy would have been welcome news to Biswell, who died in 1992 at age 86.

Harold Weaver, a forester for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, was also an early advocate. In 1955, Weaver published an article titled "Fire as an enemy, friend and tool in forest management." Like Biswell, he was cold-shouldered. The two supported each other.

The West, which is more susceptible to wildfires because of its vast wildlands and dry climate, has been stepping up prescribed burns.

In 2019, 3.7 million acres were treated by prescribed fire in the West, a 268% increase from 2011, the National Association of State Foresters and the Coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils said in a report.

Stephens said prescribed fire and restoration thinning should increase at least five-fold to turn things around and create healthy forests as Biswell, his predecessor at Berkeley, envisioned.

"Once you get areas treated, you have to come back in around 15 years for maintenance treatments. And this never ends," Stephens said. "This is a key point: The program has to last forever."

Rights group calls for more pressure on Nicaragua government

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (AP) — An international human rights organization is calling for increased pressure on Nicaragua President Daniel Ortega as arrests of political opposition figures continue ahead of Nov. 7 elections.

Human Rights Watch planned to release a report Tuesday detailing the politically motivated arrests in recent weeks of nearly 20 opposition pre-candidates, prominent businessmen, former government officials and political leaders. The Associated Press received a copy of the report in advance.

The organization called on the United Nations Security Council to invoke Article 99 of its charter "to raise this issue in the U.N. Security Council and present it as a growing crisis involving grave human rights abuses which could undermine stability in the region."

Ortega is seeking a fourth consecutive term as president and has been systematically clearing his path of potential challengers through arrests for alleged crimes against the state. The government had already significantly reduced the public space for opposition to maneuver through repressive laws and intimidation.

"High-profile arrests and other serious human rights violations against critics appear to be part of a

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broader strategy to eliminate political competition, stifle dissent, and pave the way for President Daniel Ortega's re-election to a fourth consecutive term," Human Rights Watch said.

Late Monday, Nicaragua police announced they had placed former first lady María Fernanda Flores Lanzas, wife of ex-President Arnoldo Aleman, under house arrest for alleged crimes against the state.

There was no mention of Aleman or his whereabouts. The police statement said she would remain under guard while the allegations against her were investigated.

Also Monday, journalist Carlos Fernando Chamorro, son of former President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, said via Twitter that police had raided his home. He demanded they respect the well-being of his sister-in-law and others with her.

"They will not be able to silence journalism," he wrote. In May, police raided the offices of his online news outlet Confidencial. The government seized the outlet's old offices in December 2018.

Earlier, Nicaraguan writer and former Vice President Sergio Ramírez said there was no chance of free and fair elections in Nicaragua and that the opposition should refuse to participate in voting that would only legitimize Ortega's victory.

Last week, most members of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States condemned the Nicaraguan government's actions and called for the immediate release of political prisoners. On Monday, Argentina and Mexico, two countries who abstained from the vote, recalled their ambassadors from Nicaragua for consultation over the developments.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Treasury Department slapped sanctions on Ortega's daughter and a top army official, as well as several others close to the president.

"The gravity and intensification of the Ortega government's brutal crackdown on critics and members of the opposition in recent weeks requires a redoubling of international pressure," said José Miguel Vivanco, Americas director at Human Rights Watch.

The report noted that more than 108,000 Nicaraguans have fled the country since street protests began in April 2018 and were violently put down by the government. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights found that 328 people were killed and some 2,000 wounded. Ortega has maintained those protests were a foreign-backed coup attempt.

Most of the arrests in recent weeks have been related to allegations that opposition figures accepted foreign financing for activities against the government.

Even before the latest crackdown, more than 100 political prisoners were already jailed in Nicaragua, the report said. Among them, Human Rights Watch has documented three cases of women who suffered assault and sexual aggression during their imprisonment.

In developing the report, Human Rights Watch interviewed 53 people in Nicaragua, including 46 activists, lawyers, journalists, human rights defenders and opposition figures who were victims of harassment of arbitrary detention. It said the government had not responded to its request for information on those cases.

Government targets frequently report police vehicles parked outside their homes that prevent them from leaving.

"There is virtually no chance Nicaraguans can exercise their fundamental rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association, nor to vote and run for public office, if they are seen as opposing the ruling party," Vivanco said. "Top UN officials and UN member countries that care about human rights have an opportunity to prevent a regional crisis by pressuring Ortega to end his repression now. They should seize it."

Asian shares track rebound on Wall Street

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares have rebounded from their retreat a day earlier, tracking Wall Street's recovery from the Federal Reserve's reminder it will eventually provide less support to markets.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 jumped 2.8% in morning trading to 28,785.24. Australia's S&P/ASX 200

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added 1.4% to 7,336.30. South Korea's Kospi rose 0.6% to 3,260.11. Hong Kong's Hang Seng edged up 0.1% to 28,522.78, while the Shanghai Composite gained 0.9% to 3,559.32.

Although the latest bout of jitters over a possible easing of help from the Federal Reserve and other central banks appears to have passed, analysts said rising coronavirus cases in the region remained a concern.

"Much of the region is dealing with renewed waves of COVID-19 infections. These waves, especially in the case of India, Indonesia and some other countries in Southeast Asia, are the most severe yet," said Venkateswaran Lavanya at Mizuho Bank in Singapore.

On Monday, the S&P 500 snapped 1.4% higher, to 4,224.79, recovering nearly three-quarters of its worst weekly loss since February. Oil producers, banks and other companies that were hit particularly hard last week led the way.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 1.8% to 33,876.97 and the Nasdaq composite rose 0.8%, to 14,141.48.

Investors are still figuring all the ramifications of the Fed's forecast that may start raising short-term interest rates by late 2023. That's earlier than previously thought. The Fed also began talks about slowing programs meant to keep longer-term rates low, an acknowledgment of the strengthening economy and threat of higher inflation.

The market's immediate reaction to last week's Fed news was to send stocks lower and interest rates higher. Higher rates would make stock prices, which have been climbing faster than corporate profits, look even more expensive than they do already.

But it's not like the Fed said it will hike rates from their record low of nearly zero anytime soon.

"If markets are worried about a march back to more normal monetary and fiscal policy as the economy recovers, it will be a very long march," Barings chief global strategist Christopher Smart said in a note. In the meantime, support from both the Federal Reserve and the U.S. government should continue to help stock prices, even if they do look expensive compared with history, he said.

Companies whose profits are the most closely tied to the economy's strength and inflation were among the market's strongest on Monday.

Hess, Marathon Oil and Devon Energy all rose at least 6.9% as energy stocks rallied with the price of oil. Banks were also strong, with Bank of America up 2.5% and Wells Fargo climbing 3.7%.

High-growth companies able to flourish almost regardless of the economy lagged behind in a reversal from last week's trend, when investors rattled by the Fed piled back into the biggest winners of the pandemic.

Amazon slipped 0.9%, and the lagging performance for tech meant the Nasdaq trailed other indexes.

More bumps may be ahead for markets, which had been mostly quiet for weeks before the Fed's announcement. Fed Chair Jerome Powell will speak before a House subcommittee on Tuesday about the Fed's response to the pandemic.

In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude picked up 13 cents to \$73.25 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It jumped \$1.83 to \$73.12 on Monday. Brent crude, the international standard, gained 23 cents to \$75.13 a barrel.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar rose to 110.39 Japanese yen from 110.31 yen. The euro rose to \$1.1918 from \$1.1914.

Nassib becomes first active NFL player to come out as gay

By ARNIE STAPLETON AP Pro Football Writer

Las Vegas Raiders defensive end Carl Nassib on Monday became the first active NFL player to come out as gay.

Nassib, who is entering his sixth NFL season and second with the Raiders, announced the news on Instagram, saying he wasn't doing it for the attention but because he felt representation and visibility were important.

"I just wanted to take a quick moment to say that I'm gay," Nassib said in his video message from his home in West Chester, Pennsylvania. "I've been meaning to do this for a while now, but I finally feel com-

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comfortable enough to get it off my chest.

"I really have the best life. I got the best family, friends and job a guy can ask for. I'm a pretty private person, so I hope you guys know that I'm really not doing this for attention. I just think that representation and visibility are so important."

