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OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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Brown County 4-H horse show

First	Last	Class	Ribbon	Awards
Joeseeph	Dutenhoffer	1000: Beginner Western Showmanship	Red	
Maria	Kiesz	1000: Beginner Western Showmanship	Purple	GRAND CHAMPION
Parker	Zoellner	1000: Beginner Western Showmanship	Purple	RESERVE CHAMPION
Lydia	Blachford	1002: Junior Western Showmanship	Blue	
Rayven	Dutenhoffer	1002: Junior Western Showmanship	Blue	
Kylie	Johannsen	1002: Junior Western Showmanship	Blue	
Emily	Malsam	1002: Junior Western Showmanship	Purple	RESERVE CHAMPION
Blake	Pauli	1002: Junior Western Showmanship	Purple	
Hailey	Pauli	1002: Junior Western Showmanship	Purple	
Riley	Zoellner	1002: Junior Western Showmanship	Purple	
Walker	Zoellner	1002: Junior Western Showmanship	Purple	GRAND CHAMPION
Lydia	Blachford	1003: Jr. Pony/Miniature Horse Western	Purple	GRAND CHAMPION
Jazmine	Hart-Crissman	1004: Senior Western Showmanship	Purple	RESERVE CHAMPION
Hanna	Miller	1004: Senior Western Showmanship	Blue	
Colin	Sprinkel	1004: Senior Western Showmanship	Purple	GRAND CHAMPION
Joeseeph	Dutenhoffer	2000: Beginner Stock Seat Equitation	Red	
Maria	Kiesz	2000: Beginner Stock Seat Equitation	Blue	RESERVE CHAMPION
Parker	Zoellner	2000: Beginner Stock Seat Equitation	Purple	GRAND CHAMPION
Lydia	Blachford	2001: Junior Stock Seat Equitation	Blue	
Rayven	Dutenhoffer	2001: Junior Stock Seat Equitation	Red	
Emily	Malsam	2001: Junior Stock Seat Equitation	Blue	
Blake	Pauli	2001: Junior Stock Seat Equitation	Blue	
Hailey	Pauli	2001: Junior Stock Seat Equitation	Blue	GRAND CHAMPION
Walker	Zoellner	2001: Junior Stock Seat Equitation	Blue	RESERVE CHAMPION
Jazmine	Hart-Crissman	2002: Senior Stock Seat Equitation	Blue	RESERVE CHAMPION
Colin	Sprinkel	2002: Senior Stock Seat Equitation	Purple	GRAND CHAMPION
Kylie	Johannsen	2004: Junior Hunt Seat Equitation	Blue	
Colin	Sprinkel	3001: Senior Reining	Purple	GRAND CHAMPION
Lydia	Blachford	3002: Junior Ranch Riding	Purple	GRAND CHAMPION
Emily	Malsam	3002: Junior Ranch Riding	Blue	
Walker	Zoellner	3002: Junior Ranch Riding	Purple	RESERVE CHAMPION
Colin	Sprinkel	3003: Senior Ranch Riding	Purple	GRAND CHAMPION
Lydia	Blachford	3004: Junior Trail	Red	
Kylie	Johannsen	3004: Junior Trail	Red	
Emily	Malsam	3004: Junior Trail	Purple	GRAND CHAMPION
Riley	Zoellner	3004: Junior Trail	Red	
Walker	Zoellner	3004: Junior Trail	Purple	RESERVE CHAMPION
Jazmine	Hart-Crissman	3005: Senior Trail	Red	RESERVE CHAMPION
Colin	Sprinkel	3005: Senior Trail	Purple	GRAND CHAMPION
Lydia	Blachford	3006: Jr. Pleasure Single-Horse Driving	Purple	GRAND CHAMPION
Maria	Kiesz	3010: Beginner Trail	Blue	RESERVE CHAMPION
Parker	Zoellner	3010: Beginner Trail	Purple	GRAND CHAMPION
Lydia	Blachford	4000: Junior Barrel Racing	Red	
Abigail	Holmberg	4000: Junior Barrel Racing	White	
Joeseeph	Dutenhoffer	4000: Junior Barrel Racing	Red	
Rayven	Dutenhoffer	4000: Junior Barrel Racing	Red	
Kylie	Johannsen	4000: Junior Barrel Racing	Red	

