

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Albrecht Family Thank You

The family of Grace Albrecht wishes to express their thankfulness for the outpouring of sympathy and care shown us at the passing of our mother. The cards, phone calls, flowers, food, hugs and attendance at services were uplifting and comforting. Our family has been blessed by all of you as we thank God that she is with Jesus and at home with loved ones gone before.

Beverly Sombke & Family  
Lavonne Gesling & Family  
Wilbur & Judy Albrecht & Family  
Leland & Vickie Albrecht & Family



## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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**The Spirit of Gilbert Award went to Groton Area staff Diane Kurtz, Brenda Madsen and Mary Johnson for leading the way for a successful World Classroom Tour to the Washington, D.C. area. Gilbert is the name given to the ball. The ball is used for leading the group and for entertainment purposes. All World Classroom Tours use "Gilbert."** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



## WC Dundee Awards

World Classroom Tour Guides gave out Dundee Awards at the end of the trip.

Top Left: Bryson Wambach given by Shelby Anderson - Sportsmanship Award for Bowling (even after Shelby beat him)

Top Right: Emma Bahr given by Jayden Holsey - Best Laugh

Right: Christian Ehresmann given by Jayden Holsey, Best Wipe Out and also Best Dressed  
(Photos by Paul Kosel)



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Left photo features the tour guides of the World Classroom Tour. They are Shelby Anderson, an elementary school teacher from Kansas City, Mo.; Christian Mirasol, an independent D.C. area tour guide from Fairfax, Va.; and Jayden Holsey, who works full time for World Classroom in Aberdeen. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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**“Martha Washington” posed for a picture with the Groton group at the Washington farm in Mt. Vernon. The Washington House is pictured in the background in the group photo below.**

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



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The parents posed for a photo under the shade of the George Washington house at Mt. Vernon.

Larry Bryant is a 25-year bus driver. He was the driver for the Groton group during the World Classroom Tour in the Washington, D.C. area. (Photo by Paul Kosef)





By Kenneth A. Bartholomew, M.D. ~ Prairie Doc® Perspectives

## The Liver, We Can't Live Without It

The liver is one of the most amazing but underrated organs in our bodies. We cannot live without it, and, unlike the kidney, we cannot bypass it with a dialysis machine. Lose your liver and you lose your life.

The liver is essential for digestion, but also detoxifies our blood, filtering, breaking down, and disposing of chemicals we cannot use. While there are many toxins that can harm the liver cells, it has an amazing ability to regenerate itself. It can suffer immense damage, nearly die out, then recover and allow many more years of life.

To help us discuss liver damage, we look at 'hepato' from the Greek 'hepar' or liver. Thus, the words 'hepatocellular' meaning cells of the liver, and 'hepatitis' referring to inflammation of those cells. Hepatitis can cause cirrhosis (liver scarring), liver failure, liver cancer and death.

The classic forms of hepatitis (yellow jaundice) are caused by the hepatitis viruses, A, B, and C. Hepatitis C is particularly aggressive but thankfully there is now a drug that can kill this virus.

Toxins and chemicals can also cause hepatitis, the most common being drinking alcohol and acetaminophen (Tylenol). The combination of both is especially toxic. Other commonly used medications that can damage the liver include aspirin, cholesterol drugs called statins, anti-seizure meds like phenytoin (Dilantin), ketoconazole, some antiviral drugs, and anabolic steroids. If you take these prescription meds, do not stop. Instead talk to your doctor if you have questions.

Unknown to many people is the fact that even some herbs and supplements, used excessively, can cause liver damage. Comfrey, black cohosh, aloe vera, cascara, kava, and chaparral are just a few; even vitamins taken in quantity have poisoned the livers of children who mistook them for candy.

Regrettably, in our obese society, fatty liver is fast becoming one of the most common forms of liver damage. Fatty infiltration of the liver cells causes inflammation. NASH (nonalcoholic steatohepatitis) is the worst form of this. There is no medication; the only known cure is significant weight loss.

A simple blood test can reveal if your liver enzymes are in the normal range or if they are showing inflammation. The liver may be underrated, but please do not ignore it. Schedule your annual exam and talk to your doctor about your liver. Catch problems early and you might prevent long-term complications.

Kenneth A. Bartholomew, M.D. is a contributing Prairie Doc® columnist. He practices in Pierre, South Dakota and serves on the Healing Words Foundation Board of Directors, a 501c3 which provides funding for Prairie Doc® programs. For free and easy access to the entire Prairie Doc® library, visit [www.prairiedoc.org](http://www.prairiedoc.org) and follow Prairie Doc® on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show streaming on Facebook and broadcast on SDPB most Thursdays at 7 p.m. Central.



## Groton Trap Team takes second at state

The Groton High School trap team placed 2nd at the State High School Trap Tournament held at the Aberdeen Gun Club June 12 - 13th where they also placed 1st in their class 2A conference for 2021.

Pictured top row left to right are Lane Kreuger, Adrian Knudson, Paxton Bonn, Trevor Harry, Dylan Kreuger, Caleb Furney, Taryn Taylor, Lee Iverson and Luke Simon.

Middle row left to right Tristan Kampa, Porter Johnson, Nick Morris, Payton Mitchell, Gavin Khali, Paisley Mitchell, Tina Zoellner, Hollie Frost, coaches Stephen Wright, Bill Zoellner and Tom Mahan.

Front row left to right are Titon Stange, Ethan Pigors, Michael Powers Dinger, Jaeger Kampa, Cadence Feist, Lisa Kreuger, Charlie Frost, Isaiah Scepaniak, and Ryder Daily. Not pictured is Danny Feist. (Courtesy Photo)



## Doing better than our fathers

I sat under a partly sunny sky on Father's Day contemplating fatherhood. I awoke to a text and Father's Day greetings from Dylan who started it all for me nearly 25 years ago. He was on vacation in the Black Hills. India was still snoozing after a bachelorette party at Green Lake. She was pretty chipper when she went to bed at 4:30 a.m., leading me to believe there was nothing overly nefarious that took place at the lake cabin.

The air smelled of fresh rain. We got a meager 30/100ths, enough to nourish the crops another day, though.

I remembered my own father, gone some 28 years now, into the ether at 55, so every year I have past that mark, I count myself lucky. I thought about the rare times we went fishing together and the more frequent times he hit me fly balls and grounders behind the Methodist Church until I became a competent center fielder.

Dad tried to be a disciplinarian—the keyword is “tried,” because he and Mom had planned to have a large family, and when I, the oldest, turned out to be a renegade, the strategy was to rein me in, because can you imagine six outlaws!? After about a dozen years of that fruitless tactic, I think they decided to let me be me. I'd run amuck, get grounded, and then do it again two weeks later.

Because I was a born observer and student of human psychology, a born writer, I suppose, I reasoned that every child is born pretty much being who they are. Some respond to discipline, some to finesse, and some are no trouble at all. As I contemplated these things while incarcerated in my room, subsisting on bread and water (hey, this is my story), I realized that all the things my father was were passed down from his father and grandfather and generations lost to memory. There's a natural evolution and there should be. Every new father should be better than his own at the best job in the world. I don't think that's sacrilege.

I know Dad was proud of me, the risks I took that he couldn't understand, my willingness to reach beyond my grasp. Once, when he was having a drink with my buddy Gare Bare, he told him, “One thing about Tony, he decides to do something, and the son-of-bitch does it!” Now, he never told me that, but I heard it all the same, and I don't think he ever spoke sweeter words. I had him for three and a half decades, but we were just becoming friends, equals, when I lost him.

What did I learn? I understood quickly that Dylan wouldn't respond to “Because I'm your Dad” orders. Sure, I could have been a drill sergeant, which is what I would have been had I been a young father, but I was seasoned enough to understand him. He was what the Lakota call Heyoka, a contrarian. He crawled backward, for cripes sake! Dylan would do the right thing but you had to explain why it was the right thing.

Now, India was a stubborn little anarchist (still is) so I employed humor and charm when I could and direct orders when I had to, to which she would insolently grunt before stomping like a three-foot bull elephant to her room.

But it's simple really, if your kids have good hearts, you've succeeded.

One of the best things I learned about parenting is that a good hug solves just about anything, but we weren't huggers. With our Russian and German blood and ancestors who spent their time either invading or being invaded, it doesn't come naturally. But genetics can be overcome. To a point. I'll still never dunk a basketball. The hugging component came from my brother Joel who would come home from Denver with big bear hugs and it just sort of caught on. Turns out, Joel's a pretty good daddy, and now, a wildly enthusiastic grandpa.

It's evolution. We were grounded in ethics and loyalty with a willingness to stand up to and even get knocked down by bullies by the example Dad and Mom set, a firm foundation upon which we could build. Upon which our sons and daughters can build. That's really who I wrote this for, but it's for fathers, too. You can teach an old Dad new tricks.



**That's  
Life**  
by Tony Bender

## Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Dominique Clare

Things are looking up for the Minnesota Vikings. Not only is the Danielle Hunter situation officially settled, but they also made a splash in free agency with some of their unused cap space.

The Vikings signed Hunter to a contract extension that was a win for both parties. Hunter got money upfront and can get a new contract next season on par with his production. The Vikings got cap relief for this season to build on an already impressive offseason.

With that extra money, the Vikings didn't waste any time, signing free agent DT Sheldon Richardson. This is Richardson's second stint with the Vikings after spending time with the Cleveland Browns. He joins a stacked defensive line headlined by Danielle Hunter, Dalvin Tomlinson, and Michael Pierce. Speaking of Hunter, head coach Mike Zimmer said Hunter 'looks fantastic' after seeing him move around the practice field.

This week, we continue our roster breakdown with the tight ends.

Irv Smith Jr. – This is the year Irv Smith Jr. gets a real opportunity to make himself known to the NFL. With Kyle Rudolph departing for the New York Giants, Smith gets the chance to be that guy.

He is a much different type of tight end than Rudolph was. Rudolph was a big sure-handed catcher with average speed and blocking ability. Smith, on the other hand, is fast enough to be respected as a wide receiver and can still get the job done blocking. He presents a lot of ways for Klint Kubiak to use him. So expect to see a heavy dose of Irv Smith Jr. this upcoming season.

Last season he caught 30 passes for 365 yards and 5 touchdowns. There is no reason why he shouldn't have at least double that.

Tyler Conklin– While the fans and media have been high on Irv Smith Jr., head coach Zimmer has been raving about what Tyler Conklin brings to the table. Zimmer told the media that he is one of the players who is improving from last season.

One thing that Conklin does better than Smith is blocking. He is an excellent blocker and that alone will have him heavily involved in a Vikings offense that is focused around star running back Dalvin Cook.

He is also a pretty good receiver, which will allow the Vikings to get some decent gains with him out of 12 personnel (1 running back, two wide receivers, 2 tight ends). His best use in the passing game will be play-action as the defense will look at him as primarily a blocker. And that is when he is going to make them pay.

Last season Conklin brought in 19 receptions for 194 yards and 1 touchdown in a limited role. It will be interesting to see where he develops from here.

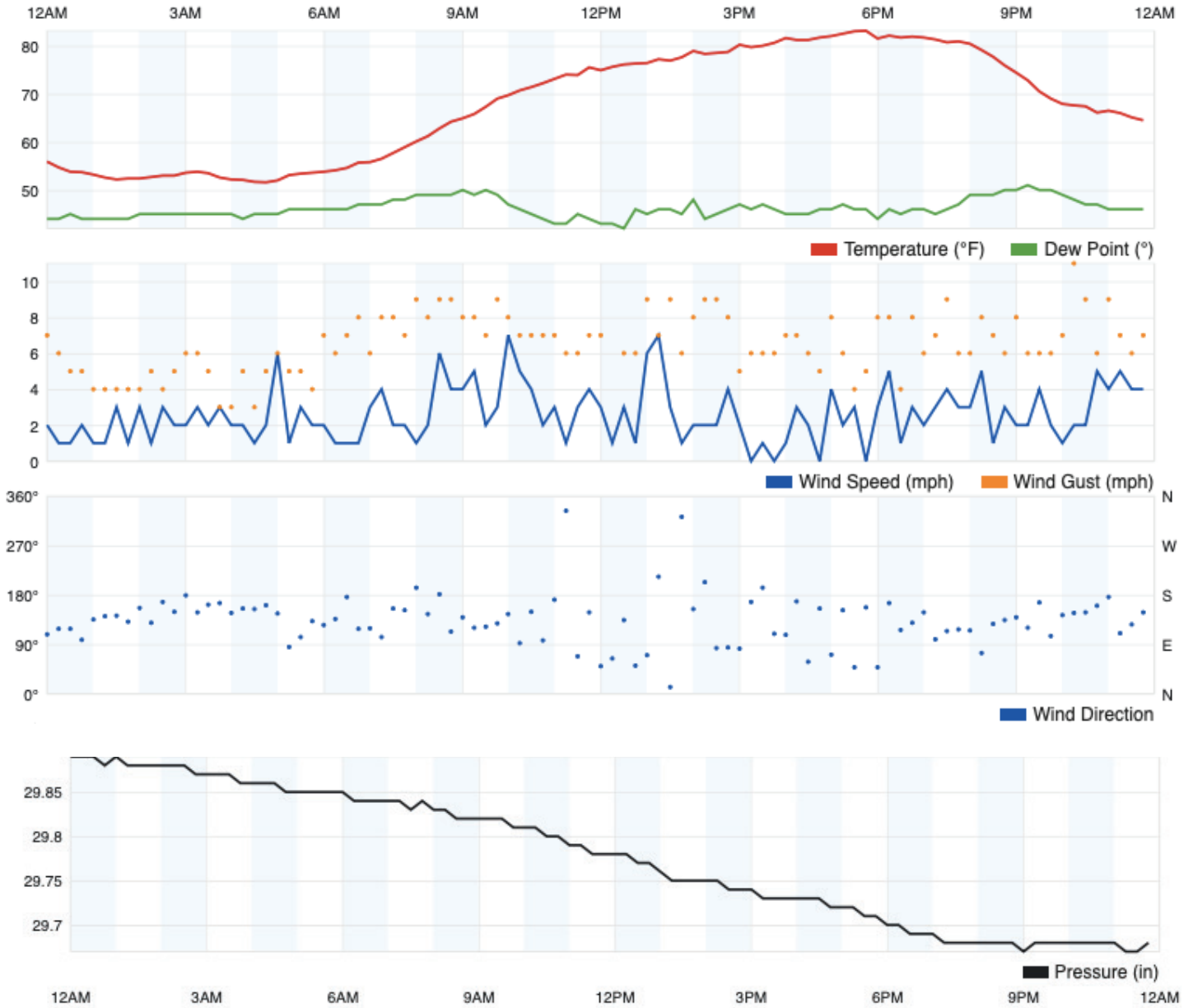
The rest – With Irv Smith Jr. and Conklin locking up the top two tight end positions, the Vikings will be looking to find the team's third TE. It is an important role for short-yardage situations and of course depth. Currently on the roster are Brandon Dillon, 2021 draft pick Zach Davidson, and undrafted free agent signing Shane Zylstra who switched from wide receiver to tight end after the Vikings signed him. He is also the younger brother of Former Vikings receiver Brandon Zylstra.

My favorite to win the 3rd spot on the depth chart is Zach Davidson. He is tall and an athlete. I think he would bring something unique to the table. He is also a little raw. If the Vikings can get to work on him, I have high hopes for his future.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
Hot	Partly Cloudy then Slight Chance T-storms	Hot	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance T-storms	Chance Showers
High: 101 °F	Low: 65 °F	High: 91 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 80 °F

## Fire Weather Concerns Today

	Maximum Temperature Forecast										Minimum RH Forecast										Maximum Wind Gust Forecast									
	6/23 Wed										6/23 Wed										6/23 Wed									
	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	Maximum	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	Minimum	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	Maximum
Aberdeen	94	97	100	102	102	101	99	94	87	102	27	24	20	18	18	18	20	24	31	18	24	23	22	22	23	23	21	17	15	24
Britton	89	92	94	95	96	95	93	89	84	96	32	29	27	26	26	28	31	35	43	26	29	29	29	26	26	25	21	17	15	29
Eagle Butte	92	95	96	97	96	96	94	91	85	97	23	20	19	18	18	19	21	24	31	18	12	18	24	24	25	23	20	16	14	25
Eureka	92	95	97	99	99	98	96	92	85	99	27	22	18	17	16	17	19	23	31	16	22	24	26	28	28	25	23	20	16	28
Gettysburg	90	94	96	98	98	97	94	90	83	98	30	23	20	18	17	18	22	25	31	17	20	20	22	23	25	22	20	16	12	25
Kennebec	95	98	100	102	102	101	99	94	88	102	27	22	19	17	16	17	19	23	29	16	10	10	13	14	15	16	17	16	12	17
McIntosh	89	91	93	93	92	91	90	86	81	93	26	23	21	22	22	24	25	30	38	21	28	30	32	33	32	30	28	24	20	33
Milbank	88	90	92	93	93	93	92	89	84	93	30	28	27	26	27	28	31	35	43	26	16	18	20	20	18	18	18	18	15	20
Miller	91	95	98	99	99	98	96	92	85	99	30	24	21	19	19	20	22	25	31	19	17	17	17	15	18	18	16	13	12	18
Mobridge	94	97	99	100	100	99	97	93	86	100	19	17	16	15	15	16	18	22	29	15	20	22	24	25	25	25	23	20	17	25
Murdo	95	98	99	101	101	100	98	94	87	101	23	20	18	16	16	17	18	22	29	16	9	10	12	14	14	14	16	16	15	16
Pierre	95	98	100	102	102	101	99	94	88	102	23	19	17	16	15	16	17	22	27	15	9	12	15	15	17	15	15	14	12	17
Redfield	92	96	98	100	100	99	97	92	86	100	28	25	22	19	19	20	22	27	32	19	22	21	18	16	21	18	17	16	15	22
Sisseton	92	94	96	98	98	98	96	92	86	98	27	25	24	23	23	24	27	32	39	23	23	24	24	23	24	22	20	17	15	24
Watertown	88	91	93	94	94	93	92	88	83	94	31	28	26	26	27	29	32	38	46	26	20	21	21	21	22	21	21	20	17	22
Wheaton	88	90	92	93	94	94	93	89	84	94	33	30	27	26	26	27	29	34	41	26	23	22	22	22	22	21	20	18	16	23

Updated: 6/23/2021 4:07 AM Central



Hot temperatures today comes with fire weather concerns with low afternoon humidity and breezy conditions. Thunderstorm chances are low tonight through early Friday, and while some areas may see moisture, this is not expected to be too widespread. Best chance for moisture would be Friday morning.

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## Today in Weather History

June 23, 1914: A destructive, estimated F3 tornado moved east across Altamont Township in Brown County. All buildings were destroyed on at least four farms. A man was killed trying to keep his family from being blown out of a shallow cellar.

Another storm moved east from the southeastern part of Watertown to north of Goodwin. Over 200 homes were heavily damaged at Watertown by both an estimated F2 tornado and downburst winds. Barns were destroyed on three farms east of Watertown. The estimated cost was at \$200,000.

June 23, 2002: A powerful supercell thunderstorm produced six tornados from eastern McPherson County and across northern Brown County during the evening hours. The first tornado to touchdown was a brief F0, and occurred 6.4 miles northeast of Leola and resulted in no damage. The second tornado was an F1 and touched down 8.5 miles northeast of Leola and crossed over into Brown County where it dissipated 9 miles northwest of Barnard. This tornado brought down many trees and a barn and caused damage to the siding and the roof of a farmhouse in McPherson County. A third weak satellite F0 tornado occurred following the dissipation of the second tornado and resulted in no damage. A fourth, stronger F3 tornado developed 6 miles west of Barnard and moved east before dissipating 3 miles southeast of Barnard. This tornado brought down some high power lines along with a support tower and tossed a pickup truck 100 yards into a group of trees. The pickup truck was totaled. The tornado caused extensive damage to two farmhouses, several farm buildings, and farm equipment. One farmhouse lost the garage and had many trees completely snapped off down low and debarked. The fifth tornado developed 5 miles southeast of Barnard and became a violent F4 tornado. This tornado caused damage to one farmhouse, several outbuildings, trees, and equipment as it moved northeast and strengthened. The tornado then completely demolished two unoccupied homes, several outbuildings, along with destroying or damaging some farm equipment before dissipating 7.6 miles northeast of Barnard. The sixth tornado was a weak satellite F0, which occurred with this violent tornado and caused no damage. The F4 tornado was the first recorded in Brown County and one of few recorded in South Dakota. The total estimated property loss exceeded a million dollars.

1944: The deadliest and strongest tornado in the state of West Virginia occurred on this day. The Shinnston Tornado that ravaged a path of destruction from Shinnston to Cheat Mountain, then on to Maryland and ending in Pennsylvania in the Allegheny Mountains, is the only twister to produce F4 damage in West Virginia. This tornado killed 103 people.

2010: An F2 tornado destroyed approximately 50 homes and caused damages estimated to be \$15 million in Midland, Ontario. 12 people were reported to be injured. Ontario provided immediate provincial assistance of up to \$1 million to aid in cleanup and repairs.

1902 - The temperature at Volcano Springs, CA, soared to 129 degrees to set a June record for the U.S. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders)

1957 - A few miles west of Fort Stockton TX, softball size hail injured 21 persons unable to find shelter, mostly farm laborers. Some livestock were killed. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A massive hailstorm hit eastern Colorado causing an estimated 60 to 70 million dollars damage. At La Junta, CO, hail as large as softballs caused 37 million dollars damage. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thirty-four cities reported record high temperatures for the date. The reading of 90 degrees at Bluefield, WV, equalled their record for the month of June. The record high of 104 degrees at Billings, MT, was their thirteenth of the month. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Six cities in the High Plains Region reported record low temperatures for the date, including Sheridan, WY, with a reading of 38 degrees. Showers and thunderstorms in the eastern U.S. deluged New Castle County, DE, with 2.5 inches of rain in one hour. (The National Weather Summary)

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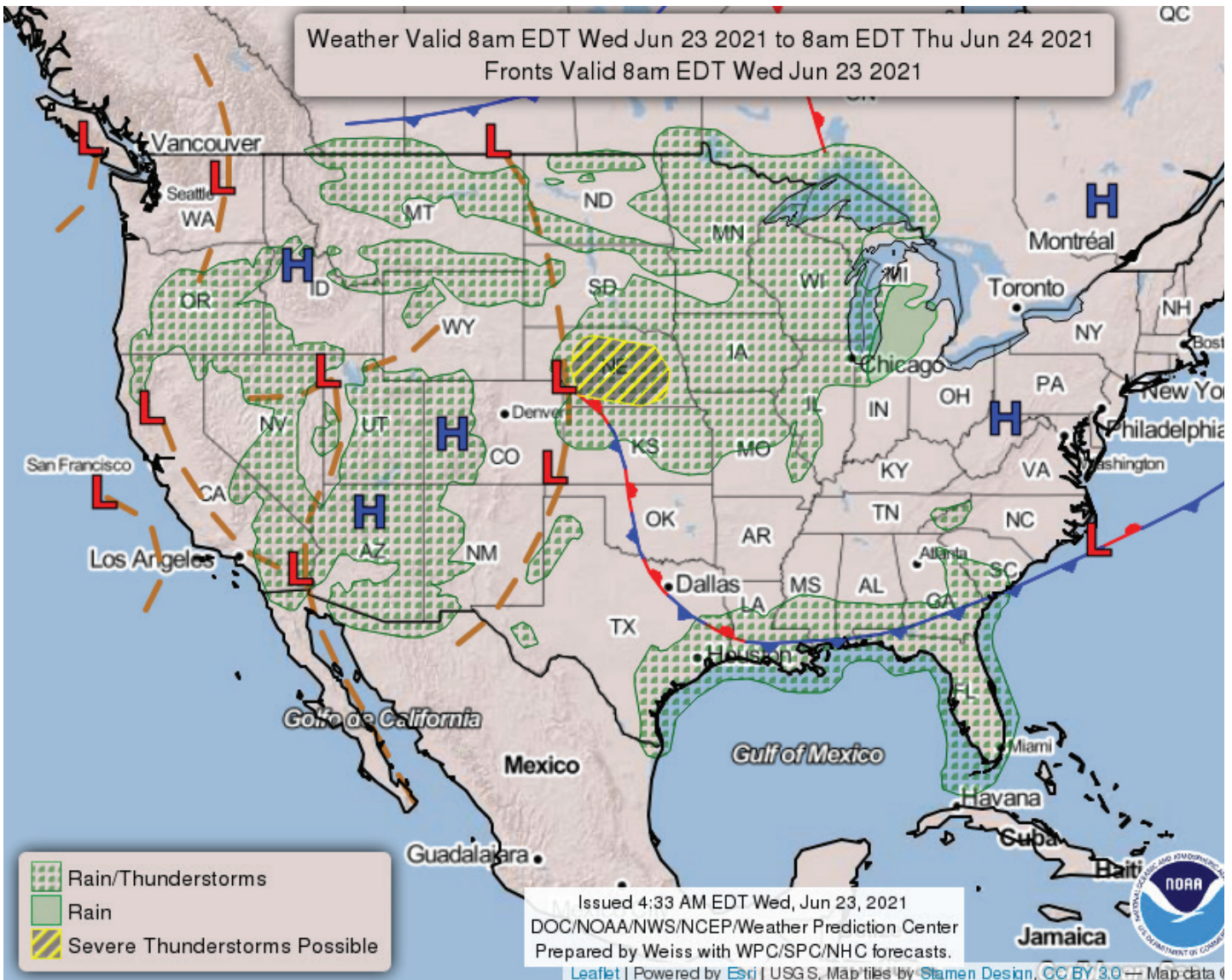
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 64.4 °F**  
**Low Temp: 57.5 °F**  
**Wind: 9 mph**  
**Precip: .00**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 104° in 1911**  
**Record Low: 33° in 1942**  
**Average High: 82°F**  
**Average Low: 57°F**  
**Average Precip in June.: 2.69**  
**Precip to date in June.: 0.60**  
**Average Precip to date: 9.94**  
**Precip Year to Date: 4.54**  
**Sunset Tonight: 9:26 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:46 a.m.**



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## TO PROTECT AND TO PROVIDE

A biographer once wrote of Christopher Columbus that "He discovered no island or sea as lonely as himself."