Nassib added in a written message that followed the video that he "agonized over this moment for the last 15 years" and only recently decided to go public with his sexuality after receiving the support of family and friends.

"I am also incredibly thankful for the NFL, my coaches, and fellow players for their support," Nassib wrote. "I would not have been able to do this without them. From the jump I was greeted with the utmost respect and acceptance."

Nassib, whose announcement came during Pride Month, added that he was donating \$100,000 to the Trevor Project, a nonprofit that seeks to prevent suicides among LGBTQ youth.

"The NFL family is proud of Carl for courageously sharing his truth today," NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said in a statement. "Representation matters. We share his hope that someday soon statements like his will no longer be newsworthy as we march toward full equality for the LGBTQ+ community. We wish Carl the best of luck this coming season."

Nassib's announcement also was greeted by Brian Burke, president of the NHL's Pittsburgh Penguins. Burke has been a major proponent of LGBTQ rights for more than a decade since his late son Brendan came out as gay.

"Proud to support Carl and his decision to come out as the first active gay player in the NFL," Burke said. "I hope other sports executives will join me in publicly expressing their support as well."

The Raiders showed their support, writing, "Proud of you, Carl," on their repost of Nassib's message on Twitter and adding a black heart emoji.

DeMaurice Smith, executive director of the NFL Players Association, tweeted: "Our union supports Carl and his work with the Trevor Project is proof that he — like our membership — is about making his community and this world a better place not for themselves, but for others."

Penn State coach James Franklin said he and his wife Fumi were inspired by Nassib's announcement to donate \$10,000 to the Trevor Project.

"I am very proud of Carl for his courage and voice," Franklin said. "This announcement doesn't surprise me because if you know Carl, you know his strength. Carl's story continues to add chapters which will have an impact well beyond the field of play."

Nassib led the nation with 15½ sacks in 2015, Franklin's second season in State College, and he was a cornerstone of the program's path back to contention.

"Carl's brave announcement will forge a path for others to be true to their authentic self," Franklin added. "I was proud of Carl when he led the nation in sacks, but I'm even more proud of him now."

Former All-Pro linebacker Shawne Merriman commended Nassib and suggested teammates and opponents won't have a problem with his announcement.

"Congrats to Carl Nassib on coming out that's a big step, I think that most players are concerned if you can play or not," Merriman tweeted.

In a post saying he was proud of Nassib, Hall of Famer Warren Moon said he played with several gay football players in a storied pro career that spanned from 1978 to 2000 but none were "comfortable enough to go public."

"They were great teammates, & obviously very talented. As long as they helped us win and were great teammates, their sexual preference was never an issue," Moon wrote. "We live in a different time now where diversity is much more accepted. Cheers Carl, and I hope this lets other athletes know, it's OK to say who you are..."

Added fellow Nittany Lions alum and Giants running back Saquon Barkley, "Much respect brudda."

Sarah Kate Ellis, president and CEO of GLAAD, a leading LGBTQ advocacy organization, called Nassib's "powerful coming out is a historic reflection of the growing state of LGBTQ visibility and inclusion in the world of professional sports, which has been driven by a long list of brave LGBTQ athletes who came

before him.”

Ellis said Nassib’s story “will not only have a profound impact on the future of LGBTQ visibility and acceptance in sports, but sends a strong message to so many LGBTQ people, especially youth, that they too can one day grow up to be and succeed as a professional athlete like him.”

More than a dozen NFL players have come out as gay after their careers were over.

Former University of Missouri defensive star Michael Sam was the first openly gay football player ever selected in the NFL draft, going in the seventh round to the then-St. Louis Rams in 2014. But he never made the final roster and retired in 2015 having never played in an NFL regular-season game.

Nassib is a sixth-year pro who was drafted by the Cleveland Browns in 2016 in the third round (65th overall) out of Penn State. He played two seasons for the Browns and two for Tampa Bay before joining the Raiders in 2020. He has 20 1/2 sacks in 73 career games.

Taliban take key Afghan district, adding to string of gains

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Taliban fighters took control of a key district in Afghanistan’s northern Kunduz province Monday and encircled the provincial capital, police said, as the insurgent group added to its recent battlefield victories while peace talks have stalemated.

The Taliban’s gains came as the Pentagon reaffirmed the U.S. troop withdrawal was still on pace to conclude by early September.

Fighting around Imam Sahib district began late Sunday and by midday Monday the Taliban had overrun the district headquarters and were in control of police headquarters, said Inamuddin Rahmani, provincial police spokesman said.

Taliban militants were within a kilometer (.6 miles) of Kunduz, the provincial capital but had not entered into the city, he said, although there were reports of small bands of Taliban near the outskirts and residents trying to leave for Kabul.

Dozens of districts have fallen to the Taliban since May 1, when U.S. and NATO troops began their final departure from Afghanistan. Like Imam Sahib district in northern Kunduz, their significance often lies in their proximity to roads and major cities.

Imam Sahib is strategically located near Afghanistan’s northern border with Tajikistan, a key supply route from Central Asia.

Rahmani said police and Afghan National Army soldiers had jointly tried to defend the district. He said it still wasn’t clear how many casualties the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces suffered in the protracted battle or how many Taliban were killed or wounded.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahed confirmed Imam Sahib district was in Taliban hands.

Several other districts in Kunduz have also fallen to the insurgent group in the latest round of fighting, including Dasht-e-Archi, which neighbors Imam Sahib, said Rahmani, further consolidating local transportation links in the area.

Syed Mohammad Mousavi drove with his family to the relative safety of Kabul from northern Mazar-e-Sharif, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) west of Kunduz on Sunday.

He said people were trying to leave Kunduz city for Kabul fearing additional fighting. “The Taliban were all over the road, checking cars. We were very scared,” he said after reaching the capital.

In recent days, the Taliban have taken several districts across the three northern provinces of Kunduz, Baghlan and Balkh, said Mousavi. Significantly, witnesses said Doshi district in Baghlan province was in Taliban hands, which if it true gives the insurgent group control of the one road that links five northern provinces to the capital Kabul.

The Taliban have circulated videos on their website and to WhatsApp groups which they claim show government soldiers who have surrendered being told to return to their homes and receiving money from the Taliban. On Sunday, Taliban leader Mawlawi Hibatullah Akhunzada issued a statement ordering his soldiers to “treat those who surrender well and display good behavior with them.”

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But the fighting has been bitter in some districts with both sides suffering casualties. A senior police official speaking on condition he not be identified because he is not authorized to speak to the media said the police fighting in the districts are mostly from poor families. Those families have remained poor despite the trillions of dollars spent in Afghanistan in the past 20 years. "They have not seen changes in their lives and are indifferent so they see no difference. ... They want to save their lives just for today."

Taliban gains and the steady withdrawal of the remaining 2,500-3,500 U.S. troops and 7,000 NATO forces have lent an urgency to efforts to find a negotiated end to Afghanistan's protracted conflict.

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby on Monday said Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has regularly reviewed the U.S. withdrawal, which he said is "on pace" and will be finished by early September. "It is a dynamic situation, and we've said that from the very beginning," Kirby said.

Austin is "looking at the situation every day with a fresh set of eyes to see if, you know, the pace we are setting is the appropriate pace." Among the uncertainties, officials have said, is the State Department's needs for embassy security and its decisions about getting interpreters and other Afghans who worked with the Americans out of the country.

Talks between the government and the Taliban taking place in Qatar have stalemated. While Taliban leaders say they are ready to negotiate, observers familiar with the talks say the insurgent movement seems more anxious to chalk up military gains hoping to strengthen their negotiating position.

Later this week, President Joe Biden will meet with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, the head of the country's High Council for National Reconciliation, which oversees the government's negotiation team.

Friday's meeting in Washington, according to a White House statement, is intended to reaffirm America's financial and humanitarian aid "to support the Afghan people, including Afghan women, girls and minorities."

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Monday their conversation would also "continue to discuss how we can work together to ensure that Afghanistan never again becomes a safe haven for terrorist groups who pose a threat to the U.S. homeland."

Judge tosses most claims over clearing protesters in DC park

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge has dismissed a majority of the claims filed by activists and civil liberties groups who accused the Trump administration of violating the civil rights of protesters who were forcefully removed by police using chemical agents from a park near the White House before then-President Donald Trump walked to a nearby church to take a photo.