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Emily	Malsam	4000: Junior Barrel Racing	White
Blake	Pauli	4000: Junior Barrel Racing	Blue
Hailey	Pauli	4000: Junior Barrel Racing	Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Parker	Zoellner	4000: Junior Barrel Racing	White
Riley	Zoellner	4000: Junior Barrel Racing	Blue RESERVE CHAMPION
Walker	Zoellner	4001: Junior Pony Barrel Racing	Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Jazmine	Hart-Crissman	4002: Senior Barrel Racing	Blue RESERVE CHAMPION
Hanna	Miller	4002: Senior Barrel Racing	Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Colin	Sprinkel	4002: Senior Barrel Racing	Red
Lydia	Blachford	4003: Junior Pole Bending	Red
Abigail	Holmberg	4003: Junior Pole Bending	Red
Joeseeph	Dutenhoffer	4003: Junior Pole Bending	Red
Rayven	Dutenhoffer	4003: Junior Pole Bending	Red
Kylie	Johannsen	4003: Junior Pole Bending	Red
Emily	Malsam	4003: Junior Pole Bending	Red
Blake	Pauli	4003: Junior Pole Bending	Blue RESERVE CHAMPION
Hailey	Pauli	4003: Junior Pole Bending	Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Parker	Zoellner	4003: Junior Pole Bending	Red
Riley	Zoellner	4003: Junior Pole Bending	White
Walker	Zoellner	4004: Junior Pony Pole Bending	Blue GRAND CHAMPION
Hanna	Miller	4005: Senior Pole Bending	Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Colin	Sprinkel	4005: Senior Pole Bending	Red RESERVE CHAMPION
Joeseeph	Dutenhoffer	4006.1: Beginner Flag Racing	Blue GRAND CHAMPION
Parker	Zoellner	4006.1: Beginner Flag Racing	White
Abigail	Holmberg	4007: Junior Break-Away Roping	White
Hanna	Miller	4008: Senior Break-Away Roping	White
Dylan	Krueger	Horse Public Speaking	Purple

Trail Blazer Ben Ash

SOUTH DAKOTA



HISTORY & HERITAGE

Travelers stopping at a rest area west of Faith off of U.S. Highway 212 will find the monument honoring trail blazer Ben Ash.

Ash was a leading figure in Dakota Territory and South Dakota. He was born on Dec. 19, 1851, in Indiana and had moved as a child to the newly formed town of Yankton in 1859. In 1875, he owned a livery stable and was a deputy U.S. marshal in Bismarck, Dakota Territory. He was described in the Bismarck Weekly Tribune as "one of the truest men that ever held official position."

Gold was discovered in the Black Hills during an 1874 expedition led by Gen. George Custer. The Bismarck Weekly Tribune reported in December 1875 that 1,000 men were in the Black Hills. Some Bismarck residents realized that advertising their town as the best jumping off point to the Black Hills from the north would benefit the community.

Ash and J.C. Dodge left Bismarck on Dec. 20, 1875, to forge a trail to the Black Hills. Dodge, also referred to as S.C. Dodge and Henry Dodge, was a county commissioner-elect, businessman and dairy owner.

Several accounts exist of the trail blazers' journey to the Black Hills. The following account is based on what was printed in the Bismarck Weekly Tribune.

Ash and Dodge were joined by five men from Bismarck the first night on their journey.

According to a letter Ash wrote to his parents, the party followed Custer's old trail for the greater part of the way and reached the Black Hills on New Year's Day.

"The Black Hills are full of gold and every man whom we met had something to tell of his own experience which confirms the truth of this assertion. I tried prospecting on a claim of my own which I located on Rapid Creek and took out enough gold to make mother a ring and have sent the dust to Chicago for that purpose," Ash wrote.

He also described the beauty of the countryside and encouraged his parents to move to the Black



The photograph is taken at the dedication ceremony unveiling the Ben Ash Monument on July 23, 1949. The monument is located along U.S. Highway 212 about 32 miles west of Faith. The monument marks the spot where Ash and his companions first saw the Black Hills for the first time on Dec. 26, 1875, when they forged a trail from Bismarck to the Black Hills.

According to the Faith Independent, Fred Jennewein of Bison was "an old acquaintance of Ash's and a great influence in obtaining funds for the erection of the memorial" and the South Dakota State Historical Society sponsored the memorial. J. Leonard Jennewein was the main speaker at the dedication ceremony.

The South Dakota State Historical Society – State Archives lists people as Nelson Mason, Maj. Frank Anders, Will Robinson, Paul D. Ash, Leonard Jennewein, Fred Jennewein and Don Patton.