How different for those who trust God!

David wrote, "When You, God, went out before Your people, when You marched through the wilderness... You provided for the poor!"

The writer of Hebrews echoed those words when he wrote of the risen Christ, "I will never leave you nor ever forsake you."

King Nebuchadnezzar refused to hear the testimony of three young men. He bound them and threw them into a fiery furnace. In amazement, when he looked into the furnace he did not see three men, but four: unharmed and unbound. He shouted, "Servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" God went before them, protected them and rescued them.

On one occasion the disciples of Jesus were frightened by the winds and the waves that were threatening them. They were in a little boat with little hope. Then Jesus appeared and said, "Take courage. Don't be afraid. It is I!" He went to them, calmed their fears and then said, "You of little faith. Why did you doubt?"

A Psalmist was traveling through a deep valley with dark shadows. He was filled with great fear as he faced the "unknown." Yet, he was able to say, "I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff will comfort me!" He trusted God because he knew God would never abandon him.

The Lord always goes before us to protect us. He will provide for everything we need now and through eternity.

Prayer: Thank You, God, for assuring us that we do not face the threats of life alone. Thank You for Your protection. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: When You, God, went out before Your people, when You marched through the wilderness...You provided for the poor. Psalm 68:7 & 10b

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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



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## News from the Associated Press

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

01-26-48-51-59, Mega Ball: 25, Megaplier: 4

(one, twenty-six, forty-eight, fifty-one, fifty-nine; Mega Ball: twenty-five; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$40 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$63 million

### Dakota Access lawsuit dismissed; future challenges possible

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A federal judge on Tuesday dismissed the lawsuit filed by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe challenging the operation of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

With his ruling, U.S. District Judge James Boasberg outlined a path for a future legal challenge to an ongoing environmental review, should the tribe seek to make one.

Boasberg indicated if the tribe plans to challenge the outcome of the study it must do so in the form of a new lawsuit that would be assigned to his court. The judge also left open the possibility of reopening the case should any previous orders he made concerning the pipeline be violated.

Boasberg in May answered lingering issues in the litigation, ruling the pipeline could keep operating. Standing Rock had asked him to issue an injunction forcing the line to stop pumping oil, but he concluded the tribe had failed to demonstrate a "likelihood of irreparable injury" from the line's continued operation.

The Bismarck Tribune reports the ruling eased the anxiety of many Bakken producers who send their oil to market through the 1,200-mile line. State officials also feared a decline in oil tax revenue and jobs if the pipeline were forced to shut down during the environmental review.

Boasberg for five years has presided over the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline. His rulings over the years gave victories and defeats to both Standing Rock and pipeline supporters, including operator Energy Transfer and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the agency tasked with permitting the line's Missouri River crossing.

The \$3.8 billion pipeline began operating in 2017, after being the subject of months of protests during its construction.

### US to review Native American boarding schools' dark history

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

The federal government will investigate its past oversight of Native American boarding schools and work to "uncover the truth about the loss of human life and the lasting consequences" of policies that over the decades forced hundreds of thousands of children from their families and communities, U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland announced Tuesday.

The unprecedented work will include compiling and reviewing records to identify past boarding schools, locate known and possible burial sites at or near those schools, and uncover the names and tribal affiliations of students, she said.

"To address the intergenerational impact of Indian boarding schools and to promote spiritual and emotional healing in our communities, we must shed light on the unspoken traumas of the past no matter how hard it will be," Haaland said.

A member of New Mexico's Laguna Pueblo and the first Native American to serve as a Cabinet secretary, Haaland outlined the initiative while addressing members of the National Congress of American Indians

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during the group's midyear conference.

She said the process will be long, difficult and painful and will not undo the heartbreak and loss endured by many families.

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, Indigenous children were taken from their communities and forced into boarding schools that focused on assimilation.

Haaland talked about the federal government's attempt to wipe out tribal identity, language and culture and how that past has continued to manifest itself through long-standing trauma, cycles of violence and abuse, premature deaths, mental health issues and substance abuse.

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 the troubling 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 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.

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.

Interior Department officials said aside from trying to shed more light on the loss of life at the boarding schools, they will be working to protect burial sites associated with the schools and will consult with tribes on how best to do that while respecting families and communities.

As part of the initiative, a final report from agency staff is due by April 1, 2022.

Chuck Hoskin Jr., principal chief of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, which had about 80 boarding schools, called the announcement encouraging and said anything that can be done to address those "troubling chapters of history" is a positive thing.

"I hope we don't discover gruesome incidents like were discovered in Canada. I just think it's good in this country to have conversations about what happened to Native American children," Hoskin said.

Navajo Nation President Nez also offered his support for the initiative, noting discrimination against Native Americans continues today on many fronts — from voter suppression to high numbers of missing and murdered people.

"Last week, Congress and President Biden established 'Juneteenth' as a national holiday, in observance of the end of slavery, which I fully support as a means to healing the African American community," Nez said. "Now, from my perspective as a Navajo person, there are so many atrocities and injustices that have been inflicted upon Native Americans dating back hundreds of years to the present day that also require national attention, so that the American society in general is more knowledgeable and capable of understanding the challenges that we face today."

This is not the first time the federal government has attempted to acknowledge what Haaland referred to as a "dark history."

More than two decades ago, Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Kevin Gover issued an apology for the emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual violence committed against children at the off-reservation schools. Then in 2009, President Barack Obama quietly signed off on an apology of sorts that was buried deep in a multibillion-dollar defense spending bill; the language had been watered down from the original legislation introduced years earlier.

**South Dakota lawmakers, cities warm to marijuana plans**

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By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — As South Dakota anticipates a state Supreme Court decision on whether recreational marijuana will become legal in July, state lawmakers and city governments are moving forward with their own pot plans.

Officials across the state have warmed to the idea of legalization since voters passed a constitutional amendment in November legalizing marijuana for adults. Some cities want to own and operate recreational marijuana dispensaries, a lobbyist for municipalities told a committee of state lawmakers studying adult-use recreational marijuana on Tuesday. And even if the Supreme Court keeps the drug from being legalized, state lawmakers are planning to craft a legalization bill ahead of next year's legislative session.

As it stands, the voter-passed law will not take effect on July 1 because a state circuit court judge struck it down in February, reasoning that it violated a requirement that constitutional amendments deal with just one subject and would have created broad changes to state government. An appeal to that ruling from marijuana legalization advocates is currently being weighed by the state Supreme Court.

State lawmakers have been in a holding pattern as the legal battle has played out. Republican Rep. Hugh Bartels said he anticipates the Supreme Court will issue its ruling on Thursday, meaning that if the high court sides with pot legalization, the state would have just days to prepare for the law to take effect.

Bartels, who is the chair of the Legislature's Adult-Use Marijuana Study Subcommittee, said the Supreme Court's ruling will largely determine the job of the committee. If marijuana gets the go-ahead from justices, lawmakers will focus on cleaning up state law to accommodate pot and study its implications on issues such as property taxes and driving laws. If pot legalization is struck down, Bartels said the committee would focus on writing a proposal to legalize pot next year.

He said the bill would be a "good, center of the road" proposal that would look to avoid some of the pitfalls the constitutional amendment suffered, though he acknowledged the bill would not be a sure bet in the Republican-dominated Legislature.

During the 2020 election, 54% of voters passed the constitutional amendment legalizing pot. A separate ballot measure legalizing medical marijuana was even more popular, passing with 70% of the vote.

Gov. Kristi Noem has led the effort to stop recreational marijuana legalization, bringing the lawsuit challenging its constitutionality and calling it a "bad decision" for the state.

But Yvonne Taylor, the executive director of the South Dakota Municipal League, told lawmakers that cities are seeing the potential financial benefit of marijuana legalization. She proposed allowing cities to own and operate pot dispensaries as a way for local communities to reap some of the profits.

"The advent of recreational marijuana is going to bring in a lot of money and a lot of outside interests," she said.

## Ex-teacher given 100 years for sexually assaulting students

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A former elementary school teacher in Sioux Falls has been sentenced to 100 years in prison for sexually assaulting two students.

Thomas Richard Strong, 72, of Sioux Falls, was earlier found guilty of four counts of rape and one count of sexual contact with a child under 16.

He was sentenced last week by Judge Jerome Eckrich in Minnehaha County to 25 years in prison on each count of rape to run consecutively to each other and 10 years on the sexual contact count to run concurrently.

An investigation began in May 2019 when concerns were raised about inappropriate contact with two students. The jury heard testimony from two victims, now ages 8 and 10, about the crimes the defendant committed against them, the Argus Leader reported.

Strong is currently being held in a secure annex adjacent to the South Dakota State Penitentiary, according to the South Dakota Department of Corrections.

## Hungary's PM uses soccer to push vision of right-wing Europe

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By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Populist Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has long used soccer to advance his right-wing politics, and now widespread international criticism of a new law seen as targeting the LGBT community has turned this month's European Championship into a major stage for his challenge to Europe's liberal values.

Last week, as more than 60,000 soccer fans poured into Budapest's Puskas Arena, an emblem of Orban's famous devotion to soccer, the Hungarian Parliament approved a controversial bill that bans sharing with minors any content portraying homosexuality or sex reassignment.

Human rights groups and liberal politicians in Hungary and from around Europe denounced the law as conflating homosexuality with pedophilia and as a draconian effort to push any representation of LGBT people into the shadows. Nearly half of the European Union's 27 member countries issued a statement calling it a "clear breach of (LGBT people's) fundamental right to dignity," and officials are examining whether the legislation contravenes EU law.

In a direct rebuke to the law, Munich's mayor and city council called for its stadium to be lit up with rainbow colors in a show of support for tolerance and gay rights when Germany plays Hungary on Wednesday at Euro 2020.

The controversy has turned the game into a symbolic showdown between competing visions for the future of Europe, pitting Orban's promotion of what he calls "illiberal democracy" against Western Europe's "liberal consensus."

UEFA, European soccer's governing body, said that while it understood the city's intention to send a message to promote inclusion, it denied the request because it considered it a political move. Other stadiums in Germany unaffiliated with the tournament will be allowed such displays and the team captain will wear a rainbow armband.

European Commission Vice President Margaritis Schinas slammed the UEFA decision, saying Wednesday he can't find "any reasonable excuse" for UEFA to reject Munich's plans.

Orban has been challenging the European consensus ever since he returned to power in 2010: frequently criticizing multiculturalism, curtailing media freedoms, and relentlessly campaigning against the EU itself, portraying Brussels as a modern heir to Soviet Moscow, which dominated Hungary for decades.

His message resonates with many Hungarians who resent interference and perceived condescension from the EU — and he has frequently shown himself adept at maneuvering around its policies, such as when he went out on his own to make Hungary the first EU country to procure Russian and Chinese COVID-19 vaccines not approved by European regulators.

The move — which has led Hungary to have the second-highest rate of vaccination in the EU — offered validation for his strategy of bucking the bloc's dictates, both increasing his power at home and challenging the EU's credibility and liberal values.

Fiercely opposed to immigration, he has blasted European leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, for plans in 2015 to distribute the burden of that year's wave of refugees from the Middle East and Africa and refused to accept asylum seekers. His crackdowns on the media have led to "a degree of (state) media control unprecedented in an EU member state," according to Reporters Without Borders.

More recently, after his ruling Fidesz party broke with its center-right political group in the European Parliament, Orban has embarked on a mission to unite Europe's right-wing forces into a new political formation.

By all accounts a soccer fanatic and a former player himself, Orban has often used the sport as his preferred venue for pushing his political vision and amplifying his image as a man of the people.

Since the days of Hungary great Ferenc Puskas — widely regarded as one of the best players of all time who led "the Mighty Magyars" to the 1954 World Cup final and an Olympic gold medal at the 1952 Helsinki Games — the country has never again achieved world-class status in soccer. But Orban has attempted to rekindle some of the old magic.

In 2007, he founded the Puskas Soccer Academy in his home village of Felcsut, where he had played semi-professionally in the 1990s. His government also introduced a scheme where companies may donate

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money to sports clubs in lieu of paying corporate tax, an arrangement that since 2010 has netted clubs as much as \$2.7 billion — money that critics say would have been better spent on Hungary's ailing health care sector.

The government also directly funds the sport, paying for several of the 32 stadiums that have been built or renovated in Hungary since Orban assumed power, making the structures something of a symbol of state largesse.

This major injection of capital into soccer has made games a popular meeting place for politicians and the politically connected. Orban is often photographed at games with some of Hungary's most successful businessmen, including billionaire Sandor Csanyi, Hungary's second wealthiest person who is also the president of the Hungarian soccer federation and a UEFA vice president.

The games themselves have also become battlegrounds for displays of Hungary's values. After a recent game in Budapest between Hungary's national team and Portugal, UEFA received complaints that Hungarian fans were carrying homophobic banners.

Video from the game also showed Hungarian fans chanting "Cristiano homosexual!" at Portugal captain Cristiano Ronaldo during the match. In 2017, FIFA, soccer's international governing body, fined the Hungarian soccer federation \$22,000 after Hungarian fans directed the same chant at Ronaldo at a World Cup qualifier in Budapest.

Earlier in the tournament, during a friendly match in Budapest between Ireland and Hungary, Hungarian fans booed Irish players as they knelt on the field as a sign of solidarity against racism.

Orban seized the opportunity to denounce the gesture that has swept Europe and the United States amid calls for action against racial injustice. He defended the fans, asserting that "politics has no place in sports," and chided the Irish national team, telling them not to "provoke the host if you come as a guest."

Hungarians only kneel before God, their country, and their lovers, he said.

Levente Toth, 45, a Hungarian fan who traveled to Munich to view Wednesday's game, said that he thought the push to illuminate Germany's stadium in rainbow colors "has no place in sports," adding that he thought opposition to the new law was "overblown" and echoing the typical message that the legislation protects children.

"No one wants to harm gays or people who think differently or people of different sexual orientations," he said.

But Toth said those displaying homophobic banners or engaging in hateful chants at games "should be lifted out of the crowd."

## Europe seeks disabled astronauts, more women in space

PARIS (AP) — The European Space Agency says it was "blown away" by the record number of applicants — more than 22,000 — hoping to become the continent's next generation of space travelers, including more women than ever and some 200 people with disabilities.

In releasing the results of a new recruitment drive aimed at more astronaut diversity, the agency acknowledged Wednesday that it still has work to do on gender balance. Just 24% of the applicants were women, up from 15% at the last hiring drive in 2008.

The hiring campaign didn't specifically address ethnic diversity, but stressed the importance of "representing all parts of our society." The agency received applications from all 25 member nations and associate members, though most came from traditional heavyweights France, Germany, Britain and Italy.

For the first time, the ESA specifically sought out people with physical disabilities, for a first-of-its-kind effort to determine what adaptations would be necessary to space stations to accommodate them.

The competition is fierce. Just four to six people will be chosen as Europe's next astronauts, with a reserve team of about 20. The candidates will undergo intensive screening over the next year, with a final decision expected in late 2022.

"We've all been astonished" at the number of applicants, ESA Director General Josef Aschbacher told a news conference. "It's a very strong expression of interest and enthusiasm that people have across

Europe for space.”

The European agency has sent only two women into space to date — Claudie Haigneré and Samantha Cristoforetti — but wants that number to grow.

While 5,419 women applied for the new ESA program, “the numbers also show there is more to be done to achieve gender balance in the space sector,” said David Parker, its director of human and robotic exploration.

Globally, 65 of the more than 560 people who have explored space were women, most of them Americans.

## Witnesses say airstrike in Ethiopia’s Tigray kills dozens

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — An airstrike hit a busy market in Ethiopia’s northern Tigray village of Togoga on Tuesday, according to health workers who said soldiers blocked medical teams from traveling to the scene. Dozens of people were killed, they and a former resident said, citing witnesses.

Two doctors and a nurse in Tigray’s regional capital, Mekele, told The Associated Press they were unable to confirm how many people were killed, but one doctor said health workers at the scene reported “more than 80 civilian deaths.” The health workers spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

The alleged airstrike comes amid some of the fiercest fighting in the Tigray region since the conflict began in November as Ethiopian forces supported by those from neighboring Eritrea pursue Tigray’s former leaders. A military spokesman and the spokeswoman for Ethiopia’s prime minister did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Wounded patients being treated at Mekele’s Ayder hospital told health workers that a plane dropped a bomb on Togoga’s marketplace. The six patients included a 2-year-old child with “abdominal trauma” and a 6-year-old, the nurse said. An ambulance carrying a wounded baby to Mekele, almost 60 kilometers (37 miles) away by road, was blocked for two hours and the baby died on the way, the nurse added.

Hailu Kebede, foreign affairs head for the Salsay Woyane Tigray opposition party and who comes from Togoga, told the AP that one fleeing witness to the attack had counted more than 30 bodies and other witnesses were reporting more than 50 people killed. Many more were said to be wounded in the remote village that’s linked to Mekele in part by challenging stretches of dirt roads.

“It was horrific,” said a staffer with an international aid group who told the AP he had spoken with a colleague and others at the scene. “We don’t know if the jets were coming from Ethiopia or Eritrea. They are still looking for bodies by hand. More than 50 people were killed, maybe more.”

On Tuesday afternoon, a convoy of ambulances attempting to reach Togoga, about 25 kilometers (15 miles) west of Mekele, was turned back by soldiers near Tukul, the health workers said. Several more ambulances were turned back later in the day and on Wednesday morning, but one group of medical workers reached the site on Tuesday evening via a different route.

Those medical workers were treating 40 wounded people but told colleagues in Mekele that the number of wounded is likely higher as some people fled after the attack. Five of the wounded patients were said to need emergency operations but the health workers were unable to evacuate them.

“We have been asking, but until now we didn’t get permission to go, so we don’t know how many people are dead,” said one of the doctors in Mekele.

Another doctor said the Red Cross ambulance he was traveling in on Tuesday while trying to reach the scene was shot at twice by Ethiopian soldiers, who held his team for 45 minutes before ordering them back to Mekele.

“We are not allowed to go,” he said. “They told us whoever goes, they are helping the troops of the TPLF.”

The TPLF refers to the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, which governed Tigray until it was ousted by a federal government offensive in November. The subsequent fighting has killed thousands and forced more than 2 million people from their homes.

While the United Nations has said all sides have been accused of abuses, Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers have been repeatedly accused by witnesses of looting and destroying health centers across the Tigray region and denying civilians access to care.

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This month, humanitarian agencies warned that 350,00 people in Tigray are facing famine. Aid workers have said they have been repeatedly denied access to several parts of the region by soldiers.

The government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed says it has nearly defeated the rebels. But forces loyal to the TPLF recently announced an offensive in parts of Tigray and have claimed a string of victories.

A resident in Adigrat, about 100 kilometers (62 miles) north of Mekele, said a group of Tigrayan fighters briefly entered the town on Tuesday, although he said it had since been retaken by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces. He said federal police had since been seen beating people in the center of the town.

"Everybody is staying at home, there is no movement in the town," he said.

Renewed fighting was also reported in Edaga Hamus and Wukro, two towns that sit on the main road to Mekele.

The reports came as Ethiopia held federal and regional elections on Monday. The vote was peaceful in most parts of the country, although there was no voting in Tigray.

The vote was delayed last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, heightening tensions between the federal government and the TPLF, which went ahead with its own regional election in September.

## Biden faces growing pressure from the left over voting bill

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When New York Democratic Rep. Mondaire Jones was at the White House for the signing of the proclamation making Juneteenth a national holiday last week, he told President Joe Biden their party needed him more involved in passing voting legislation on the Hill.

In response? Biden "just sort of stared at me," Jones said, describing an "awkward silence" that passed between the two.

For Jones, the moment was emblematic of what he and a growing number of Democratic activists describe as a lackluster engagement from Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris on an issue they consider urgent and necessary for the health of the democracy.

Although the White House has characterized the issue as "the fight of his presidency," Biden has prioritized his economic initiatives, measures more likely to win Republican support in the Senate. And he's shown little interest thus far in diving into a messy debate over changing Senate rules to pass the legislation on Democratic votes alone.

But as Democrats' massive election legislation was blocked by Republicans on Tuesday, progressives argued Biden could not avoid that fight much longer and must use all his leverage to find a path forward. The criticism suggested the voting debate may prove to be among Biden's first major, public rifts with the left of his presidency.

"President Obama, for his part, has been doing more to salvage our ailing democracy than the current president of the United States of America," Mondaire said, referring to a recent interview in which the former president pushed for the legislation.

The White House argues that both Biden and Harris have been in frequent touch with Democratic leadership and key advocacy groups as the legislation — dubbed the For the People Act — moved through Congress. Biden spoke out forcefully at times, declaring a new Georgia law backed by Republicans is an "atrocity" and using a speech in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to say he was going to "fight like heck" for Democrats' federal answer, but he left negotiations on the proposal to Hill leaders.

On Monday, in advance of the vote, Biden met with Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., at the White House to discuss both voting rights and infrastructure.

But Biden didn't use his clout to work Republicans, who have expressed staunch and unified opposition to any voting legislation, arguing Democrats are pushing an unnecessary federal takeover of elections now run by state and county officials.

Biden spent much of the month focused on foreign policy during a trip to Europe, encouraging Americans to get vaccinated and selling his infrastructure plan to the American public. He tasked Harris with taking the lead on the issue, and she spent last week largely engaged in private meetings with voting rights

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advocates as she traveled for a vaccination tour around the nation.

Those efforts haven't appeased some activists, who argue that state laws tightening election laws are designed to make it harder for Black, young and infrequent voters to cast ballots. The best way to counter the state laws is with federal legislation, they say, and Biden ought to come out for a change in the Senate filibuster rules that require 60 votes to advance most legislation.

"Progressives are losing patience, and I think particularly African American Democrats are losing patience," said Democratic strategist Joel Payne, a longtime aide to former Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. "They feel like they have done the kind of good Democrat thing over the last year-plus, going back to when Biden got the nomination, unifying support around Biden, turning out, showing up on Election Day."

"Progressives feel like, 'Hey, we did our part.' And now when it's time for the bill to be paid, so to speak, I think some progressives feel like, 'OK, well, how long do we have to wait?'"

Still, there could be a silver lining for Democrats in the ongoing battle over voting rights: The issue is a major motivator for progressives and may serve to drive enthusiasm among Black voters as well, potentially driving engagement in a midterm year where Democrats are certain to face a tough political climate.

Harris is expected to continue to meet with voting rights activists, business leaders and groups working on the issue in the states, and will speak out publicly on the issue aiming to raise awareness of new voting laws and to pressure Republicans to get on board with federal legislation.

She watched the legislation fail to advance to debate on Tuesday, in her role as president of the Senate, and coming off the floor told reporters that she and Biden still support voting legislation and "the fight is not over."

Ezra Levin, co-executive director of Indivisible, a progressive grassroots group, said it's been nowhere near the level of advocacy the public has seen on the infrastructure bill.

"The president has been on the sidelines. He has issued statements of support, he's maybe included a line or two in a speech here or there, but there has been nothing on the scale of his public advocacy for recovery for COVID relief, for roads and bridges," Levin said.

"We think this is a crisis at the same level as crumbling roads and bridges, and if we agree on that, the question is, why is the president on the sidelines?"

White House aides push back against any suggestion the president and vice president haven't been engaged on the issue, and say his laissez-faire approach to the negotiations is based partly on his experience as a senator and his belief that his involvement risks undermining a deal before it's cut.

But in private, White House advisers see infrastructure as the bigger political winner for Biden because it's widely popular among voters of both parties, a White House official said. Passing a major infrastructure bill is seen within the White House as going further towards helping Democrats win in the 2022 midterms and beyond than taking on massive voting overhaul that had a slim chance of passage without a debate over filibuster rules, said the official, who requested anonymity to discuss internal talks.

Embracing filibuster changes, in particular, risks undermining Biden's profile as a bipartisan dealmaker and could poison the delicate negotiations around infrastructure, where the White House insists it still sees opportunity for bipartisan compromise.

"He does have to preserve some negotiating power, and his brand probably does not compute with being at the tip of the spear on reforming the filibuster," Payne acknowledged.

Still, other Democrats say it's time for Biden to get out front on the issue. Rep. Colin Allred, D-Texas, said the proposals Republicans are looking to pass in his home state are "more explicit and more dangerous than anything I've ever come across."