U.S. District Judge Dabney Friedrich said Monday the claims in the suit, which alleged that Trump and then-Attorney General William Barr had conspired to violate the rights of protesters last June, were speculative and it was premature for the court to conclude whether the actions of law enforcement officers were justified.

Friedrich dismissed the claims against Barr and other federal officials, including the acting U.S. Park Police chief, Gregory Monahan, finding there wasn't sufficient evidence to prove there was any agreement or plan to violate the rights of the protesters. The judge also said the law gives them immunity in civil litigation.

In a 51-page decision, the judge did allow the claims against the Metropolitan Police Department and the Arlington Police Department — their officers were involved in clearing the park — to proceed.

The lawsuit stemmed from one of the most high-profile moments of the Trump presidency, when federal and local law enforcement officials aggressively forced a group of largely peaceful protesters back from Lafayette Square outside of the White House, firing smoke bombs and pepper balls into the crowd to disperse the group. Officers were seen shoving protesters and journalists as they pushed the crowd back.

Barr has said he met with other law enforcement officials earlier that day to review a plan to extend the security perimeter around the White House to protect federal agents after days of unrest in Washington following the death of George Floyd at the hands of police officers in Minneapolis.

After the crowd was forcefully dispersed, Trump, followed by an entourage of his most senior aides — including Barr — along with Secret Service agents and reporters, walked over to St. John's Church, a land-

mark building where every president has prayed, which had been damaged a day earlier in a protest fire.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of the group Black Lives Matter D.C. and individual protesters who were present by the ACLU of DC, Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and the law firm of Arnold & Porter.

In a statement, Arthur Ago, the director of the criminal justice project at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, said the ruling set an "extremely dangerous precedent" and that former officials like Barr were "getting off scot-free."

"We will always stand up for the rights of those peacefully demonstrating for racial justice, and this ruling sends the wrong message for police accountability efforts at a time when it is needed the most," Ago said.

Supreme Court win for college athletes in compensation case

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court ruled unanimously Monday the NCAA can't limit education-related benefits — like computers and paid internships — that colleges can offer their sports stars, a victory for athletes that could help open the door to further easing in the decades-old fight over paying student-athletes.

Schools recruiting top athletes could now offer tens of thousands of dollars in education-related benefits that also include study-abroad programs and graduate scholarships. However, the case doesn't decide whether students can simply be paid salaries for the benefits their efforts bring — measured in tens of millions for many universities.

The high court agreed with a lower court's determination that NCAA limits on the education-related benefits that colleges can offer athletes who play Division I basketball and football violate antitrust laws.

The case is important in the short term for students who may see schools competing for talent by sweetening their offers with a variety of education-related benefits. It's also important in the long term because it sets the stage for future challenges to NCAA rules limiting athletes' compensation.

Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote for the court that the NCAA sought "immunity from the normal operation of the antitrust laws," an argument the court rejected. Gorsuch said that allowing colleges and universities to offer "enhanced education-related benefits ... may encourage scholastic achievement and allow student-athletes a measure of compensation more consistent with the value they bring to their schools."

Under current NCAA rules, students cannot be paid, and the scholarship money a college can offer is capped at the cost of attending the school.

The NCAA had defended its rules as necessary to preserve the amateur nature of college sports, preventing a blurring of the line between them and professional teams, with colleges trying to lure talented athletes by offering over-the-top benefits. A lower court had upheld the NCAA's limits on scholarships and cash awards, and the high court wasn't asked to weigh in on those.

Writing for only himself, Justice Brett Kavanaugh signaled where Monday's decision may lead. He said there are "serious questions" about whether the NCAA's other restrictions on compensating athletes can stand. Kavanaugh wrote that "traditions alone cannot justify the NCAA's decision to build a massive money-raising enterprise on the backs of student athletes who are not fairly compensated."

"Nowhere else in America can businesses get away with agreeing not to pay their workers a fair market rate on the theory that their product is defined by not paying their workers a fair market rate. ... The NCAA is not above the law," wrote Kavanaugh, who as a college student played on Yale's junior varsity basketball team.

The case was brought by former athletes, including West Virginia football player Shawne Alston. It followed a separate, earlier lawsuit brought by athletes including former UCLA basketball player Ed O'Bannon and NBA legends Oscar Robertson and Bill Russell where an appeals court concluded NCAA rules aren't exempt from antitrust law. That case ended with the Supreme Court declining to weigh in.

As a result of Monday's ruling, the NCAA itself can't bar schools from offering Division I basketball and football players additional education-related benefits. But individual athletic conferences can still set limits if they choose.

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"It is our hope that this victory in the battle for college athletes' rights will carry on a wave of justice uplifting further aspects of athlete compensation," said Steve Berman, an attorney for the former college athletes, in a statement following the ruling. "This is the fair treatment college athletes deserve."

The court's ruling comes at a time when the NCAA has already been debating how to amend its rules to allow college athletes to profit from their names, images and likenesses, often abbreviated NIL. That would allow athletes to earn money for sponsorship deals, online endorsement and personal appearances.

NCAA President Mark Emmert last week urged member schools to pass a long-stagnant names-and-images reform proposal before the end of the month. If they don't, he will take action himself, he said.

Emmert told The Associated Press on Monday that the high court's ruling makes going about the NIL reforms "more complicated" but "doesn't mean we can't and we shouldn't."

An NCAA governing body with the power to adopt changes is scheduled to meet this week. Meanwhile, six state laws that allow athletes to receive names-and-images compensation will go into effect July 1. The NCAA has asked Congress for help in the form of a federal law, but lawmakers are nowhere near passing legislation.

The players associations of the NFL, the NBA and the WNBA had all urged the justices to side with the ex-athletes, as did the Biden administration.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday of the athletes: The "decision recognizes that, as with all Americans, their hard work should not be exploited."

NASA sends squid from Hawaii into space for research

HONOLULU (AP) — Dozens of baby squid from Hawaii are in space for study.

The baby Hawaiian bobtail squid were raised at the University of Hawaii's Kewalo Marine Laboratory and were blasted into space earlier this month on a SpaceX resupply mission to the International Space Station.

Researcher Jamie Foster, who completed her doctorate at the University of Hawaii, is studying how spaceflight affects the squid in hopes of bolstering human health during long space missions, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported Monday.

The squid have a symbiotic relationship with natural bacteria that help regulate their bioluminescence.

When astronauts are in low gravity their body's relationship with microbes changes, said University of Hawaii professor Margaret McFall-Ngai, who Foster studied under in the 1990s.

"We have found that the symbiosis of humans with their microbes is perturbed in microgravity, and Jamie has shown that is true in squid," said McFall-Ngai. "And, because it's a simple system, she can get to the bottom of what's going wrong."

Foster is now a Florida professor and principal investigator for a NASA program that researches how microgravity affects the interactions between animals and microbes.

"As astronauts spend more and more time in space, their immune systems become what's called dys-regulated. It doesn't function as well," Foster said. "Their immune systems don't recognize bacteria as easily. They sometimes get sick."

Foster said understanding what happens to the squid in space could help solve health problems that astronauts face.

"There are aspects of the immune system that just don't work properly under long-duration spaceflights," she said. "If humans want to spend time on the moon or Mars, we have to solve health problems to get them there safely."

The Kewalo Marine Laboratory breeds the squid for research projects around the world. The tiny animals are plentiful in Hawaiian waters and are about 3 inches (7.6 centimeters) long as adults.

The squid will come back to Earth in July.

US hits encouraging milestones on virus deaths and shots

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

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COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. have dipped below 300 a day for the first time since the early days of the disaster in March 2020, while the drive to put shots in arms hit another encouraging milestone Monday: 150 million Americans fully vaccinated.

The coronavirus was the third leading cause of death in the U.S. in 2020, behind heart disease and cancer, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But now, as the outbreak loosens its grip, it has fallen down the list of the biggest killers.

CDC data suggests that more Americans are dying every day from accidents, chronic lower respiratory diseases, strokes or Alzheimer's disease than from COVID-19.

The U.S. death toll stands at more than 600,000, while the worldwide count is close to 3.9 million, though the real figures in both cases are believed to be markedly higher.

About 45% of the U.S. population has been fully vaccinated, according to the CDC. Over 53% of Americans have received at least one dose of vaccine. But U.S. demand for shots has slumped, to the disappointment of public health experts.

Dr. Ana Diez Roux, dean of Drexel University's school of public health, said the dropping rates of infections and deaths are cause for celebration. But she cautioned that the virus still has a chance to spread and mutate given the low vaccination rates in some states, including Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Wyoming and Idaho.

"So far it looks like the vaccines we have are effective against the variants that are circulating," Diez Roux said. "But the more time the virus is jumping from person to person, the more time there is for variants to develop, and some of those could be more dangerous."

New cases are running at about 11,400 a day on average, down from over a quarter-million per day in early January. Average deaths per day are down to about 293, according to Johns Hopkins University, after topping out at over 3,400 in mid-January.

In New York, which suffered mightily in the spring of 2020, Gov. Andrew Cuomo tweeted on Monday that the state had 10 new deaths. At the height of the outbreak in the state, nearly 800 people a day were dying from the coronavirus.

Some states are faring worse than others. Missouri leads the nation in per-capita COVID-19 cases and is fourth behind California, Florida and Texas in the number of new cases per day over the past week despite its significantly smaller population.

The surge is being driven by new cases in a farming region in the northern part of the state and in the southwest corner, which includes the towns of Branson and Springfield. COVID-19 hospitalizations in southwest Missouri have risen 72% since the beginning of the month as of Friday.

The fall will bring new waves of infection, but they will be less severe and concentrated more in places with low vaccination rates, said Amber D'Souza, a professor of epidemiology at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

"So much depends on what happens over the summer and what happens with children," D'Souza said. "Anyone who is not vaccinated can become infected and transmit the virus."

Meanwhile, because of regulatory hurdles and other factors, President Joe Biden is expected to fall short of his commitment to share 80 million vaccine doses with the rest of the world by the end of June, officials said Monday.

Ransomware gangs get paid off as officials struggle for fix

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

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small and medium-sized. Too many are unprepared. The consequences could also be dire for the nation itself. Recent high-profile extortive attacks led to runs on East Coast gas stations and threatened meat supplies.

Although the Biden administration has made battling ransomware crime a national security priority, public officials are fumbling over how to respond to the ransom payment dilemma. 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 recoup 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 that 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 health care service was hit last month.

Five weeks on, health care 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 affected U.S. and Canadian clients.

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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 spokesperson 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 Chair 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.

Angelina Jolie visits Burkina Faso as U.N. Special Envoy

By LUDIVINE LANIEPCE and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

GOUDOUBO, Burkina Faso (AP) — Hollywood actress Angelina Jolie has visited war-weakened Burkina Faso to show solidarity with people who continue to welcome the displaced, despite grappling with their own insecurity, and said the world isn't doing enough to help.

"The humanitarian crisis in the Sahel seems to me to be totally neglected. It is treated as being of little geopolitical importance," Jolie told the Associated Press. "There's a bias in the way we think about which countries and which people matter."

While Burkina Faso has been battling a five-year Islamic insurgency linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State that's killed thousands and displaced more than one million people, it is also hosting more than 22,000 refugees, the majority Malian.

As Special Envoy to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Jolie marked World Refugee

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Day on Sunday in Burkina Faso's Goudoubo refugee camp in the Sahel, where she finished a two-day visit. She spoke with the camp's Malian refugees and internally displaced people in the nation's hard-hit Center-North and Sahel regions.

After 20 years of work with the U.N. refugee agency, Jolie told the AP the increasing displacement meant the world was on a "terrifying trajectory towards instability", and that governments had to do something about the conflicts driving the vast numbers of refugees.

"Compared to when I began working with UNHCR twenty years ago, it seems like governments have largely given up on diplomacy ... countries which have the least are doing the most to support the refugees," she said.

"The truth is we are not doing half of what we could and should ... to enable refugees to return home, or to support host countries, like Burkina Faso, coping for years with a fraction of the humanitarian aid needed to provide basic support and protection," Jolie said.

Maliens began fleeing to Burkina Faso in 2012 after their lives were upended by an Islamic insurgency, where it took a French-led military intervention to regain power in several major towns. The fighting has since spread across the border to Burkina Faso, creating the fastest growing displacement crisis in the world. Last month Burkina Faso experienced its deadliest attack in years, when gunmen killed at least 132 civilians in Solhan village in the Sahel's Yagha province, displacing thousands.

The increasing attacks are stretching the U.N.'s ability to respond to displaced people within the country as well as the refugees it's hosting.

"Funding levels for the response are critically low and with growing numbers of people forced to flee ... the gap is widening," UNHCR representative in Burkina Faso Abdourouf Gnon-Konde told the AP.

The attacks are also exacerbating problems for refugees who came to the country seeking security.

"We insisted on staying (in Burkina Faso), (but) we stay with fear. We are too scared," said Fadimata Mohamed Ali Wallet, a Malian refugee living in the camp. "Today there is not a country where there isn't a problem. This (terrorism) problem covers all of Africa," she said.

Tornado sweeps through suburban Chicago, causing damage

CHICAGO (AP) — A tornado swept through communities in heavily populated suburban Chicago, damaging more than 100 homes, toppling trees, knocking out power and causing multiple injuries, officials said.

There was relief Monday, though, as authorities reported that it appeared no one had died. Less than a dozen people were hurt in the tornado that touched down after 11 p.m. Sunday, and all were expected to recover.

At least eight people were hospitalized in Naperville, where 22 homes were left "uninhabitable" and more than 130 homes were damaged in the suburb of 147,500 people that's about 25 miles (40 kilometers) west of Chicago.

Two people initially described in critical condition had improved by Monday afternoon, said Naperville Fire Chief Mark Puknaitis.

"It could have been a lot worse, I will say that," Puknaitis said. "When you look at the destruction that has occurred over this five square block area or so, it's amazing that we can stand here and report that we only had eight people that were transported to a hospital."

Officials in the nearby village of Woodridge said a tornado damaged at least 100 structures. The village's fire chief said three people were taken to hospitals, but he could not provide more detail on their injuries during a Monday press conference.

Woodridge Police Chief Brian Cunningham said early warnings likely minimized the number of injuries.

"It was a nighttime event, a lot of people were sleeping, weren't aware of what was going on," he said. "The early warning got people to shelter. And the fact that there's only three people injured and the amount of devastation that's in the community, it's just amazing." The storm destroyed the second floor of Bridget Casey's Woodridge home. She sat in a lawn chair in the driveway before sunrise Monday. Her 16-year-old son, Nate, said he was watching TV when the storm swept through and he raced to help his

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mother get his three younger siblings to the basement.

"I just heard a loud crash and I'm thinking, 'Oh, what are my brothers up to?' I go look and I see the sky, and then I hear my brothers screaming from the room," he told the Chicago Sun-Times.

Mayor Gina Cunningham called the damage to homes and other property in the village "extensive."

"I'm just emotional because it is devastating to drive through the community that I grew up in and worked in and share with so many wonderful neighbors," she said.

The tornado was confirmed by radar, and a team with the National Weather Service began surveying damage Monday to determine its strength and path. The agency said one tornado likely caused damage in Naperville, Woodridge and Darien.

"If there were no fatalities — and there haven't been any reported to us — that's great news considering the population of the area, the level of damage and the time of day, after 11 p.m. when many people may be asleep," Matt Friedlein, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Romeoville, said.

Radar also showed storm rotation over several other areas of suburban Chicago, and in northwestern Indiana in the Hobart and South Haven areas, Friedlein said.

The weather service said surveys on Monday determined two EF1 tornadoes packing winds up to 100 mph (161 kph) struck northern Indiana's St. Joseph and Steuben counties, damaging some barns and trees and destroying other exterior structures.

Severe storms also hit other parts of the Midwest. A tornado damaged several buildings and knocked down power lines and trees in eastern Iowa on Sunday night. And in Missouri, a thunderstorm with strong winds whipped through parts of the state, knocking down trees and power lines.

Driver who rammed bicyclists in Arizona race has DUI history

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Authorities on Monday identified the man accused of plowing his pickup truck into a group of bicyclists taking part in a weekend race in an Arizona mountain town, critically injuring several riders, and court records show he has a criminal history of driving while intoxicated.