Allred said that the voting fight increases pressure on Biden to take the leadership on the filibuster fight.

"We do need President Biden to make that a priority, because if you're going to talk about supporting the underlying legislation, it really doesn't matter if we don't have way to get past the filibuster," he said.

## **EXPLAINER: What's next now that GOP has blocked voting bill?**

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press



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Senate Republicans have blocked debate of a sweeping overhaul of how elections are run in the U.S. The bill was pushed by congressional Democrats who argued it was needed to counter a spate of new GOP laws this year tightening voting rules in the states.

A look at what has happened so far, what's in the bill and what happens next:

## WHY DID SENATE REPUBLICANS BLOCK THE BILL?

Republicans have long opposed Democratic efforts to overhaul elections in the U.S. and say the reforms being proposed are more about ensuring Democratic victories than fairness in voting. They note that Democrats introduced their overhaul two years ago, before the 2020 election, and say the massive bill amounts to a federal takeover of elections, which are run by state and local election offices. Congressional Republicans argue increased voter turnout in the 2020 election is proof that reforms are not needed. But, at the same time, their counterparts in state legislatures have pointed to unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud as justification for tightening rules and increasing election oversight at the state and local level.

## WHAT DOES THE BILL DO?

The bill, known as the For The People Act, would create minimum standards for voting in the U.S. and establish Election Day as a federal holiday. It requires all states to offer automatic voter registration and at least 15 days of early voting. Some states already do this, but others do not. And Democrats argue that federal standards would reduce confusion among the public. They also say the standards would blunt the impact of new state laws creating barriers for voters.

But the bill doesn't just address election issues. There are scores of other provisions packed into the 888-page bill, including a broad expansion of public funding for campaigns, a revamp of redistricting and ethics reforms. Written when Democrats were out of power, it was more a statement of priorities than legislation to be ultimately enacted. It's been refined a few times and more changes are expected.

## IS THIS THE END OF THE ROAD?

Democratic leaders expected Tuesday's vote and their efforts to pass the bill will continue. "In the fight for voting rights, this vote was the starting gun, not the finish line," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said in remarks after the vote. But with a 50-50 split in the Senate, they have few options due to the filibuster rule that requires 60 votes to advance most legislation. Now the fight turns to whether Democrats can agree that voting legislation is so important it's worth changing or setting aside the filibuster.

They'll also continue to try to build public support for their efforts. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., who chairs the powerful Rules Committee, said Tuesday she would hold a hearing in Georgia on a law approved earlier this year by the GOP-dominated Legislature that has raised concerns of more hurdles for voters and the potential for partisan interference in local election administration.

## ARE DEMOCRATS UNITED?

At least two Democratic senators, Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona and Joe Manchin of West Virginia, have said they oppose eliminating the filibuster rule. Sinema supports the voting reform bill but argued in a recent opinion piece that the rule "compels moderation and helps protect the country from wild swings."

Manchin, who initially opposed the bill, has crafted a new version that would remove some of the more contentious provisions such as same-day voter registration and the public financing option. His proposal also calls for a national ID requirement, something Democrats have not done previously but appear open to considering. The requirement would be less strict than ones pushed by Republicans in certain states and allow voters to provide nonphoto ID such as a utility bill.

## WHAT SORT OF CHANGES ARE DEMOCRATS CONSIDERING?

Discussions are ongoing among congressional Democrats on how to proceed, with leaders noting privately that both Sinema and Manchin oppose eliminating the rule — but that doesn't mean they would oppose changing it. And President Joe Biden has signaled a willingness to consider a change. Democratic leaders argue there is an opportunity to improve the process and are weighing three potential changes:

- Require that 41 senators of the minority party be present if they want to block a vote on any legislation.
- Create a narrow exemption for the rule to be suspended for any legislation dealing with voting and elections. There is precedent for this. Democrats previously eased the rule to allow most executive branch

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nominees to be confirmed with a simple majority, and Republicans eliminated the filibuster for Supreme Court nominees during the Trump administration.

— Require opposing lawmakers to speak on the floor continuously to block the legislation from advancing — a version of a talking filibuster that would include a gradual reduction in the number of senators who can prevent a vote -- starting at 60 and eventually reaching a simple majority over a period of weeks.

WHAT DOES THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION DO NEXT?

Biden has vowed to wage what the White House calls the “fight of his presidency” over ensuring Americans’ access to voting, but he hasn’t been at the center of the fight yet. Vice President Kamala Harris has been leading the administration’s efforts, speaking with lawmakers and various voting rights’ advocates in recent weeks and meeting with Democratic state lawmakers from Texas who are pushing against a GOP effort there to tighten voting rules.

Those meetings are expected to continue, and Harris will be making public statements affirming her support for voting rights and efforts to halt restrictive voting bills in the states, according to a White House official who spoke on condition of anonymity. Biden has also met with Manchin to discuss legislation including the voting reform bill.

## Iran: ‘Sabotage attack’ on civilian nuclear center foiled

By NASSER KARIMI Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iranian authorities have thwarted what they called a “sabotage attack” targeting a civilian nuclear facility near the country’s capital, Iranian media reported Wednesday, as details about the incident remained scarce.

Nournews, a website believed to be close to Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, first reported the attack. The website said the move was foiled “before causing any casualties or damage” to the sprawling center located in Karaj city, just some 40 kilometers (25 miles) west of Tehran. It said authorities were investigating the cause of the sabotage, without saying how it was carried out.

When asked for comment, an Iranian official referred to the Nournews report. The official spoke on condition of anonymity as they did not have authorization to discuss the matter with media. Iranian state TV carried the report on its news ticker, without offering further details. The International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations’ body that monitors Tehran’s atomic program, did not immediately respond to request for comment.

Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization describes the Karaj Nuclear Center for Medicine and Agriculture as a facility founded in 1974 that uses nuclear technology to improve “quality of soil, water, agricultural and livestock production.” The area is located near various industrial sites, including pharmaceutical production facilities where Iran has manufactured its domestic coronavirus vaccine.

The reported sabotage follows several suspected attacks targeting Iran’s nuclear program in recent months, as diplomatic efforts gain traction in Vienna to resurrect Tehran’s tattered 2015 atomic deal with world powers.

In 2018, then-President Donald Trump pulled the U.S. unilaterally out of the nuclear deal and reimposed devastating sanctions, setting off a series of tense incidents that threatened the wider Mideast.

In April, Iran’s underground Natanz nuclear facility experienced a mysterious blackout that damaged some of its centrifuges. Last July, mysterious fires struck the advanced centrifuge assembly plant at Natanz, which authorities later described as sabotage. Iran now is rebuilding that facility deep inside a nearby mountain.

Israel is widely believed to have carried out the sabotage, though it has not claimed it. Iran also blamed Israel for the November killing of a scientist who began the country’s military nuclear program decades earlier.

Trump’s decision to withdraw from the deal has seen Iran, over time, abandon all limitations on uranium enrichment. The country is now enriching uranium to 60%, its highest ever levels, although still short of weapons grade. Iran has said that its nuclear ambitions are peaceful and that it will return to its commitments once the U.S. lifts its sanctions.

## The Latest: Italy welcomes tourists from US, Canada, Japan

By The Associated Press undefined

ROME — Italy's leader is pitching for tourists to start coming from the United States, Canada and Japan to give a vitally needed boost to Italian hotel and restaurant businesses.

In a speech to lawmakers on Wednesday, Premier Mario Draghi noted that Italy has recently allowed people from those three countries to now come for tourism, previously not allowed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tourists must be vaccinated, have certification that they have recovered from the illness or have a negative COVID-19 test taken within 48 hours of entering Italy.

"We want to allow them to come safely into Italy to help our hoteliers and restaurateurs bounce back after a year-and-a-half of difficulty," Draghi said.

Tourism accounts for 13% of Italy's GDP. Many restaurants and hotels were closed for months, and some hotels, including those who cater heavily to U.S. tourists, have yet to re-open.

### MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:

— Italy is banking on a huge windfall of EU pandemic recovery funds to revamp its lagging economy. The future of the eurozone may depend on how well it does.

— Due to the pandemic, Tokyo is shaping up to be the 'no-fun' Olympics

— Colombia hits 100,000 confirmed COVID-19 deaths, president blames anti-government protests

— US finds deaths among Medicare patients in nursing homes soared by 32% last year

— WHO plans technology transfer hub for coronavirus vaccines in South Africa

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

### HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

BOGOTA — Colombia reached 100,000 confirmed deaths from COVID-19 this week, becoming just the tenth country in the world to hit the unwanted milestone.

The South American nation of 50 million has been registering a growing number of daily cases since April and over the past seven days it had the world's third-highest per capita death rate from COVID-19, according to data published by Oxford University.

President Iván Duque blamed antigovernment protests that began at the end of April for many of the fatalities, saying that "more than 10,000 deaths could have been avoided" if Colombians had not held large gatherings over the past seven weeks.

But epidemiologists in Colombia said it's too soon to tell how much of an impact the protests had on the current surge in COVID-19 deaths.

"The protests definitely played a role" in coronavirus contagion, said Diego Rosselli, a professor of epidemiology at the Javeriana University in Bogota. "But at this moment putting any number on how many deaths they caused is mere speculation."

NEW DELHI — Three Indian states have been asked to strengthen containment measures, increase testing and vaccinations after the federal government classified a newly identified version of the virus that is closely related to the delta variant as a 'variant of concern'.

Viruses mutate all the time and not all changes are worrisome. But this classification implies that there is some evidence the variant has genetic tweaks that allow it to spread more easily, make people sicker or vaccinations less effective.

The delta variant, which was first identified in India and has since spread to many parts of the world, is more infectious and vaccines are slightly less effective against it. This new variant, named delta plus, has an additional genetic tweak that could allow it to evade the human immune system.

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Around 40 cases of the delta plus variant has popped up in three Indian states -- Maharashtra, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh.

**SYDNEY:** Pandemic restrictions tightened in Sydney as delta variant cluster has increased.

Residents who live in the worst-affected parts of Sydney cannot travel outside Australia's largest city "unless it's absolutely essential," New South Wales state Premier Gladys Berejiklian said.

Masks are compulsory outside homes, patrons must be seated while drinking in bars and household visitors are limited to five people.

The cluster began last week when a Sydney airport limousine driver tested positive. He was not vaccinated and is suspected to have been infected while transporting a foreign air crew. The cluster had grown to 31 cases by Wednesday.

"Please abandon non-essential activities, please don't attend social gatherings unless you absolutely must," Berejiklian said. "I'm not going to rule out further action."

Queensland and Victoria states, that share borders with New South Wales, have banned travelers from much of Sydney. South Australia and Western Australia states have banned travel from anywhere in New South Wales, except for travelers with exemptions for approved purposes.

Western Australia Premier Mark McGowan said travelers who were already in the air when the ban was announced could either go into hotel quarantine when they arrived in Perth or fly back.

"I just urge the New South Wales government to get this under control because it's a threat and a risk to the rest of the country. If that means a lockdown, well, then that's what should happen," McGowan added.

**WARSAW, Poland** – Poland is introducing obligatory 7-day quarantine for people arriving from the U.K. because of the rise in the delta coronavirus variant there. People who are fully vaccinated are exempt from the quarantine requirement, which takes effect Wednesday.

After seven days of isolation, a COVID-19 test can be done and if it is negative, the quarantine is lifted.

There's considerable traffic between Poland and the U.K., with hundreds of thousands of Poles living and working there.

Quarantines are also obligatory in Poland for people arriving from India, Brazil and South Africa.

Health Minister Adam Niedzielski said among some 11.7 million fully inoculated Poles, most have received the Pfizer vaccine, which has shown strong efficacy against the delta variant.

There have been 90 confirmed delta variant infections in Poland and at least one person has died.

**HOUSTON** — More than 150 employees at a Houston hospital system who refused to get the COVID-19 vaccine have been fired or resigned after a judge dismissed an employee lawsuit over the vaccine requirement.

A spokesperson for Houston Methodist hospital system said 153 employees either resigned in the two-week suspension period or were terminated on Tuesday.

The case over how far health care institutions can go to protect patients and others against the coronavirus has been closely watched. But it won't be the end of the debate.

Earlier this month, a federal judge threw out the lawsuit filed by 117 employees over the requirement. The hospital system's decision in April to require the vaccine for workers made it the first major U.S. health care system to do so.

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

**HAGATNA, Guam** — Guam is launching a vaccine tourism program to encourage citizens of neighboring countries and Americans living in East Asia to come get inoculated against COVID-19.

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The Pacific Daily News reports the first group of three travelers was arriving on a charter flight from Taiwan. The Guam Visitors Bureau says this is a prelude to bigger groups to come.

The program is aimed at jump-starting Guam's tourism industry which has suffered from a decline in travel amid the coronavirus pandemic.

COVID-19 vaccination rates in places like Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have been low compared to the U.S. territory, where vaccines are easily available.

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ATLANTA — Georgia's governor says he will end the state's public health state of emergency on July 1, more than 15 months after he initially declared it because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Republican Brian Kemp made the announcement Tuesday, signing a fresh extension of the extraordinary powers granted to him by lawmakers that will expire at 12:00 a.m. on July 1.

"Thanks to those efforts, more Georgians are getting vaccinated, our economic momentum is strong, and people are getting back to normal," Kemp said in a statement. "We have emerged resilient, and I thank all Georgians for doing their part."

Kemp becomes the latest in a series of governors nationwide to wind down emergency powers.

This was the first use of Georgia's public health emergency law. It grants Kemp sweeping powers to suspend laws and state regulations. The governor says he will hold on to some extraordinary powers, saying he will issue a different kind of emergency order.

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Arkansas on Tuesday reported 485 new coronavirus cases, its biggest one-day jump in more than three months.

The Department of Health said it was the biggest one-day increase since the state reported 570 new cases on March 5. The state has had 346,180 cases since the pandemic began last year.

The state's active cases, meaning ones that don't include people who have died or recovered, rose by 251 to 2,570. The state's COVID-19 deaths rose by eight to 5,884. Hospitalizations rose by four to 285.

Arkansas in late March opened its vaccinations to everyone at least 16 years old and lifted its statewide mask mandate, but the state has had one of the lowest vaccination rates in the country.

Gov. Asa Hutchinson cited the latest increase as he urged more people to get vaccinated to stop the spread of the virus. About 41% of the state's population has received at least one dose of the vaccine and about 33% completed their vaccination, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

"Until we increase the number of shots, we will continue to have increased numbers of hospitalizations and new cases like we did today," Hutchinson tweeted.

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HONOLULU — Hawaii health officials say there is community spread of the COVID-19 delta variant, which was first detected in India.

Two cases on Oahu and one on the Big Island involve travel from the U.S. mainland. One case involves an Oahu resident with no travel history. The state Department of Health said it is "investigating to determine the extent of household and community transmission."

Acting State Epidemiologist Dr. Sarah Kemble said of the four cases, only one person was vaccinated. Health experts say vaccines remain effective against the variant. Hawaii's vaccination rate is 57%. Kemble says Hawaii's pace of vaccinations has slowed in recent weeks.

—  
WASHINGTON — The COVID-19 delta variant which was first detected in India now represents more than 20% of coronavirus infections in the U.S. in the last two weeks, or double what it was when the Centers for Disease Control last reported on the variant's prevalence.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, warned that the U.S. could be following the United Kingdom's course, where the variant has become the dominant strain due to rapid spread among youth.

Fauci says indications are that the COVID-19 vaccines remain effective against the variant.

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The variant is accounting for half of new infections in the regions that include Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming.

JERUSALEM — Israel's prime minister says the country is in the grip of a "new outbreak" of the coronavirus after a spike in cases in the past week, most of them minors with the highly infectious Delta variant of COVID-19.

Naftali Bennett said Tuesday after touring Israel's main international airport that masks would be mandatory in Ben Gurion Airport and there would be more stringent testing of incoming travelers.

"We made an initial decision to treat this like a new outbreak, and our aim is to sever it," he said. Bennett called on Israelis to avoid all non-essential summer travel abroad.

Israel's Health Ministry reported 125 new coronavirus cases Tuesday, the highest daily number since late April. Over 55% of the country's 9.3 million citizens have received two vaccine doses, but Bennett said several of the new cases reported were in vaccinated individuals.

MOSCOW — The mayor of Moscow announced new coronavirus restrictions on Tuesday, saying that "the situation with the coronavirus remains very difficult" in the Russian capital.

The country's state coronavirus task force reported 6,555 new COVID-19 cases in Moscow on Tuesday and 16,715 new infections across Russia, both tallies twice as high as a month ago.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin banned all entertainment and sports events at which more than 500 people are present.

Starting next Monday, all restaurants, cafes and bars in Moscow will only allow in customers who have been vaccinated against COVID-19, recovered from the virus within the past six months or can provide a negative coronavirus test carried out within 72 hours prior to the visit. To prove their eligibility, customers will need to obtain a QR code at one of several government websites.

Coronavirus infections surged in the Russian capital two weeks ago, prompting the city authorities to order mandatory vaccinations for workers in retail, education and some other service sectors. Russians have been widely resistant to vaccinations and only less than 13% of the population has received at least one shot of a coronavirus vaccine.

## From Biden to Congress, Big Tech is under mounting pressure

By MARCY GORDON AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Without speaking a word or scratching a pen across paper, President Joe Biden drove up the pressure on Big Tech companies already smarting under federal and congressional investigations, epic antitrust lawsuits and near-constant condemnation from politicians of both parties.

Biden last week elevated a fierce critic of Big Tech, antitrust legal scholar Lina Khan, to head the powerful Federal Trade Commission. The surprise move was a clear signal of a tough stance toward tech giants Facebook, Google, Amazon and Apple and came as sweeping bipartisan legislation advanced in the House that could curb their market power and force them to sever their dominant platforms from their other lines of business.

The House Judiciary Committee is digging into the legislation in a public drafting session Wednesday, an initial step in what promises to be a strenuous slog through Congress. Many Republican lawmakers denounce the market dominance of Big Tech but don't support a wholesale revamp of the antitrust laws. Republicans have relentlessly hurled accusations of anti-conservative bias against the social media platforms and may demand targeted legislative sanctions in return for their support.

The huge legislative package, led by industry critic Rep. David Cicilline, D-R.I., targets the companies' structure and could point toward breaking them up, a dramatic step for Congress to take against a powerful industry whose products are woven into everyday life. If such steps were mandated, they could bring the biggest changes to the industry since the federal government's landmark case against Microsoft some 20 years ago.

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"It will be a really heavy lift," says Rebecca Allensworth, a professor of antitrust at Vanderbilt University Law School. The complex language that could eventually be laid down may invite fights in the courts by rewriting four decades of antitrust case law, she suggested.

Lauded as engines of innovation, the Silicon Valley giants for decades enjoyed minimal regulation and star status in Washington, with a notable coziness during the Obama administration, when Biden was vice president. The industry's fortunes abruptly reversed about two years ago, when the companies came under intense federal scrutiny, a searing congressional investigation, and growing public criticism over issues of competition, consumer privacy and hate speech.

Biden said as a presidential candidate that dismantling the big tech companies should be considered. He also has said he wants to see changes to the social media companies' long-held legal protections for speech on their platforms.

The legislative proposals also would prohibit the tech giants from favoring their own products and services over competitors on their platforms. The legislation was informed by a 15-month Judiciary subcommittee antitrust investigation, led by Cicilline, that concluded the four tech giants have abused their market power by charging excessive fees, imposing tough contract terms and extracting valuable data from individuals and businesses that rely on them.

The four companies deny abusing their dominant market position and have asserted that improper intervention in the market through legislation would hurt small businesses and consumers.

The legislation also would make it tougher for the giant tech companies to snap up competitors in mergers, which they have completed by scores in recent years.

And the legislation asks Congress to boost the budgets of regulators who police competition, such as the Federal Trade Commission and the antitrust division of the Justice Department. State attorneys general would get power over companies to choose which courts to prosecute tech antitrust cases in. Some expert observers view those as the less complicated and less controversial parts of the legislation that may stand a better chance of making it to congressional passage.

Democrats control the House, but they would need to garner significant Republican support in the Senate for legislation to pass. The chamber is split 50-50 with the Democrats' one-vote margin depending on Vice President Kamala Harris being the tiebreaker.

The tech industry has known that major antitrust legislation would likely follow the House investigation. And it was known for months that Biden was naming Lina Khan as one of five members of the FTC. But Silicon Valley — and nearly everyone inside the Beltway — was blindsided by Biden's lightning move elevating Khan to head the independent agency. She was sworn in just hours after the Senate confirmed her as one of five commissioners on a 69-28 vote.

Khan, who has been a law professor at Columbia University, burst onto the antitrust scene with her weighty scholarly work in 2017 as a Yale law student, "Amazon's Antitrust Paradox." She helped lay the foundation for a new way of looking at antitrust law beyond the impact of big-company market dominance on consumer prices. As counsel to the Judiciary antitrust subcommittee, she played a key role in the 2019-20 investigation of the tech giants' market power.

At 32, Khan is believed to be the youngest chair in the history of the FTC, which polices competition and consumer protection in industry generally as well as digital privacy.

Last October the Trump Justice Department, joined by about a dozen states, filed a ground-breaking antitrust lawsuit against Google, accusing the company of abusing its dominance in online search and advertising to stifle competition. That was followed in December by a big antitrust suit against Facebook, brought by the FTC and nearly every U.S. state. It seeks remedies that could include a forced spinoff of the popular Instagram and WhatsApp messaging services.

European watchdogs, meanwhile, are stepping up their antitrust actions against the tech giants. In the latest move, word came Tuesday that European Union regulators have opened a new investigation into whether Google stifled competition in digital ad technology. The EU regulators have previously charged Apple with stifling competition in music streaming, and accused Amazon of using data from independent

merchants to unfairly compete against them with its own products.

EU and British regulators recently opened dual antitrust probes into whether Facebook distorts competition in the classified advertising market by using data to unfairly compete against rival services.

## Iran likely had failed rocket launch, preparing for another

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran likely conducted a failed launch of a satellite-carrying rocket in recent days and now appears to be preparing to try again, the country's latest effort to advance its space program amid tensions with the West over its tattered nuclear deal.

Satellite images, a U.S. official and a rocket expert all confirmed the failed launch, earlier this month, at the Imam Khomeini Spaceport in Iran's Semnan province. The attempt comes as Iran's space program has suffered a series of high-profile losses, while its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard runs its own parallel program that launched a satellite into orbit last year.

Iran's Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi later Wednesday denied Tehran had a failed satellite launch, but offered no explanation for the activity at the spaceport. Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment early Wednesday.

Satellite photos from Planet Labs Inc. and Maxar Technologies show preparations at the spaceport on June 6. Those images include what appears to be fuel tanks alongside a massive white gantry that houses a rocket, while scientists fuel it and prepare for launch. Before the launch, workers tow the gantry away to expose the rocket.

The number of fuel tanks, based on their size, appear to have been enough to fill the first and second stages of an Iranian Simorgh rocket, said Jeffrey Lewis, an expert at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies. The Simorgh is a satellite-carrying rocket that has been launched from that same area of the spaceport, he said.

Later satellite images on June 17 showed a decrease in activity at the site. Lewis said analysts believe Iran launched the rocket at some point in that window.

"Nothing had blown up. There wasn't a giant stain — like they had dumped the fuel — and the vehicles had kind of just moved around," he said. "The overall level of activity at the site was much lower. So to our mind, that looked like a launch."

CNN, which first reported on the failed launch, quoted Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Uriah Orland saying that "U.S. Space Command is aware of the Iranian rocket launch failure which occurred early June 12." Orland did not elaborate. The Pentagon and U.S. Space Command did not immediately respond to a request for comment early Wednesday from The Associated Press.

It wasn't immediately clear why Iran would have picked June 12 for a launch as Tehran typically schedules such launches for national commemorations. However, it did come in the run-up to Iran's presidential election last week, in which the Islamic Republic had hoped to boost turnout.

On Sunday, a new satellite image from Planet Labs showed renewed activity at the site. The image shows a mobile platform previously used to secure a Simorgh rocket at the gantry, a support vehicle seen at previous launches and a new line of fuel containers lined up at the site. Lewis said the equipment suggests that another launch is imminent.

Over the past decade, Iran has sent several short-lived satellites into orbit and in 2013 launched a monkey into space. The program has seen recent troubles, however. A failed launch this month would be the fourth in a row for the Simorgh program. A separate fire at the Imam Khomeini Spaceport in February 2019 also killed three researchers, authorities said at the time.

A rocket explosion in August 2019 drew even the attention of then-President Donald Trump, who later tweeted what appeared to be a classified surveillance image of the launch failure. The successive failures raised suspicion of outside interference in Iran's program, something Trump himself hinted at by tweeting at the time that the U.S. "was not involved in the catastrophic accident." But Lewis said such failures are common, especially when trying to put objects carefully into orbit around the Earth.



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Meanwhile, the Guard in April 2020 revealed its own secret space program by successfully launching a satellite into orbit. The head of the U.S. Space Command later dismissed the satellite as “a tumbling webcam in space” that wouldn’t provide Iran vital intelligence — though it showed Tehran’s ability to successfully get into orbit.