Shawn Michael Chock, 35, fled the crash Saturday in Show Low, which is about a three-hour drive north-east of Phoenix, and was shot by police as they chased him, said Kristine Sleighter, a police spokeswoman. Chock, who lives in nearby White Mountain Lakes, is still hospitalized in stable condition, and authorities were trying to determine a motive for the crash.

Prosecutors have been working with police investigators, but Navajo County Attorney Bradley Carlyon said his office typically does not charge hospitalized suspects until they are discharged.

Online court records in Maricopa County, which includes Phoenix, show someone matching Chock's name and age has a history of arrests for driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol and assault. In 2007, he was indicted on aggravated assault. Several months later, he was charged with disorderly conduct with a weapon and pleaded guilty to a reduced charge.

In 2010, three DUI-related charges, including having a third DUI, were dropped as part of an agreement where Chock pleaded guilty to felony aggravated DUI and shoplifting. He also pleaded no contest to aggravated assault.

Records show Chock was given probation in 2012 but violated the conditions of it in May 2013. According to court paperwork, Chock rejected a chance at continuing probation and requested prison time. He was sentenced to two years and eight months but got more than 280 days credit for time served before sentencing. Online Arizona Department of Corrections records indicate he went to prison in May 2013 but was paroled in October 2014.

On Saturday, Chock is accused of speeding his truck into bicyclists gathered just before 7:30 a.m. for the annual 58-mile (93-kilometer) Bike the Bluff competition. It's the state championship road race, which determines Arizona's champion for the year in categories like professionals, men, women and teens and drew hundreds of participants. Witnesses described seeing the bodies of cyclists flying left and right.

Tony Quinones, a cyclist who saw the crash, said some riders wondered at first whether the driver had

fallen asleep at the wheel. But Quinones said he saw the man speed toward the cyclists.

"He went right at us," Quinones said.

Seven cyclists were rushed to hospitals, and six were listed in critical condition. The other was in stable condition. Sleighter said she had no update on how they are doing.

"We are deeply saddened by the tragic accident involving our riders," race organizers said on their website. "Our thoughts and prayers are with all of those affected"

After crashing into the bicyclists, the driver of the pickup hit a telephone pole, and cyclists ran up to the truck and started pounding on the windows, screaming at the driver to get out, witnesses say.

Quinones said the driver hit the accelerator and backed out, drove down the road, made a U-turn and then headed back toward the cyclists but did not hit them again and drove away.

He was shot by police outside a nearby hardware store. Chock did not comply when officers tried to arrest him, Show Low spokeswoman Grace Payne said, but authorities have not yet given details on the circumstances that led to the shooting.

The Associated Press called a cellphone number listed for Chock, which didn't appear to be set up, and left messages with two people who may be his relatives.

In a June 2020 post on a Facebook page that appears to belong to Chock, he wrote of being a few weeks away of being 30 months sober and feeling "on top of the world."

"Only god can take me out," Chock wrote. "Man I love sober living."

Show Low police say they are turning the investigation over to the Arizona Department of Public Safety.

Iran president-elect takes hard line, refuses to meet Biden

By ISABEL DEBRE and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's president-elect staked out a hard-line position Monday in his first remarks since his landslide election victory, rejecting the possibility of meeting with President Joe Biden or negotiating Tehran's ballistic missile program and support of regional militias.

The comments by Ebrahim Raisi offered a blunt preview of how Iran might deal with the wider world in the next four years as it enters a new stage in negotiations to resurrect its now-tattered 2015 nuclear deal with global powers.

The news conference in Tehran also marked the first time the judiciary chief found himself confronted on live television about his role in the 1988 mass execution of political prisoners at the end of the Iran-Iraq war. Raisi offered no specific response to that dark chapter in Iranian history, but appeared confident and defiant as he described himself as a "defender of human rights."

Behind a sea of microphones, mostly from media in Iran and countries home to Tehran-backed militias, Raisi took questions ranging from his views on the nuclear talks to relations with regional rival Saudi Arabia. He appeared nervous at the start of the hourlong session but grew increasingly at ease as he returned to vague campaign themes of promoting Iran's economic self-sufficiency and combating corruption.

The 60-year-old cleric, a protégé of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, swept nearly 62% of the 28.9 million votes in Friday's presidential election, which saw the lowest turnout in the Islamic Republic's history. Millions of Iranians stayed home in defiance of a vote they saw as tipped in Raisi's favor after a panel under Khamenei disqualified prominent reformist candidates and allies of relatively moderate President Hassan Rouhani. Tehran province had a staggeringly low 34% turnout, roughly half of previous years, with many polling stations noticeably deserted.

Concerning the talks over Iran's nuclear deal, Raisi promised to salvage the accord to secure relief from U.S. sanctions that have devastated the Iranian economy. But he ruled out any limits to Iran's missile capabilities and support for regional militias — among other issues viewed by Washington as shortcomings of the landmark deal that the Biden administration wants addressed.

"It's nonnegotiable," Raisi said of Iran's ballistic missile program, adding that the U.S. "is obliged to lift all oppressive sanctions against Iran."

Tehran's fleet of attack aircraft largely dates back to before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, forcing Iran

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to instead invest in missiles as a hedge against its regional Arab neighbors, which have bought billions of dollars in American military hardware over the years. Those missiles, with a self-imposed range limit of 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles), can reach across the Mideast and U.S. military bases in the region.

Iran also supports militant groups like Yemen's Houthi rebels and Lebanon's Hezbollah to bolster its influence and counter its regional foes.

When asked about a possible meeting with Biden, Raisi curtly answered: "No." He frowned and stared ahead, without elaborating. His moderate competitor in the election, Abdolnasser Hemmati, had suggested during campaigning that he might be willing to meet Biden.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday the U.S. does not have diplomatic relations with Iran "or any plans to meet at the leader level, so it's unclear that anything has actually changed on that front."

She added that Biden views Iran's "decision leader is the supreme leader. That was the case before the election; it's the case today; it will be the case probably moving forward."

Raisi will become the first serving Iranian president sanctioned by the U.S. government even before entering office, in part over his time as the head of Iran's internationally criticized judiciary — a situation that could complicate state visits and speeches at international forums such as the United Nations.

Raisi's election vaults hard-liners to top posts across the government as negotiations grind on in Vienna to try to rescue Tehran's nuclear deal, which lifted sanctions on Iran in exchange for curbs on its atomic program.

In 2018, then-U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the agreement, setting off months of spiraling tensions across the Middle East.

Trump's decision has, over time, seen Iran abandon every limitation on enrichment. Tehran is now enriching uranium to 60%, its highest level ever, though still short of weapons-grade 90%. Diplomats from parties to the deal returned to their capitals for consultations following the latest round of negotiations Sunday.

With the collapse of the deal, Rouhani and his fellow moderates watched their popularity plummet. Now, the ascendancy of a hard-liner hostile to the West has stoked concerns about the future of the accord and regional stability.

But in his remarks Monday, Raisi emphasized the deal's importance, describing sanctions relief as "central to our foreign policy" and exhorting the U.S. to "return and implement your commitments."

On Sunday, months after Iranian officials warned that U.S. sanctions were hampering their ability to procure parts for Iran's sole nuclear plant at Bushehr, the facility underwent an unexplained emergency shutdown.

Whether Iran and the U.S. will be able to move beyond the deal to discuss further thorny issues remains in question, however.

"No matter the timing, a U.S.-Iran agreement in Vienna leaves unanswered whether the United States can achieve a broader rapprochement with an Iran led by an avowed proponent of the core tenets of Iran's Islamic Revolution," the New York-based Soufan Center said in an analysis.

On Saudi Arabia, which has recently started secret talks with Iran in Baghdad over several points of contention, Raisi said that Iran would have "no problem" with a possible reopening of the Saudi Embassy in Tehran and that the "restoration of relations faces no barrier." The embassy shut down in 2016 as relations deteriorated.

Raisi displayed defiance when asked about the 1988 executions, which saw sham retrials of political prisoners, militants and others that would become known as "death commissions."

After Iran's then-Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini accepted a U.N.-brokered cease-fire, members of the Iranian opposition group Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, heavily armed by Saddam Hussein, stormed across the Iranian border from Iraq in a surprise attack. Iran blunted their assault.

The trials began around that time, with defendants asked to identify themselves. Those who responded "mujahedeen" were sent to their deaths, while others were questioned about their willingness to "clear minefields for the army of the Islamic Republic," according to a 1990 Amnesty International report. International rights groups estimate that as many as 5,000 people were executed. Raisi served on the commissions.

On Monday, there was no somber tone.

"I am proud of being a defender of human rights and of people's security and comfort as a prosecutor wherever I was," Raisi said.

Documentary examines troubled past with Confederate statues

By JOHN CARUCCI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Perplexed by America's controversial relationship with Confederate monuments, "The Daily Show" team member CJ Hunt saw potential for what he thought would make an interesting short film.

But not long after beginning the project, he realized a much bigger story was revealing itself and it became "The Neutral Ground," a feature-length documentary that premiered Saturday at the Tribeca Film Festival and will be available July 5 on PBS.

The serious, yet funny, documentary examines the Lost Cause, the campaign that mythicized the Confederacy after the Civil War and continues the narrative that the conflict was more about freedom than the right to own slaves.

"You can't name another war where the losers get thousands of monuments," Hunt recently told The Associated Press in an interview promoting the film.

Hunt said Southern secession documents clearly put slavery first as the reason for the division. But after the Civil War, the film points out that a successful propaganda campaign shifted the cause from being about owning people as property to state's rights and patriotism.

A reluctance to actually read primary source documents about historical events perpetuates the myth, "Sadly, our idea of history is really just like stories that were handed to us," he said.

That notion drove Hunt to delve deeper to understand the division between those that believe monuments should be removed, and others that want them to stay to preserve history.

The concept for the film began in 2015 when Hunt was living in New Orleans. The city council voted to remove four monuments from public spaces but was thwarted because work crews felt their lives threatened.

The momentum shifted last year after a summer of protests and unrest over social justice, and there was "a strong consensus to challenge these monuments in public spaces," he said.

Before joining the cast of "The Daily Show with Trevor Noah," Hunt said he watched correspondents like Roy Wood Jr. to learn how to report on a segment with the right balance of humor and information.

"Peppered within this doc is CJ's curiosity and inherent optimism," said Wood, who serves as executive producer on the film. "He did a great job allowing the story to be heavy, while being light and funny at times."

In one segment, Hunt shows the peculiar placement of a statue of Black tennis icon Arthur Ashe on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia, a strip commemorating those who fought for the Confederacy.

The film questions the notion of adding Ashe among the slaveholders for "inclusion" purposes.

"We're not going to make the Confederacy better by adding a contextual plaque or by adding a Black tennis player nearby," Hunt said. "None of these are good. None of these makes sense."

Last year four statues were removed from Monument Avenue, including one of Confederate leader Jefferson Davis, after civil unrest.

"I understand the slavery thing, but also this was treason. The idea that we even have to construct a sentence like that is part of the absurdity of the Confederacy, right? It's like you shouldn't even have to say, 'Look, I know this 60-foot-tall statue is to a man who enslaved people, but also, he betrayed the U.S.' You shouldn't need that combo. One of those things should disqualify you," Hunt said.

He notes that the myths and failure to condemn traitorous actions continue to haunt the nation, right up to the violent Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

"Because we didn't deal with that then, it is now difficult to call insurrectionists now insurrectionists. And I think the film tries to make that connection clear," Hunt said.

When it comes to what to do about the statues and memorials, the solution is a bit more complicated.

Neither Hunt nor Wood believes these remnants should be destroyed. But they agree they should be out of public view. Wood supports the idea of moving them to special areas in museums or private facilities, so those that have a connection can preserve their history.

"The statues are a great place to start, but I don't think it's about erasing anything that people hold dear. It's about reserving my right to not want to see that every damn day when I'm riding past this particular street," Wood said.

Spielberg's Amblin to make several films a year for Netflix

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Steven Spielberg, a filmmaker synonymous with big-screen enchantment, has set a new deal with Netflix in which his production company, Amblin Partners, will make multiple feature films per year for the streaming giant.

The partnership, one long courted by Ted Sarandos, Netflix chief content officer, is a major get for the company that, amid increasing competition, brings perhaps the most beloved film director more officially into the streaming fold.

The deal announced Monday doesn't specifically include any movies to be directed by Spielberg. This December, he will release "West Side Story" theatrically with Disney's 20th Century Studios. Amblin has a separate deal with Universal Pictures for theatrical releases.

"At Amblin, storytelling will forever be at the center of everything we do, and from the minute Ted and I started discussing a partnership, it was abundantly clear that we had an amazing opportunity to tell new stories together and reach audiences in new ways," Spielberg said in a statement. "This new avenue for our films, alongside the stories we continue to tell with our longtime family at Universal and our other partners, will be incredibly fulfilling for me personally since we get to embark on it together with Ted, and I can't wait to get started with him, Scott, and the entire Netflix team."

Amblin, which takes its name from a 1968 short by Spielberg, has helped produce a wide variety of films outside of those made by Spielberg, including "1917" and "Green Book." The two companies have previously worked together on TV series and the Aaron Sorkin movie "The Trial of the Chicago 7," a film co-produced by Amblin that was sold by Paramount Pictures to Netflix during the pandemic.

Spielberg has sometimes been seen as against a streaming future for movies. A Deadline Hollywood headline on Monday's announcement wondered: "Hell Freezes Over?"

But Spielberg in 2019 argued against the anti-streaming impression associated with him. Reports around then circulated that Spielberg believed streaming releases — which he compared to made-for-TV movies — should vie for Emmys, not Oscars. "I'm a firm believer that movie theaters need to be around forever," Spielberg said that year.

He clarified that big screen or small screen, "what really matters to me is a great story and everyone should have access to great stories."

"However, I feel people need to have the opportunity to leave the safe and familiar of their lives and go to a place where they can sit in the company of others and have a shared experience — cry together, laugh together, be afraid together — so that when it's over they might feel a little less like strangers," Spielberg wrote in an email to the New York Times. "I want to see the survival of movie theaters. I want the theatrical experience to remain relevant in our culture."

The lines have also blurred since then. While Netflix has given exclusive theatrical runs of a week or more to some of its most prominent releases, traditional studios like Disney and Warner Bros. have embraced more hybrid release models that send movies simultaneously to streaming services.

"Steven is a creative visionary and leader and, like so many others around the world, my growing up was shaped by his memorable characters and stories that have been enduring, inspiring and awakening," said Sarandos. "We cannot wait to get to work with the Amblin team and we are honored and thrilled to be part of this chapter of Steven's cinematic history."

EXPLAINER: Calls to #FreeBritney and court conservatorships

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — When Britney Spears, who turns 40 this year, speaks to a Los Angeles judge at her own request on Wednesday, she'll do it 13 years into a court-enforced conservatorship that has exercised vast control of her life and money. But what is a conservatorship, exactly?

Here's a look at how conservatorships operate, what's unusual about hers, and why the cry to #Free-Britney keeps getting louder.

HOW DO CONSERVATORSHIPS WORK?

When a person is considered to have a severely diminished mental capacity, a court can step in and grant someone the power to make financial decisions and major life choices for them.

California law says a conservatorship, called a guardianship in some states, is justified for a "person who is unable to provide properly for his or her personal needs for physical health, food, clothing, or shelter," or for someone who is "substantially unable to manage his or her own financial resources or resist fraud or undue influence."

The conservator, as the appointee put in charge is called, may be a family member, a close friend or a court-appointed professional.

HOW DOES SPEARS' WORK?

With a fortune of more than \$50 million comes secrecy, and the court closely guards the inner workings of Spears' conservatorship.

Some aspects have been revealed in documents. The conservatorship has the power to restrict her visitors. It arranges and oversees visits with her sons, ages 14 and 15; father Kevin Federline has full custody. It has the power to take out restraining orders in her name, which it has used more than once to keep away interlopers deemed shady. It has the power to make her medical decisions and her business deals.

Legally, Spears can get married, but the conservatorship must approve it as with other major life decisions.

Like all California conservatorships, it's subject to annual accountings and reviews from a court investigator.