The launch comes after the landslide election of Iranian President-elect Ebrahim Raisi, the country’s hard-line judiciary chief tied to the mass execution of thousands in 1988. The vote saw the lowest turnout in a presidential election since Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Raisi will take over from Iran’s outgoing President Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate who guided Tehran into its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the accord in 2018, setting in motion months of tensions in the wider Mideast that continue today. Diplomats in Vienna now are negotiating a way for both Iran and the U.S. to re-enter the deal, which saw Iran agree to limit its nuclear enrichment in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

The U.S. has alleged such satellite launches defy a U.N. Security Council resolution and called on Iran to undertake no activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

Iran, which long has said it does not seek nuclear weapons, previously maintained that its satellite launches and rocket tests do not have a military component. U.S. intelligence agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency say Iran abandoned an organized military nuclear program in 2003.

The Simorgh, however, is far too large and too slow to fuel to be a good carrier for a nuclear-tipped weapon, Lewis said.

“It’s a butter knife,” he added. “Could you stab someone with a butter knife? Yeah, but that’s not really the tool.”

## Hong Kong’s embattled Apple Daily says it will close

By ZEN SOO and MATTHEW CHENG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong’s pro-democracy Apple Daily newspaper will stop publishing Thursday, following last week’s arrest of five editors and executives and the freezing of \$2.3 million in assets under the city’s year-old national security law.

The board of directors of parent company Next Media said in a statement Wednesday that the print edition and online edition will cease due to “the current circumstances prevailing in Hong Kong.” The paper later said Thursday’s edition will be its last.

The silencing of a prominent pro-democracy voice is the latest sign of China’s determination to exert greater control over the semi-autonomous territory after huge protests in 2019 shook the government. Since then, Beijing has imposed a strict national security law to curb dissent and revamped Hong Kong’s election laws to keep opposition voices out of the legislature.

The Apple Daily announcement coincided with the start of the city’s first trial under the national security law, which is being closely watched as a barometer of how strictly the courts will interpret it.

The widely expected move to close Apple Daily followed last week’s arrests of the five editors and executives, who were detained on suspicion of colluding with foreigners to endanger national security. Police cited more than 30 articles published by the paper as evidence of an alleged conspiracy to encourage foreign nations to impose sanctions on Hong Kong and China.

The police action against Apple Daily was the first time the national security law had been used against journalists for something they had published, in an intensifying crackdown by authorities in a city long known for its freedoms.

Apple Daily reported that its management made the decision out of concern for employee safety and staffing issues.

Police also Wednesday arrested a 55-year-old man on suspicion of foreign collusion to endanger national security. According to Apple Daily, which cited unidentified sources, the man writes editorials for the newspaper under the pseudonym Li Ping.

Apple Daily has been outspoken in defending Hong Kong’s freedoms, and in recent years has often

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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.

The paper has in recent years come under increasing scrutiny over its pro-democracy stance. Its founder, media tycoon Jimmy Lai, is facing charges under the national security law for foreign collusion and is currently serving a prison sentence for his involvement in unauthorized assemblies in 2019, during a time of massive anti-government protests in the city.

It was the freezing of assets that spelled the paper's demise. The board of directors had earlier this week written to Hong Kong's security bureau requesting the release of some of its funds so the company could pay wages.

The police operation against Apple Daily drew criticism from the U.S., the E.U. and Britain, which say Hong Kong and Chinese authorities are targeting the freedoms promised to the city when the former British colony was returned to China in 1997.

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

The national security law imposed last year criminalizes subversion, secession, terrorism and foreign collusion.

The first person to stand trial under the law, Tong Ying-kit, pleaded not guilty Wednesday to charges of terrorism and inciting secession by driving a motorcycle into police officers during a 2019 rally while carrying a flag with the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, the revolution of our times." Several officers were knocked over and three sustained injuries.

His trial will set the tone for how Hong Kong handles national security offenses. So far, more than 100 people have been arrested under the security law, including prominent pro-democracy activists such as Lai, Apple Daily's founder.

The slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, the revolution of our times" was often chanted during anti-government demonstrations demanding broader democratic freedoms. Protests accuse Beijing of walking back on its promise at the 1997 handover of Hong Kong from Britain that the city could retain its freedoms not seen elsewhere in China for 50 years.

China responded with tough measures silencing opposition voices, including the national security law.

The legislation makes calls for Hong Kong independence illegal, and a government notice last July said the protest slogan connotes a call for independence and subversion of state power.

A court ruled last month that Tong will stand trial without a jury, a departure from Hong Kong's common law traditions. Under the national security law, a panel of three judges can replace jurors, and the city's leader has the power to designate judges to hear such cases.

The law carries a maximum penalty of life in prison for serious offenses. Tong is on trial at the High Court, where sentences are not capped.

## **Biden anti-crime effort takes on law-breaking gun dealers**

By COLLEEN LONG, JONATHAN LEMIRE and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is announcing new efforts to stem a rising national tide of violent crime as administration officials brace for what could be a turbulent summer, focusing on attacking gun violence, providing money to cities that need more police and offering community support.

The worry over crime is real: It has created economic hardship, displacement and anxiety. But there are also tricky politics at play. The spike in crime has become a Republican talking point and has been a frequent topic of conversation on conservative media.

White House aides believe that Biden, with his long legislative record on fighting crime as a senator, is not easy to paint as soft on the issue, and the president has been clear that he is opposed to the "defund the police" movement, which has been effectively used against other Democrats to cast them as anti-law enforcement.

But Biden also is trying to boost progressives' efforts to reform policing, following a year of mass dem-

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onstrations and public anguish sparked by the killing by police of George Floyd and other Black people across the country. And while combating crime and reforming the police don't have to be at odds with each other, the two efforts are increasingly billed that way.

Biden will try to do both at once, according to senior administration officials who detailed his upcoming address on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about it.

In his speech Wednesday, Biden will announce a "zero tolerance" policy — not to be confused with the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" policy on immigration that separated thousands of children from their families at the U.S.-Mexico border. This one gives no leeway to gun dealers who fail to comply with federal law — their license to sell will be revoked on the first offense.

The president has already announced a half-dozen executive actions on gun control, including cracking down on "ghost guns," homemade firearms that lack serial numbers used to trace them and that are often purchased without a background check.

But Biden is limited in his power to act alone. The House passed two bills requiring background checks on all firearm sales and transfers and allowing an expanded 10-day review for gun purchases. That legislation faces strong headwinds in the Senate, where some Republican support would be needed for passage.

In the meantime, Biden will also seek increased transparency on gun data and better coordination among states, and he will push Congress for more money for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the agency responsible for enforcing federal gun laws and regulating gun dealers. The Justice Department is also launching strike forces in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Washington, D.C., to help take down illegal gun traffickers, building on an initiative begun last month.

Police officials around the country have said they are struggling with increasing crime and continued tensions between police and communities, and some say their calls for support aren't answered as they take the blame for the spike.

"Many of us — if not most of us — are seeing a rise in crime, while at the same time, we're hearing calls for reform," Baltimore Police Commissioner Michael Harrison said of cities in remarks Tuesday at a forum on policing. "And some of those calls are to the extreme of dismantle and defund ... while all of the same time we're sworn to protect the people."

Biden planned to discuss how \$350 billion of the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package can be used by cities to hire law enforcement officers, pay overtime, prosecute gun traffickers and invest in technology to make law enforcement more efficient. The officials said the Biden administration hoped cities would choose to use the money for alternatives to policing, too, and to invest in community policing models.

While crime is rising — homicides and shootings are up from the same period last year in Chicago; Los Angeles; Minneapolis; Portland, Oregon; Baltimore; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Houston — violent crime overall remains lower than it was a decade ago or even five years ago. And most violent crimes plummeted during the first six months of the coronavirus pandemic, as people stayed indoors and away from others.

Crime started creeping up last summer, a trend criminologists say is hard to define and is likely due to a variety of factors such as historic unemployment, fear over the virus and mass anger over stay-at-home orders. Public mass shootings have also made an alarming return.

The rise in violence comes against the backdrop of the national debate on policing and racism in policing — and as a police reform bill is being crafted in Congress. White House press secretary Jen Psaki on Tuesday dismissed suggestions that a presidential event focused on cracking down on crime would undermine that legislative effort.

As a senator, Biden wrote several major anti-crime packages, including a 1994 bill that contained provisions now viewed by some as an overreaction to the crime spikes in the 1980s and 1990s. Critics say those bills helped lead to mass incarceration of Black Americans, and Biden's involvement became a flashpoint in his 2020 campaign.

Biden has expressed second thoughts about some aspects of the legislation, and he has acknowledged its harmful impact on many Black Americans. But he and his allies still hold out the law's provisions to address domestic violence, ban assault weapons and finance community policing.

On the reform side, Biden on Wednesday is expected to push cities to use \$122 billion to help keep schoolchildren busy this summer — they're often both targets and perpetrators of violence — and to expand summer hiring programs for teenagers, the officials said. Labor Department funding will be used to provide pre-apprenticeship jobs for youths and help formerly incarcerated adults and young people in 28 communities get work.

The White House also planned to convene a bipartisan meeting Wednesday of law enforcement officials, politicians, activists and prosecutors and will meet with 14 jurisdictions from around the country that have committed to using a portion of the funding for violence intervention programs.

"Yes, there need to be reforms of police systems across the country. The president is a firm believer in that," Psaki said Tuesday. "But there are also steps he can take as president of the United States to help address and hopefully reduce that crime. A big part of that, in his view, is putting in place gun safety measures ... using the bully pulpit but also using levers at his disposal as president."

## Can pandemic recovery plan end Italy's years of stagnation?

By DAVID McHUGH and COLLEEN BARRY AP Business Writers

MILAN (AP) — The COVID-19 pandemic hit Italy especially hard, killing more than 127,000 people and sending the European Union's third-largest economy into a devastating tailspin.

Yet out of that tragedy may come solutions for decades-old problems that have held back growth and productivity — and with them, a new sense of stability for the euro, the currency shared by 19 of the European Union's 27 members.

Backed by 261 billion euros from the EU and Italian government, the country's plan for recovering from the pandemic calls for a top-to-bottom shakeup of a major industrial economy long hampered by red tape, political reluctance to change, and bureaucratic and educational inertia.

Leading the charge is Premier Mario Draghi, the former head of the European Central Bank, who was tapped as head of a national unity government specifically for his economic expertise and institutional knowledge both in Italy and the EU.

The challenge is formidable: Italy has failed to show robust growth in the more than two decades since it joined the euro currency union in 1999.

Execution of the recovery plan remains a risk given Italy's often-fractious politics. But "if they succeed with even half, it will have a big impact," said Guntram Wolff, director of the Bruegel think tank in Brussels.

A key target is keeping more young Italians from taking their know-how abroad, a perennial issue in Italy, which has one of the lowest rates of university graduates in Europe and one of the largest brain drains.

The plan aims to create eco-systems that would help scientific discoveries find their way into the market place, fueling startups and industry while creating career paths that would help retain educated Italians, many of whom leave home due to low pay and limited prospects.

Velia Siciliano, who heads a biomedicine lab in Naples for the Italian Institute of Technology, said the pandemic only underlined the necessity of strong domestic research centers.

She has spent large chunks of her scientific career abroad, building on her undergraduate and master's degrees in Italy with a Ph.D. from the U.K. and postdoctoral study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She was named one of Italy's top 10 women of the year for 2019.

Siciliano noted that Italy had already launched programs to stop brain drain with ad-hoc initiatives, but she said a key missing element has been public-private synergies that transfer research results into new inventions and innovations.

"The truth is, if they don't nurture a system and if research doesn't also include technology transfers, it will be difficult to have a large number of Italian researchers returning to Italy," she said.

Universities failing to turn ideas into startups is just one of the chronic problems listed in the 270-page recovery plan. Others include too much red tape for businesses, lower levels of higher education than in many other developed countries, clogged courts, and low participation of women in the workforce.

The plan would fund efforts to tackle all of these: For instance, digitizing how people use public ser-

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vices to cut down on wasted time and paperwork. Using alternative dispute resolution such as arbitration to quickly resolve business disputes. Adding 228,000 day care and pre-school places to help get more women into the work force.

Of the 261 billion euros, the lion's share of 191.5 billion euros in grants and loans comes from the EU's recovery and resilience facility, part of the 27-country bloc's 806.9 billion euro pandemic recovery fund backed by common borrowing. Italy is the largest recipient because it suffered the most economic damage.

The recovery fund aims to promote long-term growth and recovery by funding economic reforms, efforts to fight climate change, and the spread of digital technologies.

The underlying problem: From 1999 to 2019, Italy's economy grew only 7.9%, compared to 30.2% for Germany, 32.4% for France, and 43.6% in Spain. Slow growth has kept Italy's debt at a dangerously high level. The pandemic has pushed the debt ratio even higher, from 134.6% of GDP before the pandemic to 157.1%. More growth would mean a smaller debt burden compared to the size of the economy.

Right now, that's not a problem, since European Central Bank stimulus has driven borrowing costs to record lows. But rising borrowing costs threatened the country's finances in 2011. Italy is a concern for the entire 19-country eurozone since it is too big to be bailed out by the other eurozone governments, as smaller economies such as Greece and Ireland were during the 2010-2015 debt crisis.

Just an additional half-percentage point of growth would, over the longer term, make Italy's debt much more manageable, said Bruegel's Wolff.

"It's the most important question of Europe's monetary union," Wolff said. "The one critical issue has always been, if Italy doesn't grow, at what stage will Italian debt become a problem, not just for Italy but for the eurozone."

Wolff said he was "cautiously optimistic" that the plan could bring about long-postponed change. The size of the support gives political leeway for the government to address deep underlying issues: "This is the first government in power in Italy that actually talks about the right reforms and has financial support from Europe to implement them, so I think there is reason to be optimistic here."

Francesco Di Stasio, a 37-year-old researcher at a top robotics center, has left Italy twice, but returned each time. He has degrees from Italian and British universities, has worked in both Italy and Britain, and has done advanced studies both at home and abroad in Spain.

Di Stasio says Italy's problem is not that Italians go abroad — that is common in Europe and essential in the sciences. Now in a position to hire scientists for his lab developing light sources using nanomaterials, he says the real weakness in the system is the difficulty in attracting qualified applicants to Italy, be they Italians or foreigners. The question is more complex than salary.

While Italy has pockets of excellence — including relatively recent research institutes like Genoa-based Italian Institute of Technology, where Di Stasio works — what it is lacking are fuller ecosystems on par with more competitive economies like Germany, Britain or France, where researchers in scientific and technological fields can see places to jump every few years as they pursue a career path.

"The doubt is more present. When I search for people, they worry about the future. They don't know how to access a career path in Italy," Di Stasio said. "What plays against us is the perception we have of Italy."

## Adams takes fragile lead in NYC Democratic mayoral primary

By KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams appeared to take a fragile lead Tuesday in New York City's Democratic mayoral primary, but it could be weeks before it becomes clear who is actually on top in the first citywide election to use ranked choice voting.

As ballot counting began Tuesday, a plurality of Democrats ranked Adams as their first choice in the race.

It was tough to tell, though, whether that lead would hold. As many as 207,500 absentee ballots remained to be counted. Voters' full rankings of the candidates have yet to be taken into account. It could be July before a winner emerges in the Democratic contest.

Adams, a former police captain who co-founded a leadership group for Black officers, was leading for-

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mer city sanitation commissioner Kathryn Garcia and former de Blasio administration lawyer Maya Wiley. Speaking to jubilant supporters, Adams acknowledged that he hadn't won yet, and that under the ranked choice system there were multiple rounds of ballot counting still to go.

"We know that there's going to be twos and threes and fours," he said. "But there's something else we know. We know that New York City said, 'Our first choice is Eric Adams.'"

Former presidential candidate Andrew Yang, who was far behind in early returns, conceded about two hours after polls closed and vowed to work with the next mayor.

In the Republican primary, Guardian Angels founder Curtis Sliwa defeated businessman Fernando Mateo. Ranked choice voting wasn't a factor because there were only two candidates in the race.

Several candidates in the race to succeed Mayor Bill de Blasio have the potential to make history if elected. The city could get its first female mayor, or its second Black mayor, depending on who comes out on top.

But in the Democratic contest, the initial picture could be misleading. After polls closed at 9 p.m., New York City's Board of Elections began releasing results of votes cast in person, but the returns focused on who candidates ranked as their first choice.

The ranked choice system, approved for use in New York City primaries and special elections by referendum in 2019, allowed voters to rank up to five candidates on their ballot.

Vote tabulation is then done in computerized rounds, with the person in last place getting eliminated each round, and ballots cast for that person getting redistributed to the surviving candidates based on voter rankings. That process continues until only two candidates are left. The one with the most votes wins.

It won't be until June 29 that the Board of Elections performs a tally of those votes using the new system. It won't include any absentee ballots in its analysis until July 6, making any count before then potentially unreliable.

Among the votes counted on election night, Adams trailed both Garcia and Wiley when voters listed their second, third and fourth choices in the ranked choice voting system.

Besides Adams, Garcia, Wiley and Yang, other contenders in the Democratic contest included City Comptroller Scott Stringer, former U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Shaun Donovan, former Citigroup executive Ray McGuire and nonprofit executive Dianne Morales.

Stringer, McGuire and Morales addressed supporters after polls closed as early returns showed them trailing the front-runners but did not immediately concede.

De Blasio, a Democrat, leaves office at the end of the year due to term limits.

The candidates traveled around the city Tuesday doing a last round of campaigning.

Wiley was losing her voice greeting voters near her polling place in Brooklyn. Garcia campaigned up in the Bronx, while Sliwa and Stringer bumped into each other campaigning in Manhattan.

A still hoarse Wiley acknowledged the uncertainty of the race in a speech later. "What we celebrate today is that we have a path," she said.

Garcia told her supporters, "I know that we're not going to know a lot more tonight, so I want to thank everyone who is here, and everyone who has been a part of this journey."

Concern over a rise in shootings during the pandemic has dominated the mayoral campaign in recent months, even as the candidates have wrestled with demands from the left for more police reform.

As a former officer, but one who spent his career fighting racism within the department, Adams may have benefited most from the policing debate.

He denounced the "defund the police" slogan and proposed reinstating a disbanded plainclothes unit to focus on getting illegal guns off the streets.

Wiley and Stringer, battling for progressive votes, both said they would reallocate a portion of the police department's budget to other city programs.

Of the top contenders, either Garcia or Wiley would be city's first female mayor if elected. Adams or Wiley would be the second Black mayor.

Yang and Garcia formed an alliance in the campaign's last days in an apparent effort to use the ranked voting system to block Adams. The two held several joint campaign events, with Yang asking his supporters to rank Garcia as their No. 2 — though Garcia did not quite return the favor, not telling her voters where

to rank Yang. Adams accused his two rivals of purposely trying to block a Black candidate.

Sliwa does not have much of a chance to win the November general election in a city where registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by 7 to 1.

Former allies, the two Republicans Sliwa and Mateo traded personal insults and tried to shout over each other during one debate on Zoom.

Sliwa, a radio host who still wears his red Guardian Angels beret when he appears in public, got an endorsement from former Mayor Rudy Giuliani, who called him "my great friend" in a robocall to Republican voters.

Flanked by Giuliani at his victory party, Sliwa promised a general election campaign focused on crime. "This is going to be a campaign clearly in which I talk about cracking down on crime, supporting the police, refunding our heroes the police, hiring more police, taking the handcuffs off the police and putting it on the criminals, and restoring qualified immunity to the police so that they can't be personally sued," he said.

## **Blinken brings Biden Europe charm offensive to Germany**

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

BERLIN (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is in Germany as the Biden administration presses ahead with a diplomatic charm offensive designed to woo back wary Western European allies after four years of turbulent relations under former President Donald Trump. That's despite some lingering differences with key allies over energy and defense priorities.

Blinken arrived in Berlin on Wednesday to start his second visit to Europe in seven days, having just accompanied President Joe Biden to leaders' meetings in Britain and Belgium. In talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, Blinken plans to emphasize the "America is back" message that Biden delivered personally last week.

Biden is determined to assure Europe that Trump's transactional approach to transatlantic ties is a thing of the past despite some significant lingering differences with core NATO allies. Those include a major dispute with Germany over the impending completion of a Russian gas pipeline and defense spending, both of which are holdover issues from the Trump years.

"This trip is a continuation of the priority that President Biden has made of rebuilding our relationships with allies, including Germany, and that the strength of these relationships will lay in the foundation for many of the foreign policy priorities," the top U.S. diplomat for Europe Philip Reeker said this week.

U.S.-Germany relations were particularly strained during Trump's term in office, notably over trade, military budgets, troop deployments and the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project from Russia. Many say the pipeline will compromise European energy security and hurt eastern and central Europe by bypassing Ukraine and Poland.

Merkel, however, strongly favors the project, which has been one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's key initiatives to increase Russia's energy revenue.

In addition to Ukrainian and Polish objections, the pipeline faces strong bipartisan opposition in the U.S. Congress, where both Republican and Democratic lawmakers harshly criticized the administration for waiving sanctions against the German firm constructing it, the company's German CEO and several other executives in May. Critics saw those sanctions as a last-ditch effort to prevent completion of the pipeline that is now more than 95% constructed.

In waiving the sanctions against Nord Stream 2 AG and the executives, the White House rejected recommendations from the State Department and other agencies in favor of imposing the penalties, according to officials and congressional aides familiar with the matter. Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan argued that the sanctions would do more harm than good in terms of repairing ties with Germany, they said.

"The administration waived certain sanctions in an effort to make something positive out of the difficult situation; rather than risk damaging relations with European allies through further sanctions," Reeker said. "We're going to use this space provided by these waivers to engage Germany diplomatically and take steps to reduce the risks that Nord Stream 2 poses to Ukraine and to European energy security more broadly."

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Administration officials insist that there are still ways to mitigate the pipeline's impact, despite its advanced stage. They have pointed out that even after the project is physically completed there are still permitting, insurance and testing hurdles it must clear before becoming operational. Some officials believe that could delay its opening by nine to 12 months after completion.

Blinken is expected to press Merkel, who is in her final three months in office, on the pipeline in their meeting

"Our goal remains to ensure that Russia cannot use energy as a coercive tool against Ukraine or, frankly, anyone else in the region, and that will remain the basis on which we pursue these conversations," Reeker said.

After Germany, Blinken will visit France and Italy as part of his weeklong tour, his first trips to all three nations as secretary of state.

## Japanese soccer player Yokoyama comes out as transgender

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese soccer player Kumi Yokoyama said they are transgender — a revelation praised in the U.S. where they play in the National Women's Soccer League but an identity not legally recognized in Japan.

The 27-year-old forward for the Washington Spirit said they felt more comfortable with their own gender identity while living in the United States, where teammates and friends are more open to gender and sexual diversity.

"I'm coming out now," Yokoyama said in a video talk on former teammate Yuki Nagasato's YouTube channel. "In the future, I want to quit soccer and live as a man."

Yokoyama's revelation was praised by President Joe Biden.

"To Carl Nassib and Kumi Yokoyama — two prominent, inspiring athletes who came out this week: I'm so proud of your courage. Because of you, countless kids around the world are seeing themselves in a new light today," Biden tweeted. Nassib is the first active NFL player to come out as gay.

The Spirit also expressed the team's support and pride in Yokoyama. "Thank you for showing the world it's ok to embrace who you are!" the team tweeted, adding that the player uses they/them pronouns.

Support and awareness of gender and sexual diversity has slowly grown in Japan, but LGBTQ people lack many legal protections and often suffer discrimination, causing many to hide their sexual identities. An equality law pushed by rights groups was scrapped recently due to opposition from the conservative ruling party.

Transgender people in Japan also must have their reproductive organs removed to have their gender recognized on official documents — a requirement that human rights and medical groups criticize as inhuman and unnecessary and say should end.

Yokoyama said they weren't enthusiastic about coming out but it was a choice made while thinking about the future and that it would be harder to live closeted. "I would not have come out in Japan," they said.

They thanked their teammates, friends and girlfriend for their support and courage.

Yokoyama played for Japan at the 2019 Women's World Cup in France and moved from Japanese club AC Nagano Parceiro to the Washington Spirit.

Yokoyama said they felt a strong pressure to conform and remain closeted in Japan but hoped to live as a man after retiring as a professional soccer player and to help raise awareness for sexual minorities in Japan.

"More people in Japan are becoming familiar with the word LGBTQ and it's seen more (in the media), but I think awareness won't grow unless people like myself come out and raise our voices," Yokoyama said.

## 5 years after Brexit vote, divided UK still feels shockwaves

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Five years ago Wednesday, Britons voted in a referendum that was meant to bring



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certainty to the U.K.'s unsettled relationship with its European neighbors.

Fat chance.

Voters' decision on June 23, 2016 was narrow but clear: By 52% to 48%, they chose to leave the European Union. It took over four years to actually make the break and the former partners are still bickering, like many divorced couples, over money and trust.

And five years after a fractious referendum campaign that sparked family arguments and neighborhood disputes, Britain is still as split over Europe as ever.

"Britain is still significantly divided over the merits of Brexit," said polling expert John Curtice of the University of Strathclyde. He says voters are split almost exactly 50-50 between "remain" and "leave" supporters, and relatively few have changed their minds since 2016.

"Over four in five people still say that they would vote exactly in the same way as they did five years ago," Curtice said.