WHO HAS POWER OVER SPEARS?

Her father has largely been in charge through the years, and the stereotypical image of a parent preying on a famous child's fortune fuels the enmity against James Spears and the conservatorship, though his every move is scrutinized by the court.

From 2008 until 2019, he had power over her life choices, and he and attorney Andrew Wallet controlled her money. Now, he has financial control only, and must share that role with the Bessemer Trust, an estate-management firm. Jodi Montgomery, a court-appointed professional, now acts as conservator over her personal matters.

WHY ARE SO MANY CALLING TO #FREEBRITNEY?

Fans who dote on Britney Spears' social media posts and public statements, trying to decipher her every utterance, dance move or shared meme, have increasingly coalesced into a movement after becoming convinced she was being controlled unfairly. Key were two women who in 2017 turned their hobby of picking apart Spears' Instagram posts into a podcast, "Britney's 'Gram." It would help birth the hashtag #FreeBritney.

Now, even minor hearings can bring dozens of protesters to the courthouse, carrying signs like "CONSERVATORSHIP IS SLAVERY" and "THIS IS TOXIC." Many say they relate to her struggles with mental health and the system. The movement, or at least its sentiments, has attracted her fellow celebrities, including Bette Midler, Miley Cyrus, Paris Hilton and Pitbull.

James Spears has called the group conspiracy theorists, and says those who shout #FreeBritney don't understand the totality of the situation.

WHY WAS IT IMPOSED IN THE FIRST PLACE?

In 2007 and 2008, shortly after she became a mother, she began to have very public mental struggles, with media outlets obsessed over each moment. Hordes of paparazzi aggressively followed her every time she left her house, and she no longer seemed able to handle it.

She attacked one cameraman's car with an umbrella. She shaved her head at a salon. She lost custody

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of her children. When she refused to turn over her boys after a visit, she was hospitalized and put on a psychiatric hold. The conservatorship was put in place within days.

WHY HAS IT GONE ON SO LONG?

A conservatorship can always be dissolved by the court, though it's rare that a person successfully asks to be released. The burden is on them to prove their competence.

Conservatorships can last decades, because few of the circumstances that lead to them are temporary. The mandatory secrecy of medical records has kept murky the reasons why Britney Spears must remain in hers, but it's clear that it involves psychiatric issues. A recent filing said that she wasn't capable of giving consent for medical treatment.

Even with required secrecy, it's usually no mystery why someone must stay in a conservatorship, says Sarah Wentz, an attorney who specializes in estates. "Courts don't just impose these on people," she says. They're most commonly in situations with something dramatic like a traumatic brain injury, Alzheimer's or dementia."

Spears' father and his attorneys have emphasized that she is especially susceptible to people who seek to take advantage of her money and fame. All sides agree, at least in theory, that she should be able to make her own choices if she becomes able. "The threshold is not, 'Do I make dumb decisions?' because we're entitled in our life to make dumb decisions," Wentz says. "Think of how many intelligent women make bad choices. You can fall in love with somebody and give them every penny you have."

HOW DOES SPEARS FEEL ABOUT ALL OF THIS?

Britney Spears has never asked the court to end the conservatorship. And in a recent court filing she said it "rescued her from a collapse, exploitation by predatory individuals and financial ruin" and made her "able to regain her position as a world class entertainer."

But she has sought more say in who runs it, has emphasized that she reserves the right to seek to end it at any time and has welcomed the scrutiny of #FreeBritney fans. She's been clear in saying she wants her father out entirely. Her lawyer said at a recent hearing that she fears him and will not end her lengthy career pause as long as he maintains control.

Tokyo Olympics to allow local fans — but with strict limits

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — A sharply limited number of fans will be allowed to attend the Tokyo Olympics, organizers announced Monday as they tried to save some of the spirit of the Games where even cheering has been banned.

Organizers set a limit of 50% capacity — up to a maximum of 10,000 fans, all of whom must be Japanese residents — for each Olympic venue, regardless of whether it is indoors or outdoors. Officials said that if coronavirus cases rise again the rules could be changed and fans could still be barred all together. Spectators from abroad were banned several months ago, and now some local fans who have tickets will be forced to give them up.

The decision comes as opposition among Japanese to holding the Games in July remains high, though may be softening, and as new infections in Tokyo have begun to subside.

Still, health officials fear that in a country where the vast majority of people have yet to be vaccinated, crowds at the Olympics could drive cases up. The country's top medical adviser, Dr. Shigeru Omi, recommended last week that the safest way to hold the Olympics would be without fans. Allowing fans presents a risk not just at the venues but will also lead to more circulation on commuter trains, in restaurants and other public spaces.

It's already become clear that these Olympics Games will be unlike any others, but organizers have said they are determined to hold them and billions of dollars in broadcast rights and ticket sales are at stake. Still, much of the fanfare that surrounds them — people from around the world rubbing elbows, a celebratory atmosphere in the host city and the showcasing of the host country's culture — will be off the table or far more muted this year.

Seiko Hashimoto, the president of the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee, called the decision "the last

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piece for the Olympics" to proceed on July 23.

But as with everything about these Olympics — the first postponed in the history of the Modern Games dating from 1896, though previous ones were canceled during both World Wars — the decision raised many questions.

For one, it is not quite what it seems. Although a maximum of 10,000 fans will be allowed in any given venue, so-called stakeholders — including sponsors and sporting federation officials — will not be counted toward that total, according to organizing committee CEO Toshiro Muto. Japanese media, for instance, reported that up to 20,000 people might attend the opening ceremony, over and above athletes, though Muto said he thought it would be less than that.

The decision on local fans 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. A decision on the Paralympics comes on July 16.

Hashimoto, meanwhile, left the door open for a no-fans Olympics if the conditions worsen around the pandemic.

"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."

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.

"We would like people to go directly home from the venue without stopping by anywhere," Muto said.

He said 3.64 million tickets were already in the hands of Japanese residents. He indicated that was about 900,000 more than the seats likely to be available. That will mean a lottery to see who can attend.

Tokyo organizers had expected about \$800 million in revenue from ticket sales, but Muto said the actual figure would be no more than half that. Any shortfall will have to be picked by some Japanese government entity.

The University of Oxford has said these are the most expensive Olympics on record. The official cost is \$15.4 billion, but several government audits suggest it might be twice that much. All but \$6.7 billion is public money.

The IOC relies on selling broadcast rights for almost 75% of its income. Another 18% is from sponsors. A cancellation would cost the IOC an estimated \$3 billion-\$4 billion in lost broadcast income — an enormous blow especially at a time when its income flow has already been slowed by the pandemic.

The decision comes just as Tokyo has emerged from a state of emergency as the curve of new cases has flattened. The seven-day average for new infections in the city is about 400 daily.

The capital and other areas are now under "quasi-emergency" status until July 11. The new rules will allow restaurants to serve alcohol during limited hours, the main outcome from the reduced restrictions.

Overall, more than 14,000 deaths have been attributed to COVID-19 in Japan, which has managed the pandemic better than many countries but not as well as some others in Asia. Its vaccination campaign remains behind many Western ones, with about 6.5% of Japanese fully vaccinated and 16.5% with at least one shot.

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

"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.

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

In recent polls, support seems to be increasing for holding the Olympics, though a majority still appear to favor postponing or canceling the Games, depending how the question is worded.

Crowds gather at Stonehenge for Solstice despite advice

LONDON (AP) — Dozens of people have ignored advice not to travel to Stonehenge for the annual sum-

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mer solstice celebrations, which were cancelled Monday due to coronavirus concerns.

English Heritage, which looks after the Neolithic monument, had planned a live feed of the sunrise at Stonehenge for the second year in a row. But the organization said that program had to be interrupted because of safety concerns after "a number of people have chosen to disregard our request to not travel to the stones this morning."

Thousands of people who tuned in to watch the sunrise at the stones online ended up watching pre-recorded footage before the live feed returned around 5 a.m.

Video from Britain's PA news agency and elsewhere showed dozens of people gathering inside the stone circle, with some scaling a low fence to climb inside the restricted area to reach the stones. Some were seen dancing and others held a banner that read "Standing for Stonehenge."