The country is also split on whether Brexit has been a success. In 2016, Brexit campaigners claimed leaving the EU would not only restore British sovereignty, but save the country money. Notoriously, campaigners emblazoned a double-decker bus with the claim that Brexit would give the U.K. an extra 350 million pounds (\$486 million) a week to spend on its beloved national health service. The U.K.'s net contribution to the EU was actually about half that much.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government insists that Brexit is bringing new economic opportunities. Britain recently signed its first full post-Brexit trade deal, with Australia, and has applied to join a trade partnership of Pacific-rim countries.

But Britain's trade with the EU, which before Brexit accounted for about half of all imports and exports, plummeted by 20% after the U.K. made a full economic break at the end of 2020, although the disruption from the coronavirus pandemic makes it hard to tell how much of that impact is from Brexit.

Jonathan Portes, professor of economics at King's College London, said Brexit will be "a significant but not catastrophic" drag on U.K. economic growth for many years.

"Not a blowout, but a slow puncture," he said.

The referendum ended the career of then-Prime Minister David Cameron, who had championed staying in the EU and quit soon after. His successor, Theresa May, tried and failed to strike a divorce deal that both the EU and Britain's Parliament would accept and resigned in 2019.

The two most prominent Brexit champions have had mixed fortunes. Former U.K. Independence Party leader Nigel Farage arguably did more than anyone to make Brexit happen, but never won a seat in Parliament despite repeated attempts. He founded, and then left, the Brexit Party, and remained in the public eye as Britain's most vocal supporter of Donald Trump. He is currently out of frontline politics.

Johnson, who led the official "Vote Leave" campaign, became prime minister in 2019 by promising to "get Brexit done" after years of wrangling. He succeeded in leading Britain out of the EU -- and straight into another crisis, the coronavirus pandemic.

He leads a nation divided over more than just Brexit. Far from bringing the U.K. together, Brexit has frayed the bonds between the different parts of the United Kingdom.

It has increased support for independence in Scotland, which voted in 2016 to remain in the EU but had to leave the bloc when the rest of the U.K. did. It also has destabilized Northern Ireland, which borders EU member Ireland, by imposing new trade barriers between it and the rest of the U.K. that have angered Northern Ireland's pro-British unionist community.

As for the divorced couple itself, Britain and the EU are squabbling, with Britain urging the bloc to show flexibility and the EU threatening legal action unless the U.K. sticks to the Brexit agreement.

British Brexit minister David Frost, who led negotiations for the U.K. side, said Tuesday that many Brexit supporters like him were surprised at how rocky the relationship had become.

"It's not something that we want," he said. "The sooner we can move beyond the settling-down process the better."

**US takes down Iran-linked news sites, alleges disinformation**

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By ISABEL DEBRE and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — American authorities seized a range of Iran's state-linked news website domains they accused of spreading disinformation, the U.S. Justice Department said Tuesday, a move that appeared to be a far-reaching crackdown on Iranian media amid heightened tensions between the two countries.

The Justice Department said 33 of the seized websites were used by the Iranian Islamic Radio and Television Union, which was singled out by the U.S. government last October for what officials described as efforts to spread disinformation and sow discord among American voters ahead of the 2020 presidential election. T

The U.S. says three other seized websites were operated by the Iraqi Shiite paramilitary group, Kata'ib Hezbollah, which more than a decade ago was designated a foreign terrorist organization. The group is separate from the Lebanese militant Hezbollah group whose news websites remained operational.

The website domains are owned by U.S. companies, but despite the sanctions, neither the IRTVU nor KH obtained the required licenses from the U.S. government before using the domain names, according to the Justice Department.

The Justice Department announcement came hours after the Iranian state-run news agency IRNA revealed the U.S. government seizures without providing further information.

The takedowns come as world powers scramble to resurrect Tehran's tattered 2015 nuclear deal and just days after the election victory of Iran's hard-line judiciary chief, Ebrahim Raisi. On Monday, Raisi, known for his hostility to the West, staked out a hard-line position in his first news conference. He ruled out the possibilities of meeting with President Joe Biden or negotiating over Tehran's ballistic missile program and support for regional militias — concerns the Biden administration wants addressed in future talks.

Relations between Iran and the U.S. have deteriorated for years following President Donald Trump's withdrawal from Tehran's nuclear deal and the return of devastating sanctions on the country. That decision has seen Iran, over time, gradually abandon every limit on uranium enrichment. The country is now enriching uranium to 60%, its highest level ever, though still short of weapons-grade levels.

Iran provides support to militant groups in the region, such as Lebanon's militant Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi rebels, as it seeks to wield its influence far afield and counter its foes.

On Tuesday, visiting the addresses of a handful of sites, including Iran state television's English-language arm Press TV, Yemeni Houthi-run Al-Masirah satellite news channel and Iranian state TV's Arabic-language channel, Al-Alam, produced a federal takedown notice. It said the websites were seized "as part of law enforcement action" by the U.S. Bureau of Industry and Security, Office of Export Enforcement and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The U.S. government also took over the domain name of the news website Palestine Today, which reflects the viewpoints of Gaza-based Islamic militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, redirecting the site to the same takedown notice.

Press TV, launched in June 2007, is the state-run Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting's English-language service. Its Iran-based website, PressTV.ir, was not affected.

Most of the domains seized appeared to be ".net," ".com" and ".tv" domains. The first two are generic top-level domains as opposed to country-specific domains, while ".tv" is owned by the Pacific island nation of Tuvalu but administered by the U.S. company Verisign. Seizing a domain on a major country-specific top-level domain such as Iran's ".ir" would be apt to produce widespread international condemnation as a violation of sovereignty.

It's not the first time that the U.S. has seized domain names of sites it accuses of spreading disinformation.

Last October, the Department of Justice announced the takedown of nearly 100 websites linked to Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard. The U.S. said the sites, operating under the guise of genuine news outlets, were waging a "global disinformation campaign" to influence U.S. policy and push Iranian propaganda around the world.

Yemen's Houthi rebel group announced that its Al-Masirah satellite news channel went offline Tuesday

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without prior notice. It said the channel would continue in its mission of "confronting the American and Israeli acts of piracy against our nation, by any means."

Responsibility for providing name service for the domain name prestv.com was apparently switched to an Amazon name server on Tuesday at mid-afternoon European time, said internet infrastructure expert Ron Guilmette. Cybersecurity researchers at RiskIQ found a total of 24 seized sites sharing the same Amazon name server.

There are no private television or radio stations in Iran. Satellite dishes, while widespread, also are illegal. That leaves IRIB with a monopoly on domestic airwaves.

Marzieh Hashemi, a prominent Press TV anchor who, in 2019, was arrested as a material witness in an unspecified criminal case and has appeared before a grand jury in Washington, told The Associated Press that the channel was struggling to "figure out the reasons" for the seizure.

While airing in Iran, Press TV focuses predominantly on international affairs through the lens of how leaders in the Islamic Republic see the world. Fierce criticism of British and American foreign policy is common. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, IRIB has been in the hands of hard-liners who back Iran's government.

Press TV has previously run into trouble with Western authorities over its reporting. The Anti-Defamation League has criticized the channel as "one of the world's leading dispensers of conspiratorial anti-Semitism in English."

## AP Interview: Belarus regime 'frightened,' says opponent

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — When authorities in Belarus diverted a Ryanair passenger jet to Minsk last month to arrest a dissident journalist who was aboard, their goal may have been to silence a troublesome government critic and send a message to others like him.

Instead, believes opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, it was a panicked miscalculation by authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko that has galvanized the West against him.

"It was really a mistake," Tsikhanouskaya said in an interview with The Associated Press. "The regime never crossed this red line before, of interfering in a European area. This hijacking touched all the European leaders because their citizens were on this flight."

The European Union, the United States, Britain and Canada joined together Monday to impose sanctions on several Belarus officials and organizations in response to the May 23 diversion of Ryanair flight, which was traveling from Greece to Lithuania but was forced to land in Minsk. European officials, who likened the diversion to air piracy, also banned Belarus airlines from EU skies and airports.

Lukashenko won a sixth term as president in an Aug. 9, 2020, election that the EU refuses to recognize as legitimate. The disputed election touched off months of mass demonstrations in Belarus, including some that drew as many as 200,000 people. Authorities there also began a harsh crackdown on protesters, and human rights officials say tens of thousands have been detained, with many brutally beaten by security forces.

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said EU countries thought for months that it still might be possible to reason with Lukashenko — until the flight diversion.

"The mood is different now," Landsbergis said.

Tsikhanouskaya was a candidate in the election, running in place of her husband, Siarhei Tsikhanouski, a popular opposition figure who had hoped to stand against Lukashenko but was arrested in May 2020.

A day after the vote, Tsikhanouskaya was forced to flee the country to neighboring Lithuania, where the 38-year-old political novice lives in exile with her children and has worked to rally European countries against Lukashenko.

"The regime is so frightened by the unity of Belarusians, by the unity of the European Union, the U.S.A., about this situation in Belarus that they stopped to think strategically. They started to think emotionally," Tsikhanouskaya told AP.

On Thursday, her husband's trial is scheduled to begin in the city of Homel on charges of violating public

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order, inciting hatred and plotting mass disturbances — accusations he rejects. He faces up to 15 years in prison.

"The trial will be closed. The trial will be not in the court, it will be right in the prison. Lawyers will not have an opportunity to tell us what is going on," Tsikhanouskaya said.

She expects it to last a month or two, and is not optimistic about the outcome.

"We understand that the trial will not be lawful, will not be honest, will not be fair. In reality, judges can write any number of years in prison," she said.

For Tsikhanouskaya, it's yet another test of her ability as an accidental politician to avoid putting her own feelings for her husband above those of the many Belarusians who have been jailed for opposing the government.

"He's my beloved. I'm thinking about him most of all, because I'm talking about him with my children. I have every day to explain to them where their Daddy is, how he is feeling," she said. "I assure them that he will come back soon."

She must "separate all those feelings from political duties, because your political duty is to release all of them," Tsikhanouskaya said.

"This is your personal pain. You can cry into your pillow in the evening. But just imagine in what conditions those people are in, what conditions my husband is (in) — without light, without information, without the normal conditions of life. Of course, it's awful," she said. "But again, it gives me strength not to stop, not to think about myself."

Since he was pulled off the Ryanair flight in Minsk, Belarusian journalist Raman Pratasevich has been paraded on state TV, tearfully apologizing for his actions and praising Lukashenko.

His parents, members of the opposition and others in the West believe he spoke under duress, with some saying there were signs he was beaten — a warning that no regime opponent can ignore.

Pratasevich's friends say the 26-year-old journalist, who left his homeland in 2019, believed he was being spied upon by Belarusian authorities before his May 23 arrest. This probably is true for many other political activists from Belarus, said Tsikhanouskaya, who a week earlier had flown Ryanair from Greece to Lithuania, just like Pratasevich.

As she travels Europe to raise awareness about Belarus, she feels "more or less in safeness."

"People on the ground (in Belarus), they don't have this protection of laws that the European Union has," she said.

Beyond the immediate fate of Pratasevich, her husband Siarhei and others like them, difficult times lie ahead for her country, Tsikhanouskaya said.

"This crisis is deepening," she said.

If the authorities in Minsk really cared about people "they would start dialogue with Belarusians, they would release political prisoners, and solve this crisis in a civilized way," she added. "I imagine new elections this fall. This is our aim."

## Ayton soars for last second alley-oop, Suns beat Clippers

By DAVID BRANDT AP Sports Writer

PHOENIX (AP) — Devin Booker sat in a chair with a crooked and swollen nose, complete with tape over three fresh stitches.

He also had a big smile on his face, remembering Jae Crowder's pass, Deandre Ayton's tip-in dunk and a play that will live in Phoenix Suns lore for a long, long time.

Ayton jammed an alley-oop pass from Crowder with 0.7 seconds left, lifting the Suns to a 104-103 win over the Los Angeles Clippers on Tuesday night in Game 2 of the Western Conference finals.

It was a game that looked as if it was all but over, but Booker's Suns were not going to be denied.

"I believed it could happen," Booker said. "100 percent."

The Suns were down one with 0.9 seconds left when Crowder lofted a high pass on an out-of-bounds play on the baseline. A soaring Ayton came down the lane and stuffed it through the net over L.A.'s Ivica

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Zubac as the crowd roared in disbelief. Booker — playing with a stitched up nose following a collision with Clippers guard Patrick Beverley — had a key screen on Zubac on the final play, which helped free Ayton.

"The celebration and reaction were a little shaky," Ayton said. "Because I wasn't sure what I did. I wasn't sure if it counted."

The referees spent about a minute reviewing the play before ruling the basket was good and Booker spent some time jawing with Clippers players Rajon Rondo and Demarcus Cousins in the aftermath. The Clippers couldn't get a shot off in the final 0.7 seconds.

"Those are my Kentucky guys," Booker said with a grin. "I told them 'Go Big Blue.'"

The Suns now have a 2-0 lead in the series heading to Los Angeles for Game 3 on Thursday night. The Clippers will be fighting from a 2-0 deficit for the third time in these playoffs after rallying to beat the Mavericks and Jazz.

The Crowder-to-Ayton connection negated a Clippers rally that was led by Paul George, who had 26 points.

George made a layup with 31 seconds left to give the Clippers a 101-100 lead for their first advantage since early in the third quarter. He added a 22-footer on their next offensive possession for a 103-102 lead.

But there was a lot more action left.

George — and 85% career free throw shooter — missed two free throws with 8.2 seconds remaining and the Suns had a chance to win, but it looked as if it wouldn't happen when Mikal Bridges missed a corner 3-pointer and the ball was deflected out of bounds.

Instead, it set up Crowder's heave to Ayton, who was dominant in the paint all game long.

Even with his big late shot-making, George's missed free throws loomed large.

"Obviously, it was an opportunity that was missed," George said. "Pat made an unbelievable play that put me in the position to extend the lead. I am always confident at the free throw line. I have always been very successful in clutch moments at the free throw line. Tonight, I was just unsuccessful."

The Suns have won a franchise-record nine straight in the playoffs.

The Suns were led by Cameron Payne, who was brilliant while subbing for All-Star Chris Paul. He finished with a career-high 29 points. Ayton had 24 points and 14 rebounds, while Booker added 20 points.

"We just had no answer for Cameron Payne," Lue said. "He got downhill all night. His speed and his quickness really hurt us all night."

Payne repeatedly carved through the Clippers defense, making tough buckets at the rim with pretty left-handed finishes. He made what looked like a crucial layup with about 90 seconds left, finishing high off the glass to give the Suns a 100-95 lead.

But the gritty Clippers responded and nearly pulled this one out.

"It is a hard game to swallow because look at this game, we've got this game won," Beverley said. "But we have been in the trenches before. We respond well in the trenches and we will respond well. We always do."

It was a tough night for the stars from Game 1 until the final minutes. Booker shot just 5 of 16 from the field and missed part of the third quarter with a bloody nose. George was 10 of 23 from the field and missed his first seven 3-point attempts before his late buckets.

Ayton continued his eye-opening performance in these playoffs. The No. 1 overall pick in 2018 out of Arizona often has been overshadowed by later picks in the same draft like Atlanta's Trae Young and Dallas' Luka Doncic. But he has carved out quite a niche in Phoenix and now has a signature play that will live on in franchise history.

The Suns were playing without Paul for the second straight game. The 11-time All-Star has been in the league's COVID-19 health and safety protocol for the past week and the team isn't sure when he'll return.

Clippers star Kawhi Leonard missed his fourth straight game with a right knee sprain, and he stayed in Los Angeles to get treatment on the injury.

The action was physical from the opening minutes. Referee Scott Foster gave technicals to Crowder and Clippers forward Marcus Morris Sr. after some jawing following a scrum for a loose ball.

BLOODY BOOKER, BEVERELY

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Booker took a shot to the nose late in the third after he bumped heads with Beverley, who was playing tight defense. The Suns guard fell to the floor and was down for a minute before walking back to the locker room with the medical staff with a towel over his nose.

Beverley was also left bloody on the forehead from the exchange and had to leave the game and change jerseys.

A foul was called on Beverley. The referees ruled it was not flagrant. Booker jogged back out onto the court before the fourth quarter to a big roar from the crowd.

TIP-INS

Clippers: Lue shook up the starting lineup, using Beverley and Zubac in place of Nicolas Batum and Terance Mann. ... Leonard and forward Serge Ibaka (back surgery) didn't play. ... Morris was dealing with a sore right knee that limited him in Game 1, but he started on Tuesday.

Suns: Paul and forward Abdel Nader (right knee arthroscopy) didn't play. ... The Suns had the same starting lineup for the second straight game, using Payne in Paul's place.

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## Asian Americans lobby to name Navy ship for Filipino sailor

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Asian Americans, veterans and civilians in the U.S. and the Philippines are campaigning to name a Navy warship for a Filipino sailor who bravely rescued two crew members when their ship caught fire more than a century ago, earning him a prestigious and rare Medal of Honor.

Supporters say naming a ship for Telesforo Trinidad would honor not just the only Asian American in the U.S. Navy granted the nation's highest award for valor, but the tens of thousands of Filipinos and Americans of Filipino descent who have served in the U.S. Navy since 1901, when the Philippines was a United States territory.

"I don't believe it's a long shot at all; it may be a long timeline, but we're hoping it's not," said retired Navy Capt. Ron Ravelo and chair of the campaign. "We're going to be making Navy ships into the foreseeable future, and there's no reason one of those can't bear the name of Telesforo Trinidad."

Trinidad, who died in 1968 at age 77, was so eager to join the U.S. Navy that he stowed away on a lifeboat from his home island of Panay to the main island to enlist, said grandson Rene Trinidad. In 1915, while on patrol on the USS San Diego, he risked his life and suffered burns to rescue two crewmates when boilers exploded, killing nine. He received the medal that year, at a time when the honor could be awarded for noncombat valor.

Rene Trinidad, a real estate agent in Southern California, recalls his grandfather was a man of few words.

"He let his actions speak for himself," he said, "and I suppose that's why he did what he did."

The campaign has grassroots enthusiasm, and support from Democratic Congress members who sent a letter last month to Thomas Harker, acting secretary of the Navy.

Traditionally, different types of ships have different naming conventions, but there are exceptions, said Samuel J. Cox, retired rear admiral and director of the Naval History and Heritage Command, which suggests names and has previously submitted Trinidad's for consideration. The secretary of the Navy has final authority and discretion to name and rename ships, he said.

Some memorialize states, U.S. cities, Navy heroes or distinguished Americans. The number of Navy ships receiving names varies widely by year but averages roughly to about eight, of which three or four are named for people, Cox said.

"There simply are far too many heroes compared to the number of ships to be named," he said.

Norman Polmar, author and naval analyst, agrees.

"And I hate to say this, I'm getting a little pain when I say this: Increasingly it becomes political — what party you're in and who's in the White House, and occasionally the White House gets involved," Polmar said.

Former U.S. Navy Secretary Ray Mabus drew controversy after naming naval ships for former U.S. Rep Gabrielle Giffords; the late gay civil rights leader Harvey Milk of San Francisco; and the late farmworker

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activist Cesar Chavez. The honoring of Giffords broke more modern traditions that the person be dead or old.

Critics also said there were plenty of heroic service members to choose from. Mabus said his picks also demonstrated heroism.

In January 2020, Acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas Modly named a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier after Doris "Dorie" Miller, an African American enlisted sailor who received the Navy Cross for his actions during Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.

The naming did not sit well with critics who say Miller deserves to have a ship named after him, but not an elite aircraft carrier bearing the names of presidents. There's also ongoing debate over ships named for the Civil War Confederacy.

Cecilia Gaerlan, Trinidad campaign board member, said they would like a Navy surface combatant, such as a destroyer or frigate, named for the fireman second class. The naming would be a symbol of the Navy's commitment to "diversity, equality and inclusion during this time of national racial tensions and unwarranted violence against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders," said Democratic U.S. Rep. Sara Jacobs of California, in a May letter to Harker signed by 10 others.

There are other Navy vessels named for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, including the USS Daniel Inouye, a destroyer. The former U.S. senator received the Medal of Honor as part of the celebrated 442nd Infantry Regiment, made up of Americans of Japanese descent whose families were incarcerated in camps during World War II.

There was a U.S. Navy ship named for a Filipino person, but Gaerlan says the USS Rizal, a destroyer in service from 1919 to 1931, was donated by the Philippine Legislature and honors José Rizal, a national hero who never served in the military.

More than two dozen Asian and Pacific Americans have been awarded the Medal of Honor since its creation during the Civil War, mostly in the U.S. Army, according to the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. There are roughly 3,500 recipients.

Telesforo Trinidad, born in 1890, enlisted in 1910 in the Insular Force established by then-President William McKinley and served in both world wars. More than 250,000 Filipino soldiers served in World War II, and thousands died during the brutal 1942 Bataan Death March in the Philippines.

Rene Trinidad, 65, said it goes against his cultural upbringing to call attention to his grandfather's heroism, but his late father wanted the recognition for his father, who overcame hardship, merited a medal and worked hard to provide for his family. Two sons followed him into the U.S. Navy.

"The bottom line is that Filipinos be recognized for their contribution to the United States, and that every Filipino should be proud of that as well," he said.

## Spears set to make rare remarks to conservatorship judge

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — In the most anticipated hearing in the case in years, Britney Spears is expected to address a judge overseeing the conservatorship that has controlled the pop star's money and affairs since 2008.

If Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Brenda Penny does not make a last-minute decision Wednesday to seal the proceedings, Spears' words will be heard in open court for the first time in the 13-year conservatorship.

The hearing has been eagerly awaited by the fans in the so-called #FreeBritney movement, who feel she is being controlled unfairly against her will and are likely to gather outside the courthouse in large numbers.

Spears, who is scheduled to take part remotely, asked for the hearing so she could address the court directly.

Her court-appointed attorney, Samuel Ingham III, made the request at an April 28 hearing. He gave no indication of what the 39-year-old pop star wants to say.

But in recent court filings, Spears has sought a greater say over who runs the conservatorship, and

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has asked that her father, who had extensive power over her life and money for most of its existence, be removed.

Spears said through Ingham that she fears her father James Spears, and would not end a 2 1/2-year pause on her career as long as he has control over it.

The judge declined to remove James Spears entirely, though he now plays a smaller role. He serves as co-conservator of her finances along with estate management firm the Bessemer Trust, and in 2019 relinquished his role as conservator over his daughter's life choices to a court-appointed professional.

Last week, Britney Spears said on Instagram that she wasn't sure if she will ever perform live again.

"I have no idea," she said, answering a fan who asked when she planned to take the stage. "I'm having fun right now. I'm in a transition in my life and I'm enjoying myself. So that's it."

Britney Spears has spoken in court in the conservatorship before, but the courtroom was always cleared and transcripts sealed.

The last time she was known to have addressed the judge was in May 2019.

Spears has since requested greater transparency from the court since then, and Penny has allowed far more to remain public.

The singer has never asked the court to end the conservatorship entirely, though she has emphasized in documents that she reserves the right to do so at any time.

It was put in place as she underwent a mental health crisis in 2008. She has credited it with saving her from financial ruin and keeping her a top flight pop star.

Her father and his attorneys have emphasized that she and her fortune, which court records put at more than \$50 million, remain vulnerable to fraud and manipulation. Under the law, the burden would be on Spears to prove she is competent to be released and free to make her own choices.

## Tokyo shapes up to be No-Fun Olympics with many rules, tests

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — The Tokyo Olympics, already delayed by the pandemic, are not looking like much fun: Not for athletes. Not for fans. And not for the Japanese public. They are caught between concerns about the coronavirus at a time when few are vaccinated on one side and politicians who hope to save face by holding the games and the International Olympic Committee with billions of dollars on the line on the other.

Japan is famous for running on consensus. But the decision to proceed with the Olympics — and this week to permit some fans, if only locals — has shredded it.

"We have been cornered into a situation where we cannot even stop now. We are damned if we do, and damned if we do not," Kaori Yamaguchi, a member of the Japanese Olympic Committee and a bronze medalist in judo in 1988, wrote in a recent editorial published by the Kyodo news agency. "The IOC also seems to think that public opinion in Japan is not important."

Support for going ahead seems to be increasing, but there's persistent opposition with small street protests planned on Wednesday, one month before the July 23 opening. Much of that concern stems from qualms about the health risks. While the number of new cases has been receding in Tokyo, only about 7% of Japanese are fully vaccinated — and even though the government is now supercharging its vaccine drive after a slow start, the vast majority of the population still won't be immunized when the games start.

That's left the IOC and the Japanese government going through contortions to pull this off. Dr. Shigeru Omi, the government's top COVID-19 adviser, called it "abnormal" to hold the world's biggest sports event during a pandemic. He also said the safest Olympics would be with no fans.

He was overruled on both counts by the government of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and organizers.

The official cost of the Tokyo Olympics is \$15.4 billion, but government audits suggest it's twice that. All but \$6.7 billion is public money. The IOC chips in only about \$1.5 billion to the overall cost.

The pressure to hold the games is largely financial for the Switzerland-based IOC, a nonprofit but highly commercial body that earns 91% of its income from broadcast rights and sponsorship. Estimates suggest a cancellation could cost it \$3 billion to \$4 billion in broadcast rights income.



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Beyond financial concerns, putting on a successful Olympics is also a major source of pride for the host country. Some economists compare it to throwing a big party. You overspend but hope your guests go away bragging about the hospitality.

"It's a bit like a gambler who already has lost too much," said Koichi Nakano, a political scientist at Sophia University in Tokyo. "Pulling out of it now will only confirm the huge losses made, but carrying on you can still cling to the hope of winning big and taking it all back."

Before the postponement 15 months ago, Japan was on track to host a well-run if expensive Olympics. It had a beautiful new National Stadium by architect Kengo Kuma, meticulous organization, and a grand stage for a country that mounted historic games in 1964 — just 19 years after defeat in World War II. IOC President Thomas Bach called Tokyo the "best prepared Olympics ever" — and he still says it repeatedly.

But now, worries that the games will become an incubator for the virus hang over them. For now, the rolling averages of deaths and cases have stabilized in a country that has reported more than 14,000 deaths — good by global standards but worse than many of its Asian neighbors.

While the games may still end up wowing television audiences who will tune in around the world, the pandemic has removed any sense of celebration. Athletes are meant to stay in the village or venues. Most others entering Japan for the Olympics can only shuttle between their hotels and venues for the first 14 days, must sign a pledge of follow the rules, and could have their movements monitored by GPS.

There will be no public viewing areas in Tokyo. The few fans who can attend venues must wear masks, social distance, refrain from cheering, and go straight home afterward. No stopping off at the local izakaya for beer and skewers of grilled chicken.

With spectators from overseas ruled out months ago, there's little business for hotels. Local sponsors have paid more than \$3 billion to be involved, and some have complained about lost advertising possibilities. Others have expressed concern about being tied to an event that's unpopular at home.

In perhaps a last-ditch effort to save some of the festive spirit, organizers said Tuesday they were looking into selling alcohol at the venues.

Olympic Minister Tamayo Marukawa indicated financial concerns were at play: Japanese brewer Asahi is one of the sponsors and has kicked millions into the local operating budget.

But after immediate pushback, organizing committee president Seiko Hashimoto reversed the decision at a Wednesday news conference.

"We decided as Tokyo 2020 not to sell alcoholic beverages and to ban drinking alcoholic beverages in the venues," she said.

And athletes who might want a drink to celebrate have been told by organizers to "drink alone" in their rooms.

Alcohol is otherwise banned in the athletes' village.

This village will also have a fever clinic, the first stop for anyone who fails a daily test — and the last place anyone wants to go.

"We are hoping that there won't be so many people," Dr. Tetsuya Miyamoto said, director of medical services for Tokyo 2020. "This is an infectious disease we are talking about. It has the possibility of spreading. So once that happens, the numbers could start to explode."

Details of the opening ceremony are always kept a secret. But this time the questions aren't about which celebrity will light the cauldron but rather will athletes social distance and wear masks as they march through the venue? And how many will march at all?

One of the symbols of the celebratory atmosphere of the Olympics has long been its notorious policy of handing out condoms. At the games in Rio de Janeiro, officials distributed 450,000 through vending machines with signs that read, "Celebrate with a Condom."

This time there will be 150,000 — but only given to athletes as they leave for home.

## Colombia reaches 100,000 deaths from COVID-19 as cases surge

By MANUEL RUEDA Associated Press

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BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Colombia reached 100,000 confirmed deaths from COVID-19 this week, becoming just the tenth country in the world to hit the grim milestone.

The South American nation of 50 million has been registering a growing number of daily cases since April and over the past seven days it had the world's third-highest per capita death rate from COVID-19, according to data published by Oxford University.

On Monday night, President Iván Duque blamed antigovernment protests that began at the end of April for many of the fatalities, saying that "more than 10,000 deaths could have been avoided" if Colombians had not held large gatherings over the past seven weeks.

But epidemiologists in Colombia said it's too soon to tell how much of an impact the protests had on the current surge in COVID-19 deaths.

"The protests definitely played a role" in coronavirus contagion, said Diego Rosselli, a professor of epidemiology at the Javeriana University in Bogota. "But at this moment putting any number on how many deaths they caused is mere speculation."

More than 25,000 people have died from COVID-19 in Colombia since May 1, or about a quarter of those who have died from the disease since the first case of coronavirus was registered in Colombia in March of last year.

Rosselli said more contagious variants of the virus may have contributed to the sharp acceleration in death rates, as has happened in nearby countries like Argentina and Brazil.

Fatigue with sanitary measures – like using facemasks – crowded living arrangements and fewer restrictions on gatherings have also fueled contagion in Colombia and elsewhere in South America. The region makes up just 5% of the world's population but accounts for almost a quarter of all COVID-19 deaths.

In Colombia, the rise in cases comes as the government lifts some of the last restrictions it had put in place to control the spread of the coronavirus and allows nightclubs, bars and cinemas to open for the first time in more than a year.

Cities like Medellin and Bogota are also preparing to hold trade shows and music events that will be attended by thousands of people, while 10,000 people recently attended a soccer match in the coastal city of Barranquilla.

Municipal governments say they have no option but to allow these events in order to regain jobs and help the economy get back on its feet.

Colombia's unemployment rate doubled last year as the government implemented several lockdowns to slow down contagion and the country's GDP shrank by 7%.

Vaccination sped up in June with up to 350,000 doses administered in one day, but only 10% of Colombia's population is fully vaccinated.

Doctors fear that recent decisions to allow more gatherings will increase the number of severely ill patients arriving at hospitals, which are already struggling to cope. In Bogota, Cali and Medellin, more than 95% of intensive care beds at hospitals are already occupied.

Paola Cabra, an emergency room doctor in the Samaritana University Hospital in Bogota, said the best thing would be to return to lockdowns to decrease infections.

"But in a country like Colombia you can't do that," Cabra said. "Most people here work independently to make a living and cannot afford to stay home doing nothing."

The hospital's 19 intensive care units for COVID-19 patients have been full for weeks, forcing staff to add respirators and other equipment to ER beds.

"I would like to be wrong," Cabra said. "But it looks like the situation will get worse in the following weeks."

## **GOP filibuster blocks Democrats' big voting rights bill**

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

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Democrats' sweeping attempt to rewrite U.S. election and voting law suffered a major setback in the Senate Tuesday, blocked by a filibuster wall of Republican opposition to what would be the largest overhaul of the electoral system in a generation.

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The vote leaves the Democrats with no clear path forward, though President Joe Biden declared, "This fight is far from over."

The bill, known as the For the People Act, would touch on virtually every aspect of how elections are conducted, striking down hurdles to voting that advocates view as the Civil Rights fight of the era, while also curbing the influence of money in politics and limiting partisan influence over the drawing of congressional districts.

But many in the GOP say the measure represents instead a breathtaking federal infringement on states' authority to conduct their own elections without fraud — and is meant to ultimately benefit Democrats.

It failed on a 50-50 vote after Republicans, some of whom derided the bill as the "Screw the People Act," denied Democrats the 60 votes needed to begin debate under Senate rules. Vice President Kamala Harris, the first Black woman to hold her office, presided over the chamber as the bill failed to break past that filibuster barrier.

Biden praised Senate Democrats for standing together "against the ongoing assault of voter suppression that represents a Jim Crow era in the 21st Century." In a statement from the White House, he said that in their actions, though unsuccessful on Tuesday, they "took the next step forward in this continuous struggle."

The rejection forces Democrats to reckon with what comes next for their top legislative priority in a narrowly divided Senate. They've touted the measure as a powerful counterweight to scores of proposals advancing in GOP-controlled statehouses making it more difficult to vote.

"Once again, the Senate Republican minority has launched a partisan blockade of a pressing issue," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said from the chamber floor. He vowed that the vote was the "starting gun" and not the last time voting rights would be up for debate.

Whatever Democrats decide, they will likely be confronted with the same challenge they faced Tuesday when minority Republicans used the filibuster — the same tool that Democrats employed during Donald Trump's presidency — to block consideration of the bill.

Republicans showed no sign of yielding.

Republican leader Mitch McConnell called the bill a "a solution looking for a problem" and vowed to "put an end to it." Texas Sen. Ted Cruz dismissed it as "partisan legislation, written by elected Democrats, designed to keep elected Democrats in office."

And, more graphically, Sen. Shelley Moore Capito called the bill "a despicable, disingenuous attempt to strip states of their constitutional right to administer elections" that "should never come close to reaching the president's desk."

Pressure has been mounting on Democrats to change Senate rules or watch their priorities languish. A group of moderate Democratic senators, however, including Sens. Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema, have ruled that out, denying the votes needed to make a filibuster change.

Biden has vowed what the White House calls the "fight of his presidency" over ensuring Americans' access to voting. But without changes to Senate rules, key planks of his agenda, including the voting bill, appear stalled.

Sen. Raphael Warnock, a Georgia Democrat and senior pastor at the Atlanta church Martin Luther King Jr. once led, called minority Republicans' willingness to prevent debate on the voting bill a "dereliction" of duty.

"What could be more hypocritical and cynical than invoking minority rights in the Senate as a pretext for preventing debate about how to preserve minority rights in the society," Warnock said during a floor speech Tuesday.

The changes being enacted in many 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 who tend to support Democrats. Republicans, cheered on by Trump, talk instead about fighting potential voting fraud and say the Democrats' concerns are wildly overblown.

As the Senate discussion 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.

They also want to limit the ability of state officials to remove local election officials. Georgia Republicans passed a 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.

But Democrats have divisions of their own. Until Tuesday, it wasn't even clear that they would be united on the vote to bring the bill up for debate. Manchin, a moderate from West Virginia, announced earlier this month that he couldn't support the bill because it lacked Republican support.

Manchin flipped his vote to a "yes" after Democrats agreed to consider his revised version. His proposal was endorsed by former President Barack Obama and called a "step forward" by Biden's administration.

Manchin has proposed adding provisions for a national voter ID requirement, which is anathema to many Democrats, and dropping a proposed public financing of campaigns. The ID requirement would be less strict than ones pushed by Republicans in certain states and allow voters to provide non-photo ID such as a utility bill.

Those changes 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. McConnell dismissed Manchin's version as "equally unacceptable."

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, a moderate Alaska Republican, said some aspects of the Democratic bill were laudable and she supports other voting rights legislation, like a reinstatement of the Voting Rights Act struck down by the Supreme Court in 2013.

But, ultimately, she said the "sprawling" bill amounted to "a one-size-fits-all mandate coming out of Washington D.C." that "in many cases doesn't work."

Months in the making, Tuesday's showdown had taken on fresh urgency as Trump continues to challenge the outcome of the 2020 election and new limits move ahead in Republican-led states.

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

## **Pistons win lottery, receive No. 1 pick in 2021 NBA draft**

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

Newly selected Basketball Hall of Famer Ben Wallace tapped his fist on the table a few times, then clapped his hands and pointed one finger skyward.

After one of the worst seasons in franchise history, Detroit has something to celebrate.

The Pistons won the NBA draft lottery on Tuesday night, meaning they'll have the No. 1 pick on July 29 — and, presumably, the chance to take Oklahoma State guard Cade Cunningham.

"We get to add another young player to the restoration process," Pistons general manager Troy Weaver said. "We're excited to be in this position. But it means that we've got a lot of work to do. We're going to be diligent about it, but it always helps to be able to add a No. 1 pick from a talented group of players to choose from."

Houston — which basically had 50-50 odds of picking in the top four — got the No. 2 pick. Cleveland will pick No. 3 and Toronto will pick No. 4, after both of those franchises got some lottery luck to move up in the order.

But the big winners were the Pistons, with Weaver saying the team will take a look at five players before deciding on the No. 1 selection. Unless Detroit moves the pick, it will be picking No. 1 overall for the first time since taking Bob Lanier in 1970.

And, as if there was any doubt, Weaver said Cunningham — just the fourth player to win Big 12 Player and Freshman of the Year honors in the same season, after averaging 20.2 points per game in his lone collegiate season — is at the "top of the list."

"It's going to mean a lot. It's going to mean a lot for this team," Wallace said on the ESPN telecast of

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the lottery, after he served as the team's virtual representative for the event that took place in Secaucus, New Jersey. "I think the team is headed in the right direction."

Orlando will get the No. 5 and No. 8 selections, with Oklahoma City picking No. 6 and Golden State also with two lottery slots — No. 7, as part of a trade with Minnesota, and the Warriors' own pick at No. 14.

The rest of the lottery results: Sacramento picks No. 9, New Orleans No. 10, Charlotte No. 11, San Antonio at No. 12, and Indiana at No. 13.

The lottery — 14 ping-pong balls, all numbered 1 through 14, placed into a hopper — technically only determines the first four picks. The rest then default to a pre-established order of finish; Golden State, for example, had only a 2.4% chance of its own pick being anything other than the No. 14 selection.

And form held through the first six picks that were unveiled. The No. 8 pick, which was slotted to Chicago, winds up with the Magic as part of the Nikola Vucevic trade from this season. That's when the first significant buck-the-odds move happened, when Toronto's 31.9% chance of cashing into a top-four slot delivered.

The Thunder will have three first-round picks, but none higher than No. 6. That's good news for them, and really good news for Houston.

The Rockets had a 52% chance of winning a top-four pick. The worst Houston could do was the No. 5 selection, and that truly was a worst-case scenario because if the Rockets were outside of the top four the pick would convey to Oklahoma City as part of the compensation for the Russell Westbrook-Chris Paul trade between those teams in 2019. In that scenario, if Houston had gotten the No. 5 pick, it would have gone to the Thunder in exchange for the No. 18 pick.

But the Rockets held on, getting the No. 2 pick as one of the building blocks they can use to reload after finishing with the NBA's worst record this season. Viewers might have found out the order before Rockets general manager Rafael Stone, who decided not to watch the stressful countdown.

"I decided that probably would be unpleasant," Stone said.

The consensus opinion has been that the No. 1 pick will be either a one-and-done college player — Cunningham, Southern California center Evan Mosley or Gonzaga guard Jalen Suggs — or someone from the G-League development program like guard Jalen Green or forward Jonathan Kuminga.

And, as always, it'll be a guessing game: Most of the players expected to be lottery picks are teenagers, mostly 19, some 18.

Sitting at No. 3 gives the Cavs a chance to add another young player to their "core four" — Darius Garland, Collin Sexton, Isaac Okoro and Jared Allen — and maybe find a player capable of pushing Cleveland back to relevance.

Cavs general manager Koby Altman feels this draft has more quality at the top than previous years.

"Even beyond the top five, there could be potential All-Stars," he said.

The rest of the first round, for now, is slotted this way — Washington will pick 15th, followed by Oklahoma City, Memphis, Oklahoma City, New York, Atlanta, New York, the Los Angeles Lakers, then Houston at both No. 23 and No. 24, followed by the Los Angeles Clippers, Denver, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Phoenix and Utah.

## US to review Native American boarding schools' dark history

By SUSAN MONTTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

The federal government will investigate its past oversight of Native American boarding schools and work to "uncover the truth about the loss of human life and the lasting consequences" of policies that over the decades forced hundreds of thousands of children from their families and communities, U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland announced Tuesday.

The unprecedented work will include compiling and reviewing records to identify past boarding schools, locate known and possible burial sites at or near those schools, and uncover the names and tribal affiliations of students, she said.

"To address the intergenerational impact of Indian boarding schools and to promote spiritual and emotional healing in our communities, we must shed light on the unspoken traumas of the past no matter

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how hard it will be," Haaland said.

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

She said the process will be long, difficult and painful and will not undo the heartbreak and loss endured by many families.

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, Indigenous children were taken from their communities and forced into boarding schools that focused on assimilation.

Haaland talked about the federal government's attempt to wipe out tribal identity, language and culture and how that past has continued to manifest itself through long-standing trauma, cycles of violence and abuse, premature deaths, mental health issues and substance abuse.

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 the troubling 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 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.

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.

Interior Department officials said aside from trying to shed more light on the loss of life at the boarding schools, they will be working to protect burial sites associated with the schools and will consult with tribes on how best to do that while respecting families and communities.

As part of the initiative, a final report from agency staff is due by April 1, 2022.

Chuck Hoskin Jr., principal chief of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, which had about 80 boarding schools, called the announcement encouraging and said anything that can be done to address those "troubling chapters of history" is a positive thing.

"I hope we don't discover gruesome incidents like were discovered in Canada. I just think it's good in this country to have conversations about what happened to Native American children," Hoskin said.

Navajo Nation President Nez also offered his support for the initiative, noting discrimination against Native Americans continues today on many fronts — from voter suppression to high numbers of missing and murdered people.

"Last week, Congress and President Biden established 'Juneteenth' as a national holiday, in observance of the end of slavery, which I fully support as a means to healing the African American community," Nez said. "Now, from my perspective as a Navajo person, there are so many atrocities and injustices that have been inflicted upon Native Americans dating back hundreds of years to the present day that also require national attention, so that the American society in general is more knowledgeable and capable of understanding the challenges that we face today."

This is not the first time the federal government has attempted to acknowledge what Haaland referred to as a "dark history."

More than two decades ago, Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Kevin Gover issued an apology for the emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual violence committed against children at the off-reservation schools. Then in 2009, President Barack Obama quietly signed off on an apology of sorts that was buried deep in a multibillion-dollar defense spending bill; the language had been watered down from the original

legislation introduced years earlier.

## **Pelosi signals new panel to investigate Jan. 6 Capitol riot**

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is signaling that she is poised to create a new committee to investigate the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol, pushing closer to a partisan investigation of the attack after Senate Republicans blocked the creation of an independent probe.

A person familiar with the matter said after a meeting with Democrats that Pelosi had told her colleagues that she would create a select panel. The person spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private remarks. But Pelosi later denied that, telling reporters, "No, I did not make that announcement."

The new committee would come after the Senate voted earlier this month to block legislation to form a bipartisan, independent commission investigating the attack by former President Donald Trump's supporters. Pelosi said afterward that the House would step up investigations of the riot, in which a violent mob overran police, broke into the building and hunted for lawmakers to try to stop the certification of Joe Biden's election victory.

A new select committee would put majority Democrats in charge of the investigation. More than three dozen Republicans in the House and seven Senate Republicans said they wanted to avoid a partisan probe, and they supported the legislation to form a commission, which would have been modeled after a similar panel that investigated the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Still, those numbers weren't strong enough to overcome GOP opposition in the Senate, where support from 10 Republicans is needed to pass most bills if all Democrats vote yes. Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer has said he may hold a second vote after the legislation failed to advance last month, but there's no indication that Democrats can win the necessary support from three additional Republicans.

Pelosi said earlier this month that the House "can't wait any longer" and would proceed with a probe. She said then that she was considering a select committee or having an existing committee conduct the investigation.

Many Republicans have made clear that they want to move on from the Jan. 6 attack, brushing aside the many unanswered questions about the insurrection, including how the government and law enforcement missed intelligence leading up to the rioting and the role of Trump before and during the insurrection.

Some Republicans have gone so far as to downplay the violence, with one suggesting the rioters looked like tourists and another insisting that a woman, Ashli Babbitt, who was shot and killed that day while trying to break into the House chamber through a window was "executed."

Last week, 21 Republicans voted against giving medals of honor to Capitol Police and Metropolitan Police to thank them for their service that day. Dozens of those officers suffered injuries, including chemical burns, brain injuries and broken bones.

Seven people died during and after the rioting, including Babbitt, three other Trump supporters who died of medical emergencies and two police officers who died by suicide in the days that followed. A third officer, Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, collapsed and later died after engaging with the protesters, but a medical examiner determined he died of natural causes.

## **Police chief: Slain Colorado officer was ambushed**

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — A police officer who was one of three people killed in a shooting at a suburban Denver shopping district was ambushed by a suspect who expressed hatred toward police, authorities said Tuesday.

Arvada Police Officer Gordon Beesley "was targeted because he was wearing an Arvada police uniform and a badge," police Chief Link Strate said at a news conference. "Officer Beesley was ambushed by someone who expressed hatred of police officers."

Strate called it a "deliberate act of violence" and an "isolated incident." But he did not provide details

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about the suspect, who also died in the shootout Monday; how authorities knew that the suspect had deliberately attacked Beesley; and how they knew about the suspect's views toward police.

The suspect was identified as 59-year-old Ronald Troyke by Jefferson County coroner Annette Cannon.

Strate also did not explain what started Monday's shootout, which also killed a man authorities have described as a "Samaritan" near a library in historic downtown Arvada, an area that is home to popular shops, restaurants, breweries and other businesses about 7 miles (10 kilometers) northwest of downtown Denver.

Strate on Tuesday identified that man as John Hurley, 40, of nearby Golden. Without elaborating on what he did, Strate called Hurley a "true hero who likely disrupted what could have been a larger loss of life."

The chief said there was no connection between Hurley and the suspect.

Arvada police spokesman Dave Snelling declined to say who shot the suspect, saying that would be something investigated by a team of area law enforcement officers.

The city of Arvada planned an evening vigil at Peace Lutheran Church just west of the Olde Town district.

Beesley was a school resource officer with a reputation for taking a compassionate approach with students. With school out for the summer, Beesley was working on patrol when he was hit by gunfire shortly after a report of a suspicious incident that police also have not described.

Beesley was a 19-year veteran of the Arvada Police Department, working as a patrol officer and as a motorcycle traffic officer before working as a school resource officer.

According to his school resource officer biography, he played the drums in a band and enjoyed hiking, biking, skiing, and camping with his family. His motto was "Look for the good in every day."

While working at Oberon Middle School, Beesley tried to help students who got into trouble from being prosecuted with crimes and reminded them and their parents that they would get through any problems they had, school counselor David Ruppert said.

Beesley once convinced a student he worked with who did not want to go to school to get out of his car and attend classes, Ruppert said.

"The kids gravitated toward him. They looked at him as someone I can go to," Ruppert said.

In 2015, Beesley began biking to school alongside a seventh grader with developmental delay after learning that he was really interested in bicycles but that his mother did not want him riding alone, according to a KUSA-TV story.

Ruppert was one of about 30 school staff members who walked from the scene of the shooting to the growing makeshift memorial for Beesley that was created outside the police department and city hall. Flowers were piled on top a police cruiser and bicycle festooned with U.S. flags and balloons.

The shooting in Arvada came three months after a gunman opened fire and killed 10 people, including a police officer, at a supermarket in Boulder, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) northwest of Arvada.

After Beesley was killed Monday, about 100 people — some holding American flags and pro-police flags — gathered as procession of police cars and motorcycles escorted the hearse carrying Beesley's body to the coroner's office.

Among them was Elaine Magnuson, who choked up as she watched. She originally thought the huge police response in the area near her home indicated that a car accident might have happened — not a shooting that killed a police officer.

"It's so close," she said.

## Austin backs change in military sex assault prosecution

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, for the first time, said Tuesday he will support long-debated changes to the military justice system that would remove decisions on prosecuting sexual assault cases from military commanders.

In a statement, obtained by The Associated Press, Austin said he supports taking those sexual assault and related crimes away from the chain of command, and let independent military lawyers handle them.



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The Pentagon has long resisted such a change, but Austin and other senior leaders are slowly acknowledging that the military has failed to make progress against sexual assault, and some changes are needed.

Austin pledged to work with Congress to make the changes, saying they will give the department "real opportunities to finally end the scourge of sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military." His public support for the shift has been eagerly awaited, sending a strong signal to the military and boosting momentum for the change.

The statement came a day before Austin testifies to the House Armed Services Committee amid escalating pressure from Congress to take concrete steps to address sexual assault. Austin's memo, however, does not express any view on legislation that would make broader changes to the military justice system and require that independent lawyers handle all major crimes.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., has the support of 66 senators for a bill that would have independent prosecutors handle felonies that call for more than a year in prison. But other key lawmakers and leaders of the military services have balked at including all major crimes, saying stripping control of all crimes from commanders could hurt military readiness, erode command authority, and require far more time and resources.

Until now, Austin has said publicly that he was open to changes recommended by an independent review commission that he appointed to take a look at sexual assault and harassment in the military. The panel said sexual assault, sexual misconduct, domestic violence, stalking, retaliation, child sexual assault and the wrongful distribution of photos should be removed from the chain of command.

In the statement, Austin finally makes public that he supports the change, and says those additional crimes should be included because there is a strong correlation between them and the prevalence of sexual assault. According to a defense official, Austin has reservations about the more expansive change outlined in Gillibrand's bill, similar to those expressed by his senior leaders. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

In recent weeks military service secretaries and chiefs, in memos to Austin and letters to Capitol Hill, said they were wary about the sexual assault change, and laid out greater reservations on more broadly revamping the military justice system.

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said removing commanders from prosecution decisions "may have an adverse effect on readiness, mission accomplishment, good order and discipline, justice, unit cohesion, trust, and loyalty between commanders and those they lead."

In a letter to Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma, ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, Milley acknowledged the military hasn't made sufficient progress in combating sexual assault. He has repeatedly said, though, he's open to the sexual assault change.

The independent review panel on Monday presented Austin with an expansive set of recommendations to combat sexual assault in the military, including prevention, command climate, victim care and support.

"Generally they appear strong and well-grounded," Austin said in his statement. "I have directed my staff to do a detailed assessment and implementation plan for my review and approval."

Austin said he will present his recommendations to President Joe Biden in the coming days. But he also noted that the changes will require additional personnel, funding and authorities. The ones that can be done under existing authority will be given priority, he said, and other changes may take more time and will need help from Congress.

"As I made clear on my first full day in office, this is a leadership issue. And we will lead," he said. "Our people depend upon it. They deserve nothing less."