English Heritage said it was "disappointing" to see people "act in a way that put themselves, our staff and the police at risk" during a pandemic.

The summer solstice typically draws tens of thousands of people to the stone circle in southern England to celebrate the longest day of the year.

Wiltshire Police said despite a "minor incursion into the stone circle" early Monday, the solstice weekend was peaceful. One woman in her 50s was arrested in the area on suspicion of drunk and disorderly behavior, the force said.

Hong Kong's Apple Daily newspaper says it may shut down

By ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong's embattled pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily reported Monday that its board of directors has asked authorities to unfreeze some assets so it can pay salaries and avoid labor violations, and that the board will meet again on Friday to decide if the newspaper will cease operations.

Police last week arrested five top editors and executives of Apple Daily under the city's tough national security law on suspicion of foreign collusion, searched its offices and froze \$2.3 million worth of assets of three companies linked to the newspaper.

The arrests and freezing of assets came as Hong Kong authorities crack down on dissenting voices as Beijing tightens control over the territory in what critics say is an erosion of freedoms it promised the city for 50 years when the former British colony was handed over to China in 1997.

Apple Daily has been outspoken in defending Hong Kong's freedoms, and in recent years has often criticized the Chinese and Hong Kong governments for limiting the city's democratic freedoms as well as constricting the rights of free speech and assembly not found on mainland China.

Apple Daily said in an article on its website on Monday that if its board decides on Friday to cease operations of the newspaper, its website could stop publishing as soon as early Saturday morning, and Saturday's print edition of the newspaper would be its last.

An internal department memo sent to some employees at Apple Daily also stated that those who wish to resign immediately could do so.

Apple Daily said in an article on Sunday that it may challenge the decision to freeze its assets in court if the city's Security Bureau denies its request.

The Security Bureau said it would not comment on the details of the case because legal proceedings were ongoing. It said endangering national security is a "very serious crime."

"We handle such crimes according to the law, targeting at illegal acts, and invoke the power to freeze offense-related properties based on need and the law," the bureau said in an English-language statement. "Secretary for Security will handle in accordance with the law any application related to the frozen property."

Last week, police identified over 30 articles published by Apple Daily that they said played a "crucial" role in a conspiracy with foreign countries to impose sanctions against China and Hong Kong for undermining Hong Kong's autonomy.

The newspaper's founder, media tycoon Jimmy Lai, was convicted earlier this year for his involvement in unauthorized assemblies and is currently in jail. Two of the five people arrested last week have also been

charged with collusion with foreign countries.

The police operation against Apple Daily has drawn criticism from the U.S. and Britain, which say Hong Kong and Chinese authorities are targeting the city's promised freedoms.

Chinese and Hong Kong officials have insisted that the media must abide by the law, and that press freedom cannot be used as a "shield" for illegal activities.

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 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

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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.

The Senate has set a procedural vote Tuesday on the For the People Act, a significant rewrite of voting and election law that the White House has called a "cause" for the president. Democrats are working on changes that could win moderate Democrat Joe Manchin's support, but they'd still need 60 votes to advance the bill.

"I wouldn't say we expect there to be 10 magical votes to appear from the Republicans in the Senate, they've been pretty clear that they don't want to make it easier to vote, they don't want to make it more accessible to vote," White House press secretary Jen Psaki told "CBS This Morning" on Monday. "So this is just a first step, we'll see where it goes. We'll see what happens over the next couple of days."

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 instead of the usual 60 needed for most legislation. The Senate is split 50-50, but Vice President Kamala Harris can cast a tie-breaking vote.

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."

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, June 22, the 173rd day of 2021. There are 192 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 22, 1970, President Richard Nixon signed an extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that lowered the minimum voting age to 18.

On this date:

In 1611, English explorer Henry Hudson, his son and several other people were set adrift in present-day Hudson Bay by mutineers aboard the Discovery.

In 1815, Napoleon Bonaparte abdicated for a second time as Emperor of the French.

In 1870, the United States Department of Justice was created.

In 1937, Joe Louis began his reign as world heavyweight boxing champion by knocking out Jim Braddock in the eighth round of their fight in Chicago. (A year later on this date, Louis knocked out Max Schmeling in the first round of their rematch at Yankee Stadium.)

In 1940, during World War II, Adolf Hitler gained a stunning victory as France was forced to sign an

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armistice eight days after German forces overran Paris.

In 1941, Nazi Germany launched Operation Barbarossa, a massive invasion of the Soviet Union.

In 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, more popularly known as the "GI Bill of Rights."

In 1945, the World War II battle for Okinawa ended with an Allied victory.

In 1969, singer-actor Judy Garland died in London at age 47.

In 1977, John N. Mitchell became the first former U.S. Attorney General to go to prison as he began serving a sentence for his role in the Watergate cover-up. (He was released 19 months later.)

In 1981, Mark David Chapman pleaded guilty to killing rock star John Lennon. Abolhassan Bani-Sadr was deposed as president of Iran.

In 1992, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *R.A.V. v. City of St. Paul*, unanimously ruled that "hate crime" laws that banned cross burning and similar expressions of racial bias violated free-speech rights.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama announced in a White House address that he would pull home 33,000 troops from Afghanistan by the following summer. James "Whitey" Bulger, the longtime fugitive Boston crime boss and fixture on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted list, was arrested in Santa Monica, California.

Five years ago: Rebellious Democrats launched a 25-hour round-the-clock sit-in on the House floor to demand votes on gun-control bills, forcing exasperated Republicans to recess while cutting off cameras showing the protest. Dennis Hastert arrived at a Minnesota prison to serve his 15-month sentence in a hush-money case involving revelations that the former House speaker had sexually abused at least four boys when he coached wrestling at an Illinois high school. Chicago's Patrick Kane won the Hart Trophy, becoming the first player born and trained in the U.S. to be named the NHL's most valuable player.

One year ago: Mourners filed through Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church for a public viewing of Rayshard Brooks, a Black man who'd been fatally shot in the back by a white police officer after a struggle. Protesters tried to pull down a statue of President Andrew Jackson near the White House before being dispersed by police. President Donald Trump said the United States had done "too good a job" on testing for cases of COVID-19 and that it had more cases than other countries because it did more testing. Trump opened a new front in his fight against mail-in voting, making unsubstantiated assertions that foreign countries would print millions of bogus ballots to rig the results. Joel Schumacher, director of the Brat Pack film "St. Elmo's Fire" and two Batman movies, died in New York at the age of 80 after a yearlong battle with cancer.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Prunella Scales (TV: "Fawlty Towers") is 89. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., is 88. Singer-actor Kris Kristofferson is 85. Movie director John Korty is 85. Actor Michael Lerner is 80. Actor Klaus Maria Brandauer is 78. Fox News analyst Brit Hume is 78. Singer Peter Asher (Peter and Gordon) is 77. Singer Howard "Eddie" Kaylan is 74. Singer-musician Todd Rundgren is 73. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., is 72. Actor Meryl Streep is 72. Actor Lindsay Wagner is 72. Singer Alan Osmond is 72. Actor Graham Greene is 69. Pop singer Cyndi Lauper is 68. Actor Chris Lemmon is 67. Rock musician Derek Forbes is 65. Actor Tim Russ is 65. Rock musician Garry Beers (INXS) is 64. Actor-producer-writer Bruce Campbell is 63. Rock musician Alan Anton (Cowboy Junkies) is 62. Actor Tracy Pollan is 61. Environmental activist Erin Brockovich is 61. Rock singer-musician Jimmy Somerville is 60. Basketball Hall of Famer Clyde Drexler is 59. Actor Amy Brenneman is 57. Author Dan Brown is 57. Rock singer-musician Mike Edwards (Jesus Jones) is 57. Rock singer Steven Page is 51. Actor Michael Trucco is 51. Actor Mary Lynn Rajskub (RYS'-kub) is 50. TV personality Carson Daly is 48. Rock musician Chris Traynor is 48. Actor Donald Faison (FAY'-zahn) is 47. Actor Alicia Goranson is 47. Actor-comedian Mike O'Brien (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 45. TV personality/actor Jai Rodriguez is 42. Americana singer-songwriter John Moreland is 36. Pop singer Dinah Jane (Fifth Harmony) (TV: "The X Factor") is 24.