In a recent interview with the AP, Gillibrand said the wider change is necessary to combat racial injustice within the military, where studies have found that Black people are more likely to be investigated and arrested for misconduct.

Gillibrand has argued against limiting the change to sexual assault, saying it would be discriminatory and set up what some call a "pink" court to deal with crimes usually involving female victims.

"I'm deeply concerned that if they limit it to just sexual assault, it will really harm female service members.

It will further marginalize them, further undermine them, and they'll be seen as getting special treatment," she told the AP.

## Biden urges shots for young adults as variant concern grows

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. government is stepping up efforts to get younger Americans vaccinated for COVID-19 as the White House acknowledges it will miss two key vaccination benchmarks and as concern grows about the spread of a new variant that threatens to set the country back in the months ahead.

The delta variant, first identified in India, in the last two weeks has come to represent more than 20% of coronavirus infections in the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Tuesday. That's double what it was when the CDC last reported on the variant's prevalence.

"The delta variant is currently the greatest threat in the U.S. to our attempt to eliminate COVID-19," Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, said at a White House briefing on the virus. "Good news: Our vaccines are effective against the delta variant."

He added: "We have the tools. So let's use them, and crush the outbreak."

The White House on Tuesday acknowledged that President Joe Biden will fall short of reaching his goal of vaccinating 70% of all American adults with at least one shot by Independence Day. But it tried to paint an optimistic picture nonetheless by stressing that the nation had reached that threshold for those aged 30 and older and expects to meet it for those age 27 or older by the July 4 holiday.

Biden also expects to miss a second goal — fully vaccinating 165 million adult Americans by July 4. White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients projected it will take several more weeks to hit that number. On Monday, the U.S. crossed 150 million fully vaccinated.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki rejected the idea that the missed July 4 benchmarks would represent a failure for the administration, telling reporters, "We don't see it exactly like something went wrong."

Still, administration officials said they were redoubling their focus on vaccinating younger Americans age 18-26, who have proved to be least likely to get a vaccine when it's available for them.

The nationwide rate of new vaccinations has dropped off precipitously over the past month even as shots have become more available, with fewer than 300,000 Americans now getting their first dose per day on average — a pace that, if sustained, will have the U.S. not reaching Biden's 70% goal until late July at the earliest.

Officials are also increasingly concerned about regional variations in the vaccination program.

More than 16 states and the District of Columbia have vaccinated 70% of their adult population. But others — particularly in the South and Midwest — are lagging substantially behind, with four not having yet reached 50% vaccination rates.

The White House said meeting Biden's vaccination goals is less important than the pace of the nation's reopening, which is exceeding even its own internal projections as the overwhelming majority of the nation's most vulnerable people are fully vaccinated and cases and deaths are at their lowest rates since the earliest days of the pandemic, averaging about 11,000 new infections and fewer than 300 deaths per day. More states are opening back up, with Michigan on Tuesday becoming the latest to do away with a mask mandate and virus restrictions. The state had the nation's worst outbreak this spring.

"We have succeeded beyond our highest expectations," Zients said.

Americans at highest risk for complications from COVID-19 are overwhelmingly vaccinated, according to CDC data, but only 53% aged 25-39 have received one dose. Among those 18-24, it's 47%.

"Where the country has more work to do is particularly with 18 to 26 year olds," Zients said.

Zients and government experts said the rise of the delta variant should motivate younger Americans to get vaccinated.

"The reality is many younger Americans have felt like COVID-19 is not something that impacts them, and they've been less eager to get the shot," Zients said. "However, with the delta variant now spreading across the country, and infecting younger people worldwide, it's more important than ever that they get

vaccinated.”

The variant is taking root as there are warning signs about a possible surge in cases in unvaccinated corners of America. Rural sections of Missouri, including Springfield and Branson, have seen a dramatic spike in COVID-19 hospitalizations in recent weeks that health officials attribute in part to the delta variant spreading among younger, unvaccinated residents.

“There is a danger, a real danger that if there is a persistence of a recalcitrance to getting vaccinated that you could see localized surges,” said Fauci.

Mississippi, Louisiana, Wyoming, Alabama and Idaho are all below 40% of their population with at least one dose of vaccine.

The White House planned to focus on increasingly local vaccination pushes, with first lady Jill Biden traveling Tuesday to Mississippi and Tennessee to promote vaccinations and Biden himself set to visit North Carolina on Thursday.

The variant is accounting for half of new infections in the regions that include Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming.

## **Fed’s Powell says high inflation temporary, will ‘wane’**

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell on Tuesday responded to concerns from Republican lawmakers about spiking inflation by reiterating his view that current price increases will likely prove temporary.

Consumer prices jumped 5% in May compared with a year earlier, the largest increase in 13 years. Republican House members have sought to blame higher inflation on President Joe Biden’s \$1.9 trillion economic relief package, approved in March, in an effort to retake the House next year.

“The Biden inflation agenda of too much money chasing too few goods is causing major harm to hard-working families,” said Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise, the second-ranking Republican House leader.

Powell avoided participating in such policy debates, despite attempts from both Democrats and Republicans to draw him in.

But he said in testimony before a congressional oversight panel that recent price gains mostly reflected temporary supply bottlenecks, and the fact that prices fell sharply last spring at the onset of the pandemic, which make inflation figures now, compared with a year ago, look much larger.

Most of the price gains have occurred in categories such as used cars, airplane tickets, and hotel rooms, Powell said, where demand has soared as the economy has quickly reopened, catching many companies flat-footed.

“Those are things that we would look to, to stop going up and ultimately to start to decline as these situations resolve themselves,” Powell said. “They don’t speak to a broadly tight economy — the kind of thing that has led to high inflation over time.”

Powell acknowledged that “these effects have been larger than we expected and they may turn out to be more persistent than we expected.” But he added that “the incoming data are very much consistent with the view that these are factors that will wane over time and then inflation will then move down toward our goals.”

The Fed chair did not specify which data he was referring to, but the prices of many commodities, such as lumber and copper, which had risen sharply during the pandemic, have tumbled in recent weeks.

Powell’s comments come at a time when financial markets are struggling to interpret the Federal Reserve’s recent moves. Last week Fed officials signaled that they may increase the central bank’s benchmark interest rate twice in 2023, an earlier time frame than they set out in March, when no rate hike was expected until after that year. Changes to the Fed’s benchmark rate affect a wide range of consumer borrowing costs, such as mortgages, credit cards, and student loans.

Powell also said last week that the Fed had formally begun discussing when and how the central bank might reduce the current \$120 billion a month of Treasuries and mortgage-backed bonds that the Fed is

purchasing. Those purchases are intended to keep longer-term interest rates lower to encourage more borrowing and spending.

Both moves were seen as evidence that the Fed wanted to indicate it was prepared to keep inflation in check without initially taking any steps to pull back on its efforts to stimulate the economy.

Some Fed officials are not fully convinced that inflation is temporary. St. Louis Fed President James Bullard said Monday that the economy is in unprecedented territory, making it hard to know where inflation will go next. But he added that, "we have to be ready for the idea that there are upside risks to inflation, (it) could go higher" than the 2.5% rate he has forecast for next year.

Yet other officials echoed Powell's views. Also on Monday, New York Federal Reserve Bank President John Williams, who also serves as vice chair of the Fed's policymaking committee, said that currently high inflation is likely transitory.

"I expect that as price reversals and short-run imbalances from the economy reopening play out, inflation will come down from around 3% this year to close to 2% next year and in 2023," Williams said.

## Some used vehicles now cost more than original sticker price

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — When it was new, the window sticker price on a typical 2019 Toyota Tacoma SR double cab pickup was just under \$29,000. Two years later, dealers are paying almost \$1,000 more than that to buy the same vehicle, even though it's used.

Then they're selling it to consumers for more than \$33,000.

Welcome to the wacky world of U.S. car and truck sales, where the pandemic and a global shortage of computer chips have pushed prices to record levels.

In the past year, used vehicle prices on average have climbed 30%, according to Black Book, which tracks car and truck data. That's created many crazy situations where high-demand vehicles are selling for more than they did when they were new, said Alex Yurchenko, the company's senior vice president of data science.

"The market is very strange right now," said Yurchenko. "Dealers need the inventory, so they are paying lots of money for their vehicles on the wholesale market."

Yurchenko has found 73 models of 1- to 3-year-old vehicles being sold at auctions (where dealers buy their vehicles) for prices above their original sticker, which is called the manufacturer's suggested retail price.

Used vehicle price increases accounted for one-third of the large rise in inflation last month, according to the Labor Department. Prices shot up a record 10% in April and another 7.3% in May, as inflation spiked 5%, the biggest 12-month increase since 2008. The average used vehicle cost \$26,457 this month, according to Edmunds.com.

Many of the models Yurchenko found were high-priced trucks and SUVs or highly sought-after loaded-out vehicles, including the high-performance Ford F-150 Raptor pickup, the 2019 Jeep Wrangler Unlimited Rubicon SUV and the boxy Mercedes G-Class AMG63 high performance SUV.

But the two-wheel-drive Tacoma SR is the lowest-priced model of Toyota's top-selling small pickup. To be sure, higher end versions of the Tacoma also were on the list, but even more mainstream vehicles are selling for more than their original prices. For instance, the 2020 Kia Telluride and Hyundai Palisade made the list even though both are considered good values compared with more expensive SUVs with three rows of seats.

Yurchenko says the crazy prices are moving further into more ordinary vehicles. "Before we get through this, prices for many mainstream vehicles will get closer to their manufacturer's suggested retail price," he said.

It all started in April and May of last year, when U.S. automakers were forced to close factories for eight weeks to help stop the novel coronavirus from spreading. That cut production, limiting inventory even as demand remained surprisingly strong.

The factories came back faster than expected, and in the meantime, computer chip makers had switched

to manufacturing semiconductors for phones, laptops, gaming systems and other consumer electronics. That created a shortage of automotive chips, which is forcing car companies to temporarily close factories, leaving some dealers with few new vehicles.

The lack of new vehicles and higher prices have sent more people into the used vehicle market, so demand is high there, too. Plus, rental car companies, normally a source of late-model used vehicles, are keeping their cars longer because they can't get new ones, Yurchenko said.

At present, consumers who have to replace a vehicle don't have much choice. "Unfortunately, if you need a vehicle, you'll need to pay the price," Yurchenko said.

But there are signs that price increases are starting to slow. Used car prices rose 0.75% last week, the lowest weekly gain in 17 weeks. Trucks and SUV prices grew 0.68%, the lowest weekly gain in 15 weeks, according to Black Book.

Karl Jensvold, owner of PricedRite Auto Sales, a used vehicle dealer in Lincoln, Nebraska, said he's seeing wholesale prices leveling off, but he doesn't expect them to drop anytime soon. "I think the normal used car market has reset to a different price point," he said. "I don't think we'll see the prices (from) before COVID for a while."

Yurchenko said at some point prices will have to go back to normal and used vehicles will depreciate once again. The timing depends on how long it takes to get more computer chips so automakers can resume normal production, he said. "Once the new inventory levels start increasing, that's where the pressure on the used market will be relieved," he said.

## **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.

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.

Responding to the report, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said that nearly 80% of nurs-

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ing home residents and more than 55% of staff are now vaccinated, and the agency is working to protect health and safety. CMS sets standards for nursing homes.

The two main nursing industry groups, the American Health Care Association and LeadingAge, said the grim statistics reflect the consequences of society and government not placing a high enough priority on the needs of frail elders. That "showed once again how ageism can result in policies that treat older people as expendable," said Katie Smith Sloan, president of LeadingAge, which represents nonprofit homes.

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. It also included patients in Medicare Advantage plans sold by private insurers. Although Medicare does not cover long-term care, the vast majority of nursing home patients are elderly, and Medicare does cover their medical needs. The report included both patients who live in nursing homes as well as those temporarily at a facility for rehabilitation.

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.

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.

Although nursing homes 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."

## How Big Tech created a data 'treasure trove' for police

By MATT O'BRIEN and MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writers

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — When U.S. law enforcement officials need to cast a wide net for information, they're increasingly turning to the vast digital ponds of personal data created by Big Tech companies via

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the devices and online services that have hooked billions of people around the world.

Data compiled by four of the biggest tech companies shows that law enforcement requests for user information — phone calls, emails, texts, photos, shopping histories, driving routes and more — have more than tripled in the U.S. since 2015. Police are also increasingly savvy about covering their tracks so as not to alert suspects of their interest.

That's the backdrop for recent revelations that the Trump-era U.S. Justice Department sought data from Apple, Microsoft and Google about members of Congress, their aides and news reporters in leak investigations -- then pursued court orders that blocked those companies from informing their targets.

In just the first half of 2020 -- the most recent data available -- Apple, Google, Facebook and Microsoft together fielded more than 112,000 data requests from local, state and federal officials. The companies agreed to hand over some data in 85% of those cases. Facebook, including its Instagram service, accounted for the largest number of disclosures.

Consider Newport, Rhode Island, a coastal city of 24,000 residents that attracts a flood of summer tourists. Fewer than 100 officers patrol the city -- but they make multiple requests a week for online data from tech companies.

That's because most crimes -- from larceny and financial scams to a recent fatal house party stabbing at a vacation rental booked online -- can be at least partly traced on the internet. Tech providers, especially social media platforms, offer a "treasure trove of information" that can help solve them, said Lt. Robert Salter, a supervising police detective in Newport.

"Everything happens on Facebook," Salter said. "The amount of information you can get from people's conversations online -- it's insane."

As ordinary people have become increasingly dependent on Big Tech services to help manage their lives, American law enforcement officials have grown far more savvy about technology than they were five or six years ago, said Cindy Cohn, executive director of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital rights group.

That's created what Cohn calls "the golden age of government surveillance." Not only has it become far easier for police to trace the online trails left by suspects, they can also frequently hide their requests by obtaining gag orders from judges and magistrates. Those orders block Big Tech companies from notifying the target of a subpoena or warrant of law enforcement's interest in their information -- contrary to the companies' stated policies.

Of course, there's often a reason for such secrecy, said Andrew Pak, a former federal prosecutor. It helps prevent investigations getting sidetracked because someone learns about it, he said -- "the target, perhaps, or someone close to it."

Longstanding opposition to such gag orders has recently resurfaced in the wake of the Trump-era orders. Apple in 2018 shared phone and account data generated by two Democratic members of the House Intelligence Committee, but the politicians didn't find out until May, once a series of gag orders expired.

Microsoft also shared data about a congressional aide and had to wait more than two years before telling that person. Brad Smith, Microsoft's president, last week called for an end to the overuse of secret gag orders, arguing in a Washington Post opinion piece that "prosecutors too often are exploiting technology to abuse our fundamental freedoms."

Critics like Cohn have called for revision of U.S. surveillance laws drawn up years ago when the police and prosecutors typically had to deliver warrants to the home of the person being targeted for searches. Now that most personal information is kept in the equivalent of vast digital storehouses controlled by Big Tech companies, such searches can proceed in secret.

"Our surveillance laws are really based on the idea that if something is really important, we store it at home, and that doesn't pass the giggle test these days," Cohn said. "It's just not true."

Many tech companies are quick to point out that the majority of the information they are forced to share is considered "non-content" data. But that can include useful details such as the basic personal details you supply when you register for an account, or the metadata that shows if and when you called or messaged someone, though not what you said to them.

Law enforcement can also ask tech companies to preserve any data generated by a particular user, which

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prevents the target from deleting it. Doing so doesn't require a search warrant or any judicial oversight, said Armin Tadayon, a cybersecurity associate at advisory firm the Brunswick Group.

If police later find reasonable grounds for conducting a search, they can return with a warrant and seize the preserved data. If not, the provider deletes the copies and "the user likely never finds out," Tadayon said.

In Newport, getting a search warrant for richer online data isn't that difficult. Salter said it requires a quick trip to a nearby courthouse to seek a judge's approval; some judges are also available after hours for emergency requests. And if a judge finds there is probable cause to search through online data, tech companies almost always comply.

"Most of the companies do play ball," Salter said. "We can speak with people, get questions answered. They're usually pretty helpful."

Nearly all big tech companies — from Amazon to rental sites like Airbnb, ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft and service providers like Verizon — now have teams to respond to such requests and regularly publish reports about how much they disclosed. Many say they work to narrow overly broad requests and reject those that aren't legally valid.

Some of the most dramatic increases in requests have been to tech companies that cater to younger people. As the messaging app Snapchat has grown in popularity, so have government requests for its data. Snap, the company behind the app, fielded nearly 17,000 data requests in the first six months of 2020, compared to 762 in the same period of 2015.

Salter said the fact that we're all doing so much online means police detectives need to stay tech-savvy. But training courses for how to file such requests aren't hard to find.

For those worried about the growing volume of online data sought by law enforcement, Salter said: "Don't commit crimes and don't use your computer and phones to do it."

"Judges are not going to sign off on something if we don't have probable cause to go forward," he said. "We're not going to look at people's information without having something to go on."

But Cohn said more tech companies should be using encryption technology to make all personal information, including metadata, virtually impossible to decipher without a user key to unlock it.

Until then, she said, police can short circuit constitutional protections against unreasonable searches "by just going to the company instead of coming directly to us."

## Special Tony Awards given to 2 shows, 1 advocacy nonprofit

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Tony Awards may be months away, but three groups can already celebrate: The Broadway Advocacy Coalition, "David Byrne's American Utopia" and Lin-Manuel Miranda's "Freestyle Love Supreme" are getting special awards.

The American Theatre Wing and the Broadway League announced Tuesday that the three groups will win Special Tony Awards, given to productions or organizations that don't fit in competitive categories.

The Broadway Advocacy Coalition is an arts-based advocacy nonprofit dedicated to building the capacity of individuals, organizations and communities to use storytelling to dismantle the systems that perpetuate racism. It was founded in 2016 by Jackie Bell, Amber Iman, Cameron J. Ross, Britton Smith, Adrienne Warren and Christian Dante White.

In a statement, the American Theatre Wing and the Broadway League said the coalition "has provided an unparalleled platform for marginalized members of our theatre community and tools to help us all do better as we strive for equity."

Two high profile shows from the pandemic-shortened season — "Freestyle Love Supreme" and "David Byrne's American Utopia" will also get special Tonys. They did not provide free tickets for Tony voters and weren't eligible for competitive awards.

"Freestyle Love Supreme" was created by Miranda, Thomas Kail and Anthony Veneziale. It features a comedic improvisational musical structure and a rotating cast of Broadway performers. Byrne's acclaimed



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stage show incorporates Talking Heads classics and other songs; Spike Lee made a film of it for HBO.

The American Theatre Wing and the Broadway League said both shows "take theatre to the next level, delivering outside-of-the-box presentations that have gone beyond the stage and brought theatre into the homes of millions of people around the world,"

The Tony Awards are set for Sept. 26.

## Should reporters challenge or ignore election disbelievers?

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Matt Negrin's campaign to ban "election deniers" from television news failed to achieve his original goal, which was to prevent a significant number of Americans from believing the lie that Donald Trump didn't lose the presidential election to Joe Biden.

Instead, it has provoked a persistent debate over the role of political journalists, along with illustrating how television news and the politicians who depend upon its cameras have changed.

Negrin, a former journalist and now producer at Comedy Central's "The Daily Show," wrote a December column for The Washington Post saying that TV journalists who invite Republicans on the air should begin by asking if they believed Biden won the election. If they don't say yes, the interview should end.

He's aggressively continued the effort on his personal Twitter account, saying mainstream news programs that book officeholders who voted against accepting election results are helping to spread misinformation.

Many in the news business believe that stance goes too far, that a journalist's role is to question ideas and point out inaccuracies or outright fictions, not to pretend they don't exist. Two Sunday morning hosts, Jake Tapper and Chris Wallace, recently revealed themselves as polar opposites on the point.

While it's not a formal policy, Tapper said he hasn't booked election deniers on CNN's "State of the Union" and on his weekday show, "The Lead."

"It's a discussion I think everyone in the news media should be having," Tapper told Politico. "Should those who shared the election lie that incited the deadly attack on the Capitol and that continues to erode confidence in our democracy be invited onto our airwaves to continue to spread the Big Lie? Can our viewers count on these politicians to tell the truth about other topics?"

Wallace, of "Fox News Sunday," has said he's willing to talk to all sides and has no rules about the order of questions. "I don't think moral posturing goes well with newsgathering," Wallace said in a statement last month.

When Florida Sen. Rick Scott appeared on his show Feb. 28, Wallace asked whether Biden won the election "fair and square." Absolutely, Scott replied.

Led by Trump, suspicion about the 2020 results has remained, despite elections officials calling it secure and the dismissal of court challenges. A Quinnipiac University poll taken six months after the election found 29% of Americans, and 66% of Republicans surveyed said Biden was not legitimately elected.

Confronting deniers is not a subject many in the business are eager to address publicly. No one on NBC's "Meet the Press," ABC's "This Week" or CBS' "Face the Nation," for example, would speak to The Associated Press about it.

What would Tim Russert do? The former "Meet the Press" host was the acknowledged king of Sunday morning political talk shows before his death in 2008, and his former producer said Russert believed in exposing ideas that many found repugnant. Russert memorably interviewed former KKK leader David Duke in 1991.

But Betsy Fischer Martin, executive producer of "Meet the Press" from 2002 to 2013, wonders how many such opportunities exist now. In today's climate, many politicians prefer friendly TV venues, like Fox News for conservatives or MSNBC for liberals.

"It's human nature in many ways that you want to pick a program that is going to give you more of a platform than a tough interview," said Fischer Martin, executive director of the Women in Politics Institute at American University.

Booking deniers is less of an issue when many don't want to be booked in the first place.

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The current "Meet the Press" moderator, Chuck Todd, alluded to this while writing for Politico in January. A handful of GOP senators make themselves available for interviews, he wrote, but they're few and far between.

Unless they need to reach a broader electorate, many Republican officeholders don't see the point of such faceoffs, said Alex Conant, a GOP consultant and founding partner of Firehouse Strategies in Washington.

"If you're a conservative, the truth is, you don't care too much about liberal voters," Conant said. "They're never going to support you, and there's not much benefit to subjecting yourself to a tough interview."

Frank Sesno, a former CNN Washington bureau chief, lands on the side of interviewing deniers. Yet he wonders whether that would be worthwhile if questions are ignored, talking points spouted or empty fights instigated.

"It's not a question of banning them," said Sesno, professor at George Washington University. "You just don't want them on the air because they're not going to be a good guest."

Some recent interviews prove his point.

ABC News' Terry Moran grew exasperated last month in repeatedly and fruitlessly asking GOP spokesman Paris Dennard whether he accepted the results of the 2020 election as legitimate. "It's a yes or no question," Moran said.

Biden was president, Dennard said. He wouldn't go further. Moran kept trying, asking whether he was scared to answer or didn't believe democracy worked last November.

"You can be an American citizen who can accept the fact that Joe Biden is president as well as being concerned about election integrity," Dennard said.

Todd's May 11 interview with Rep. Dan Crenshaw devolved into a fight when the Texas Republican was asked about his support for an effort to overturn the election. Crenshaw said it was "time to move on" and attacked the "liberal and pro-Democratic media" for continuing to bring up the subject.

"Don't start that," Todd said. "There's nothing lazier than that."

The interview soon ended.

"I understand where the 'invite and confront' people are coming from," said Jay Rosen, a New York University professor and author of the PressThink blog. "But in practice, the confrontation with a determined fabulist or denialist rarely works out to the viewer's advantage."

Few interviewers have the ability to effectively expose hypocrisy on live television, Negrin said. Even when a journalist can, politicians will take from the invitation to come on the air a message that they can say whatever they want and will still have a platform.

The online provocateur said that he's been pleased that television producers and hosts are at least thinking about these issues.

"It's been (nearly) six months since the insurrection, eight months since the election, and I think a lot of hosts just want to get back to normal — interviewing Republicans, interviewing Democrats," Negrin said. "That's what they do."

"But, to me, it's important to remember what happened."

## **EXPLAINER: Ranked choice voting gets big test in NYC**

By DAVID B. CARUSO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Ranked choice voting made its debut in New York City's mayoral primary Tuesday in one of the most high-profile tests yet for a system gaining use in pockets across the U.S.

The system is based on a simple premise: Democracy works better if people aren't forced to make an all-or-nothing choice with their vote.

Rather than pick just one candidate, voters get to rank several in order of preference. Even if a voter's top choice doesn't have enough support to win, their rankings of other candidates still play a role in determining the victor.

But the system is more complex than a traditional election, making it tough to forecast a winner. It could take longer to get results.

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## HOW DOES IT WORK?

In New York City's version, voters get to rank up to five candidates, from first to last, on their ballot. If one candidate is the first choice of a majority of voters — more than 50% — that person wins the race outright, just like in a traditional election.

If nobody hits that threshold, ranked choice analysis kicks in.

Vote tabulation is done in rounds. In each round, the candidate in last place is eliminated. Votes cast ranking that candidate first are then redistributed to those voters' second choices.

That process repeats until there are only two candidates left. The one with the most votes wins.

There are 13 candidates on the ballot in New York City's Democratic mayoral primary. Only two candidates face off on the Republican side, making ranked choice a nonfactor.

## WON'T THAT TAKE FOREVER?

All rounds of counting are done by computer in a process that takes very little time.

But absentee ballots complicate things. Because of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, all people in New York are being allowed to vote by mail.

Ballots are valid as long as they are postmarked by Tuesday, even if they take several days to arrive. A complete ranked choice analysis can't be done until those ballots are included.

After polls close at 9 p.m. Tuesday, New York City's Board of Elections plans to release data on where the vote count stands based only on people's first choices, and only for votes cast in person.

A week later, on June 29, it will run its first ranked choice analysis, using only votes cast in person. Results will be posted on the board's website. They will show who the winner and runner-up would be if no votes had been cast by mail.

A week after that, on July 6, the board will do another round of ranked choice analysis that includes all of the absentee ballots processed as of that date. If there are still uncounted or disputed ballots, the process will be run yet again on July 13, and every subsequent Tuesday until a winner can be declared.

## WHY DO PEOPLE LIKE RANKED CHOICE?

One benefit of the system is that nobody "wastes" their vote by picking an unpopular candidate as their first choice.

You can follow your heart and rank someone you like No. 1, even if you suspect that candidate doesn't stand a chance. If that person is eliminated, you still get a say in who wins the race based on your other rankings.

Another benefit is that it's tough for someone to get elected without broad support. In a traditional election, it's possible for someone with fringe political views to win in a crowded field of candidates, even if they are deeply disliked by a majority of voters.

That's theoretically less likely in a ranked choice system. A candidate could get the largest share of first-choice votes, but still lose to someone who is the second or third choice of a large number of people.

## WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES?

The system is tough to grasp. It requires voters to do a lot more research. It also makes races less predictable.

Transparency and trust are also potential problems. Ordinarily, candidates, the public and news organizations can see votes coming in, precinct by precinct, and know exactly who is leading and where their support is coming from.

Under the modern ranked choice system, the process of redistributing votes is done by computer. Outside groups will have a harder time evaluating whether the software sorted the ranked votes accurately.

That's a headache for news organizations, like The Associated Press, that analyze vote tallies and attempt to report a winner before the count is complete.

And there may be instances where candidates who seem to have a comfortable lead in first-place votes on election night lose because relatively few voters rank them as their second or third choice. That could lead to people questioning the results.

## As passengers return to air travel, bad behavior skyrockets

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

Air travel can be difficult in the best of times, with cramped planes, screaming babies, flight delays and short tempers.

Throw in a pandemic, and the anxiety level can rise quickly.

That has led to confrontations with flight attendants and other unruly behavior, including occasional fights that get captured and replayed endlessly on social media.

Airlines have reported about 3,000 cases of disruptive passengers since Jan. 1, according to a spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration, which began tracking it this year. About 2,300 of those incidents involved passengers who refused to obey the federal requirement to wear a face mask.

Over the past decade, the FAA investigated about 140 cases a year for possible enforcement actions such as fines. This year, it was nearly 400 by late May.

Things have gotten so bad that the airlines and unions for flight attendants and pilots sent a letter to the U.S. Justice Department on Monday urging "that more be done to deter egregious behavior."

"The federal government should send a strong and consistent message through criminal enforcement that compliance with federal law and upholding aviation safety are of paramount importance," the letter said, noting that the law calls for up to 20 years imprisonment for passengers who intimidate or interfere with crew members.

Trade group Airlines for America sent a separate letter to the Federal Aviation Administration acknowledging that the "vast majority of passengers" comply with the rules but "unfortunately, we continue to see onboard behavior deteriorating into heinous acts, including assaults, threats and intimidation of crewmembers that directly interfere with the performance of crewmember duties and jeopardize the safety and security of everyone onboard the aircraft."

The FAA announced a "zero-tolerance" policy against disruptive behavior on flights back in January. The agency is attempting to levy fines that can top \$30,000 against more than 50 passengers and has identified more than 400 other cases for possible enforcement.

U.S. airlines have banned at least 3,000 passengers since May of last year, and that doesn't include two of the largest, American and Southwest, which decline to provide figures.

Airlines have stripped some customers of frequent-flyer benefits, and in rare cases pilots have made unplanned landings to remove unruly passengers. Pilots and flight attendants now routinely make pre-flight announcements to remind passengers about federal regulations against interfering with crews.

"All of that is helpful, and if we didn't have that I can only imagine how much worse it would be," said Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants, "but this is clearly not taking care of the whole problem. We have to do a lot more. I have never, ever seen an environment like this."

Mike Oemichen has been a flight attendant for seven years and he, too, says he has never seen so much bad behavior on board. He recounted a recent incident in which he and other flight attendants had just completed the safety briefing for passengers and were preparing for takeoff when a fight broke out between two men and a woman accompanying one of them.

"After 20 or 30 seconds we were able to get the two male passengers away from each other, and we tried to calm everyone down," Oemichen said. "Then we went back to the gate and had the passengers removed."

Oemichen suffered a concussion when he hit his head against an overhead bin during the melee.

"We never figured out what they were fighting over," said Oemichen, who spoke on condition that his airline not be named. He also handles grievances for union members at his airline.

The fear among flight attendants is that things will get worse this summer, as travel continues to increase and planes get more crowded. The airline industry passed a milestone earlier this month when the Transportation Security Administration announced that more than 2 million people streamed through U.S. airport security checkpoints for the first time since early March 2020.

Airline bookings have been picking up since around February, as more Americans were vaccinated against

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COVID-19. Falling infection rates could, however, make it much harder for flight attendants to enforce the federal mask-wearing rule, which isn't due to expire until mid-September.

Some security experts think lifting the mask requirement will remove a key source of tension — one with political overtones in a politically divided nation. But it could also raise the anxiety of people who worry about sharing space with strangers while we're still in a pandemic.

"People on both sides of the issue are acting badly," Nelson said.

Airline unions have asked for a variety of measures including more air marshals, limits on alcohol sales on planes and in airports, and more sharing of information among airlines about disruptive passengers. They are also floating the idea of a new government-maintained list of banned passengers — but one that would be less restrictive than the no-fly list for suspected terrorists.

It's not clear why there is so much air rage. Airline employees and outside experts offer explanations including cramped flights, political polarization over wearing face masks, and the way pandemic lockdowns affect people's mental health.

"We are all more traumatized than we realize, and that puts people on edge," said Raymond Tafrate, a psychologist and criminology professor at Central Connecticut State University who has studied anger. "The pandemic isolated people and caused all sorts of stress and problems in their lives. People are in worse shape than they were before."

Robert Bor, an aviation psychologist in London who advises airline crews, blames anxiety over COVID-19 and enclosed spaces.

"It is a virus, and people are highly sensitized to the physical proximity of others around them," Bor said. He added that some people take measures like mask-wearing more seriously than others, creating conflict. "How you negotiate that in such an environment is the issue."

There have been periods in the past where air rage seemed an intractable problem, but later subsided. Long-time flight attendants say there was an uptick in unruly passengers in the 1990s. That led Congress to make it a crime to interfere with a flight crew, and incidents gradually declined, these cabin crew members say.

Arjun Garg, who served as FAA chief counsel until earlier this year, said serious cases of misbehaving passengers were rarely discussed at the agency's top levels until the pandemic hit.

"It would happen every once in a while, but it wasn't a major feature of anybody's thinking at FAA," Garg said of the pre-pandemic incidents. "Airlines would often resolve them as a 'customer-service issue,' and everyone would go on their way."

Tafrate's advice to travelers: "Accept that flights don't always go the way you want, and accept there are going to be some rules that you don't like."

## **Putin hails WWII heroes, warns of degrading Europe security**

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday marked the 80th anniversary of the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union by hailing the country's World War II heroes and calling for efforts to strengthen European security.

The Nazis invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, and the country lost a staggering 27 million people in what it calls the Great Patriotic War. The enormous suffering and sacrifice have left a deep scar in the national psyche, and the Victory Day marking the end of World War II in Europe that is celebrated in Russia on May 9 is the nation's most important secular holiday.

"The day of June 22 still evokes anger and sorrow in the hearts of all generations, causing pain for the destroyed lives of millions of people," Putin said in a speech at the Unknown Soldier's Tomb at the Kremlin wall. "Those trials, those terrible years, are literally imprinted into our memory."

The invading Nazi forces quickly overran the western part of the Soviet Union and came as close as 30 kilometers (less than 19 miles) to Moscow. But the Red Army rebounded and routed the Nazis near the capital, dealt them a crushing defeat in the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943 and then drove them back across

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Europe all the way to Berlin.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called Putin on Tuesday to "express empathy with the unmeasurable woes and suffering brought by the war that was launched by the Nazi regime," the Kremlin said.

"Both parties underlined the importance of preserving the historic memory of those tragic events" and noted that "overcoming mutual enmity and reconciliation of the Russian and German peoples had key importance for the destinies of postwar Europe," the Kremlin said. "It was emphasized that preserving security on the continent now is also possible only through joint efforts."

The Kremlin has been anxious to see international recognition of the nation's wartime sacrifices and its role in defeating the Nazis.

In an article published Tuesday in the German weekly Die Zeit, Putin emphasized that "despite attempts to rewrite the pages of the past that are being made today, the truth is that Soviet soldiers came to Germany not to take revenge on the Germans, but with a noble and great mission of liberation."

He hailed postwar efforts to restore mutual trust but blamed NATO's eastward expansion to embrace former Soviet bloc countries in Central and Eastern Europe and ex-Soviet Baltic republics for the deteriorating security.

"We hoped that the end of the Cold War would be a common victory for Europe," Putin said in the article. "But a different approach has prevailed based on the expansion of NATO, a relic of the Cold War. Fourteen new countries, including the former Soviet Union republics, joined the organization, effectively dashing hopes for a continent without dividing lines."

Moscow saw NATO's expansion as a threat to its security, and Russia-West ties sank to post-Cold War lows after Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula that followed the ouster of the Moscow-friendly Ukrainian president.

"The whole system of European security has now degraded significantly," Putin wrote. "Tensions are rising and the risks of a new arms race are becoming real."

He insisted that prosperity and security in Europe could only be achieved through joint efforts and noted that "Russia is in favour of restoring a comprehensive partnership with Europe."

"We simply cannot afford to carry the burden of past misunderstandings, hard feelings, conflicts, and mistakes," Putin said. "Our common and indisputable goal is to ensure security on the continent without dividing lines, a common space for equitable cooperation and inclusive development for the prosperity of Europe and the world as a whole."

## Catalan separatists eye freedom after Spain's Cabinet pardon

By ARITZ PARRA and JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Nine Catalan separatist leaders jailed for sedition were eyeing freedom, after Spain's Cabinet pardoned them Tuesday in the hope of starting what Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez called a much-needed reconciliation in the country's restive northeast.

"The government has taken the decision because it is the best decision for Catalonia and the best decision for Spain," Sánchez said in a short, nationally televised appearance. "We hope to open a new era of dialogue and build new bridges."

Former Catalan vice president Oriol Junqueras, who in 2019 got the heaviest sentence of 13 years in prison for sedition and misuse of public funds, will go free along with his associates after spending three-and-a-half years behind bars.

The other eight included the former Cabinet members of the Catalan government, the former Speaker of the Catalan Parliament, and two leaders of separatist civil society groups who had all received sentences ranging from nine to 12 years.

The pardons lifted the remaining years of their prison terms, while keeping intact their status as being unfit to hold public office.

A top Spanish government official said the separatists would likely be released on Wednesday, after the government's pardons are signed by King Felipe VI and published in the government's official gazette.

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The official wasn't authorized to be named in media reports.

The government said the pardons could be revoked if their beneficiaries try to lead another breakaway bid or commit a serious crime.

"These pardons do not depend on their recipients renouncing their ideas, and nor do we expect them to do so," Sánchez said. "But these people were never put in prison for the ideas they hold, but rather for having violated the laws of our democracy."

The pardons do not cover former Catalonia president Carles Puigdemont and the other high-profile separatists who fled Spain following the unsuccessful breakaway attempt.

The Catalan regional chief, Pere Aragonès, said that by issuing the pardons the government was acknowledging that the separatists' prosecution was unjust but that its move left out many other Catalans prosecuted, including Puigdemont and others who fled abroad.

"It's the time for amnesty and for self-determination," Aragonès said in a televised speech surrounded by members of his regional Cabinet. "It's the time for us to agree on a referendum on independence."

Spain's government has refused to consider an independence referendum. Instead, it hopes to find a new formula on self-rule for the affluent region that already enjoys wide-ranging powers.

The pardons have been opposed by Spain's right wing — as well as by many on the left — becoming a risky political gamble for Sánchez, the Socialist leader.

But the prime minister has insisted that a hardline approach by previous conservative administrations have worsened the conflict.

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.

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

Matters came to a 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.

Now, Sánchez is banking that their release can restore the confidence of some disaffected Catalans driven into the separatist camp over the past decade. Roughly half of Catalonia's voters back pro-secession parties, while the other half votes for parties who want union.

"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.

## Background checks blocked a record high 300,000 gun sales

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The number of people stopped from buying guns through the U.S. background check system hit an all-time high of more than 300,000 last year amid a surge of firearm sales, according to new records obtained by the group Everytown for Gun Safety.

The FBI numbers provided to The Associated Press show the background checks blocked nearly twice as many gun sales in 2020 as in the year before. About 42% of those denials were because the would-be buyers had felony convictions on their records.

The increase in blocked gun sales largely tracks with the record-setting surge in sales that took hold along with the coronavirus pandemic and has continued into this year, through historic demonstrations against police brutality, deep political divisions and an insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

It comes as Congress has failed to pass major legislation on guns despite the Democratic majority and President Joe Biden's push. A bill that would strengthen background checks is stalled in the Senate. The

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House in March passed the legislation requiring the checks on all sales and transfers, as well as an expanded 10-day review for gun purchases. Most states require background checks only for sales at federally licensed dealers. But the legislation faces an uphill battle getting any Republican support in the Senate.

According to the data, the rate of barred would-be gun buyers also increased somewhat over the previous two years, from about 0.6% to 0.8%. That could be in part because many of the people who tried to get guns in 2020 were buying them for the first time and may not have been aware that they were legally barred from owning them, said Adam Winkler, a UCLA Law professor specializing in gun policy.

"Some may have a felony conviction on their record and not think about it," he said.

Making a false statement in connection with a background check is a felony punishable by up to 10 years in prison and a hefty fine, but few people are prosecuted for what would amount to lying on the form filled out before a gun purchase, he said.

In 2017, just 12 of the 112,000 people denied a gun purchase, about 0.01%, were federally prosecuted, largely due to limited resources for the time-intensive investigations, according to a U.S. Government Accountability Office report.

Everytown's research found that 16% of would-be gun buyers in 2020 were prohibited by state law, like the extreme-risk protection orders or red-flag laws passed in several states. Another 12% were related to domestic violence, either people subject to a protective order or convicted of a misdemeanor domestic violence crime.

The data shows how necessary the legislation is, said Sarah Burd-Sharps, Everytown's director of research.

"There's no question that background checks work, but the system is working overtime to prevent a record number of people with dangerous prohibitors from being able to buy firearms," she said in a statement. "The loopholes in the law allow people to avoid the system, even if they just meet online or at a gun show for the first time."

Gun rights groups have pushed back against the proposal, and Alan Gottlieb, founder of the group the Second Amendment Foundation, said the increase in denials might be partly because more states have been updating their records of restricted people. There are sometimes false positives as well, he said. "A day doesn't go by that our office doesn't get complaint calls from people who've been denied wrongly," he said.

The data also comes as a growing number of conservative-leaning states drop requirements for people to get background checks and training to carry guns in public.

Texas last week became the latest state of about 20 to drop permitting requirements amid a push that began gathering steam several years ago. Gun rights groups say those requirements are an unfair burden for law-abiding gun owners, but firearm safety groups worry it's a dangerous trend that will allow more firearms in the wrong hands.

Denial data is released by the FBI, but the information collected by Everytown breaks it down by year and includes data from states such as California and Florida, which conduct their own background checks.

## Dirty laundry in space? NASA, Tide tackle cleaning challenge

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — How do astronauts do laundry in space? They don't.

They wear their underwear, gym clothes and everything else until they can't take the filth and stink anymore, then junk them.

NASA wants to change that — if not at the International Space Station, then the moon and Mars — and stop throwing away tons of dirty clothes every year, stuffing them in the trash to burn up in the atmosphere aboard discarded cargo ships. So it's teamed up with Procter & Gamble Co. to figure out how best to clean astronauts' clothes in space so they can be reused for months or even years, just like on Earth.

The Cincinnati company announced Tuesday that it will send a pair of Tide detergent and stain removal experiments to the space station later this year and next, all part of the galactic battle against soiled and sweaty clothes.



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It's no small problem, especially as the U.S. and other countries look to establish bases on the moon and Mars.

Rocket cargo space is tight and expensive, according to NASA, so why waste it on new outfits if their clothes could be kept looking and smelling fresh? When you figure an astronaut needs 150 pounds (68 kilograms) of clothes in space per year, that quickly adds up, especially on a three-year Mars mission, said Mark Sivik, a chemist specializing in fabric and home care technology for P&G.

There's also the health — and ick — factors.

Space station astronauts exercise two hours every day to counter the muscle- and bone-withering effects of weightlessness, quickly leaving their workout clothes sweaty, smelly and stiff. Their T-shirts, shorts and socks end up so foul that they run through a pair every week, according to Leland Melvin, a former NASA astronaut and NFL player.

"After that, they're deemed toxic," said Melvin, who's serving as a spokesman for the project. "They like have a life of their own. They're so stiff from all that sweat."

While NASA and the other space station partners have looked into special antimicrobial clothes to prolong wear, it's not a long-term solution.

In its initial experiment, P&G will send up detergent custom-made for space in December so scientists can see how the enzymes and other ingredients react to six months of weightlessness. Then next May, stain-removal pens and wipes will be delivered for testing by astronauts.

At the same time, P&G is developing a washer-dryer combo that could operate on the moon or even Mars, using minimal amounts of water and detergent. Such a machine could also prove useful in arid regions here on Earth.

One of the many design challenges: The laundry water would need to be reclaimed for drinking and cooking, just like urine and sweat are currently recycled aboard the space station.

"The best solutions come from the most diverse teams," Melvin said, "and how more diverse can you be than Tide and NASA?"

## **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.

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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 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 con-

nections. 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."

## Activists: Vatican is 'meddling' in Italy's LGBT rights law

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — The Vatican has formally opposed a proposed Italian law expanding anti-discrimination protections to the LGBT community, a leading Italian newspaper reported Tuesday. Activists immediately denounced the move as "unprecedented" Vatican meddling in Italy's legislative process.

The Vatican foreign minister, Archbishop Paul Gallagher, sent a letter last week to the Italian ambassador to the Holy See saying the proposed law violates Italy's diplomatic agreement with the Vatican and seeking changes, the Milan-based daily Corriere della Sera reported.

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni confirmed that a diplomatic communication had been sent on June 17 but did not elaborate.

According to Corriere, the Vatican's objections include parts of the law that would require schools as well as Catholic schools to organize activities on a day designated nationally to fight homophobia and transphobia.

Italian politicians and advocacy groups reacted strongly to what they saw as an attempt to derail the Zan Law, named for the Democratic Party lawmaker and gay rights activist Alessandro Zan. In the past, the Vatican has objected to Italian laws legalizing abortion and divorce and backed unsuccessful referendums after the fact to try to repeal them.

The proposed law adds women and people who are gay, transgender or have disabilities to the classes of those protected under a law banning discrimination and punishing hate crimes. It was approved by the lower house last November, but remains stalled in a Senate commission by objections from Italy's right wing.

"We support the Zan law, and naturally we are open to dialogue," on any legal issues, Democratic Party leader Enrico Letta told RAI state radio Tuesday. But he said his party wants to see the law enacted, calling it "a law of civilization."

An atheist group in Italy protested the Vatican's actions, saying they "violated the independence and the sovereignty of the Republic."

"The government has the political and moral obligation to not only just resist pressure but to unilaterally denounce this unprecedented interference in state affairs," the secretary of the Union of Atheists and Agnostic Rationalists, Roberto Grendene, said in a statement.

A gay-rights group, Gay Party for LGBT+ Rights, called on Premier Mario Draghi's government to reject the Vatican's interference "and improve the law so that it truly has, at its heart, the fight against homophobia and transphobia."

"We find worrying the Vatican meddling in the law against homophobia," said the group's spokesman, Fabrizio Marrazzo.

Marrazzo said Gay Pride Parades in Milan and Rome on Saturday would send a clear message from the

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streets on the topic "and defend the laicity of the state."

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, June 23, the 174th day of 2021. There are 191 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On June 23, 1972, President Richard Nixon signed Title IX barring discrimination on the basis of sex for "any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." (On the same day, Nixon and White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman discussed using the CIA to obstruct the FBI's Watergate investigation. Revelation of the tape recording of this conversation sparked Nixon's resignation in 1974.)

On this date:

In 1888, abolitionist Frederick Douglass received one vote from the Kentucky delegation at the Republican convention in Chicago, effectively making him the first Black candidate to have his name placed in nomination for U.S. president. (The nomination went to Benjamin Harrison.)

In 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt was nominated for a second term of office at the Republican National Convention in Chicago.

In 1931, aviators Wiley Post and Harold Gatty took off from New York on a round-the-world flight that lasted eight days and 15 hours.

In 1947, the Senate joined the House in overriding President Harry S. Truman's veto of the Taft-Hartley Act, designed to limit the power of organized labor.

In 1956, Gamal Abdel Nasser was elected president of Egypt.

In 1969, Warren E. Burger was sworn in as chief justice of the United States by the man he was succeeding, Earl Warren.

In 1985, all 329 people aboard an Air India Boeing 747 were killed when the plane crashed into the Atlantic Ocean near Ireland because of a bomb authorities believe was planted by Sikh separatists.

In 1988, James E. Hansen, a climatologist at the Goddard Institute for Space Studies, told a Senate panel that global warming of the earth caused by the "greenhouse effect" was a reality.

In 1993, in a case that drew widespread attention, Lorena Bobbitt of Prince William County, Va., sexually mutilated her husband, John, after he'd allegedly raped her. (John Bobbitt was later acquitted of marital sexual assault; Lorena Bobbitt was later acquitted of malicious wounding by reason of insanity.)

In 1995, Dr. Jonas Salk, the medical pioneer who developed the first vaccine to halt the crippling rampage of polio, died in La Jolla (HOY'-ah), California, at age 80.

In 1997, civil rights activist Betty Shabazz, the widow of Malcolm X, died in New York of burns suffered in a fire set by her 12-year-old grandson; she was 61. (Malcolm Shabazz pleaded guilty to arson and other charges and was placed in juvenile detention.)

In 2009, "Tonight Show" sidekick Ed McMahon died in Los Angeles at 86.

Ten years ago: Republicans pulled out of debt-reduction talks led by Vice President Joe Biden, blaming Democrats for demanding tax increases as part of a deal rather than accepting more than \$1 trillion in cuts to Medicare and other government programs. "Columbo" actor Peter Falk died in Beverly Hills, California, at age 83.

Five years ago: Floods tore through parts of West Virginia, killing 23 people and destroying or damaging thousands of homes, businesses, schools and infrastructure. Britain voted to leave the European Union after a bitterly divisive referendum campaign, toppling Prime Minister David Cameron, who had led the campaign to keep Britain in the EU. A short-handed and deeply divided Supreme Court deadlocked 4-4 on President Barack Obama's immigration plan to help millions living in the U.S. illegally, effectively killing it. In a narrow victory for affirmative action, the Supreme Court upheld, 4-3, a University of Texas program that took account of race in deciding whom to admit. Appalachian music patriarch Ralph Stanley, 89, who helped define the bluegrass sound, died in Sandy Ridge, Virginia.

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One year ago: A private funeral for Rayshard Brooks, a Black man who was shot by a white police officer outside an Atlanta restaurant, was held at Ebenezer Baptist Church, where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. once preached. The Louisville police department fired an officer involved in the fatal shooting of Breonna Taylor more than three months earlier, saying Brett Hankison had shown "extreme indifference to the value of human life" when he fired ten rounds into Taylor's apartment. (A second officer was also fired; Hankison is facing charges of endangerment.) Tennis player Novak Djokovic said he and his wife tested positive for the coronavirus after he played in exhibition matches he organized in Serbia and Croatia without social distancing; he was the fourth player to come down with COVID-19 after taking part. Major League Baseball issued a 60-game schedule for a season to start in late July in empty ballparks. Saudi Arabia said that because of the coronavirus, only "very limited numbers" of people could perform the annual hajj pilgrimage. Segway said it would end production of its two-wheeled personal transporter.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Diana Trask is 81. Actor Ted Shackelford is 75. Actor Bryan Brown is 74. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas is 73. Actor Jim Metzler is 70. "American Idol" ex-judge Randy Jackson is 65. Actor Frances McDormand is 64. Rock musician Steve Shelley (Sonic Youth) is 59. Writer-director Joss Whedon is 57. R&B singer Chico DeBarge is 51. Actor Selma Blair is 49. Actor Joel Edgerton is 47. Rock singer KT Tunstall is 46. Actor Emmanuelle Vaugier is 45. Singer-songwriter Jason Mraz is 44. Football Hall of Famer LaDainian Tomlinson is 42. Actor Melissa Rauch is 41. Rock singer Duffy is 37. Country singer Katie Armiger is 30.