No information is provided from the State Archives about what order the people are standing in or about their connection to Ash. This I do know: Robinson was director of the State Historical Society. Paul Ash was Ben's son and lived in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. J. Leonard Jennewein lived in Huron and was the son of Fred Jennewein. Fred was curator of the Bison museum. Patton wrote a biography of Ash.

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Hills, which they did.

Both Ash and Dodge spoke glowingly of the Black Hills and said they intended to move there. Dodge did leave for the Black Hills with livestock intending to ranch there, but was the victim of an Indian attack.

Blazing a trail to Bismarck was just one of the things for which Ash was noted.

Ash resigned as deputy U.S. marshal in 1880. By then, Ash had married Sarah Brisbane, the daughter of a judge in Yankton, and they would have three sons. The Tribune reported that Ash and his family were going to locate in Pierre.

At various times in Pierre, Ash owned a livery business, a butcher shop and retail grocery store. He served as sheriff in Hughes County and Indian Agent at the Lower Brule Agency.

In the 1890s, Ash purchased a horse ranch on the Moreau River. He sold the horses and raised cattle, owning as many as 10,000 head, according to his biography in the South Dakota Hall of Fame. He later raised sheep.

Ash sold his livestock at the beginning of World War I and moved to Sioux Falls, according to biographer Don Patton.

Ash was active in the Democratic party. "A natural leader, Mr. Ash was influential in political affairs in South Dakota, it being said of him that he wielded more power in the state legislature when not a member than did most of the duly elected members," stated the Bison Courier.

Ash was inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame and the National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

Ash became a resident of what is now the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home in 1932. He died in Hot Springs on April 15, 1946.

The Ben Ash Monument was dedicated in July 1949. The site, about 32 miles west of Faith off of U.S. Highway 212, marks the spot where Ash and his companions first saw the Black Hills on Dec. 26, 1875, as they blazed a trail from Bismarck to the Black Hills.

The granite monument shows a map of the Bismarck – Deadwood Trail. It is engraved with the words "The Trail Blazers" and the names of Ash and those who accompanied him. Dedication ceremony speaker J. Leonard Jennewein said that Ash told him in the summer of 1945 that when his eyes got better, he would erect a small marker on the Bismarck – Deadwood Trail in memory of Dodge and the other members of his party, placing it at the point from which they first saw the Black Hills.

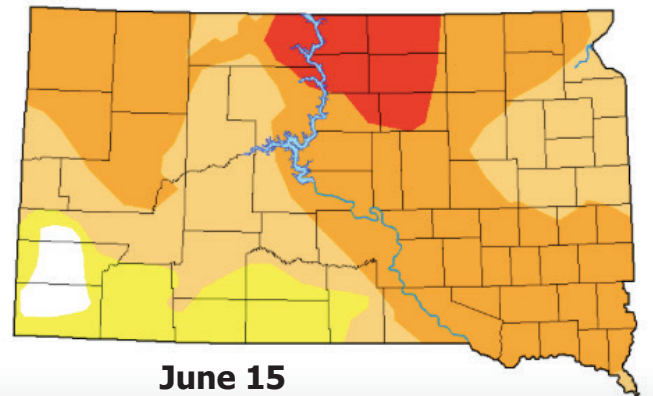
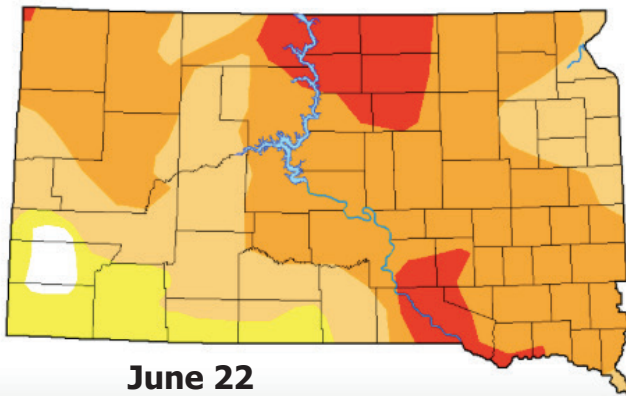
"It was characteristic of Ben Ash that he thought of this marker as a memorial to his partner, not to himself," Jennewein said. "It was also typical of the man that he was confident he could do it; after all, he was only 94. But when the grass greened up next spring, his eyes were no better; Ben Ash slipped away from us, and the monument wasn't erected."

This moment in South Dakota history is provided by the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation, the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. Find us on the web at www.sdhsf.org. Contact us at info@sdhsf.org to submit a story idea.

Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



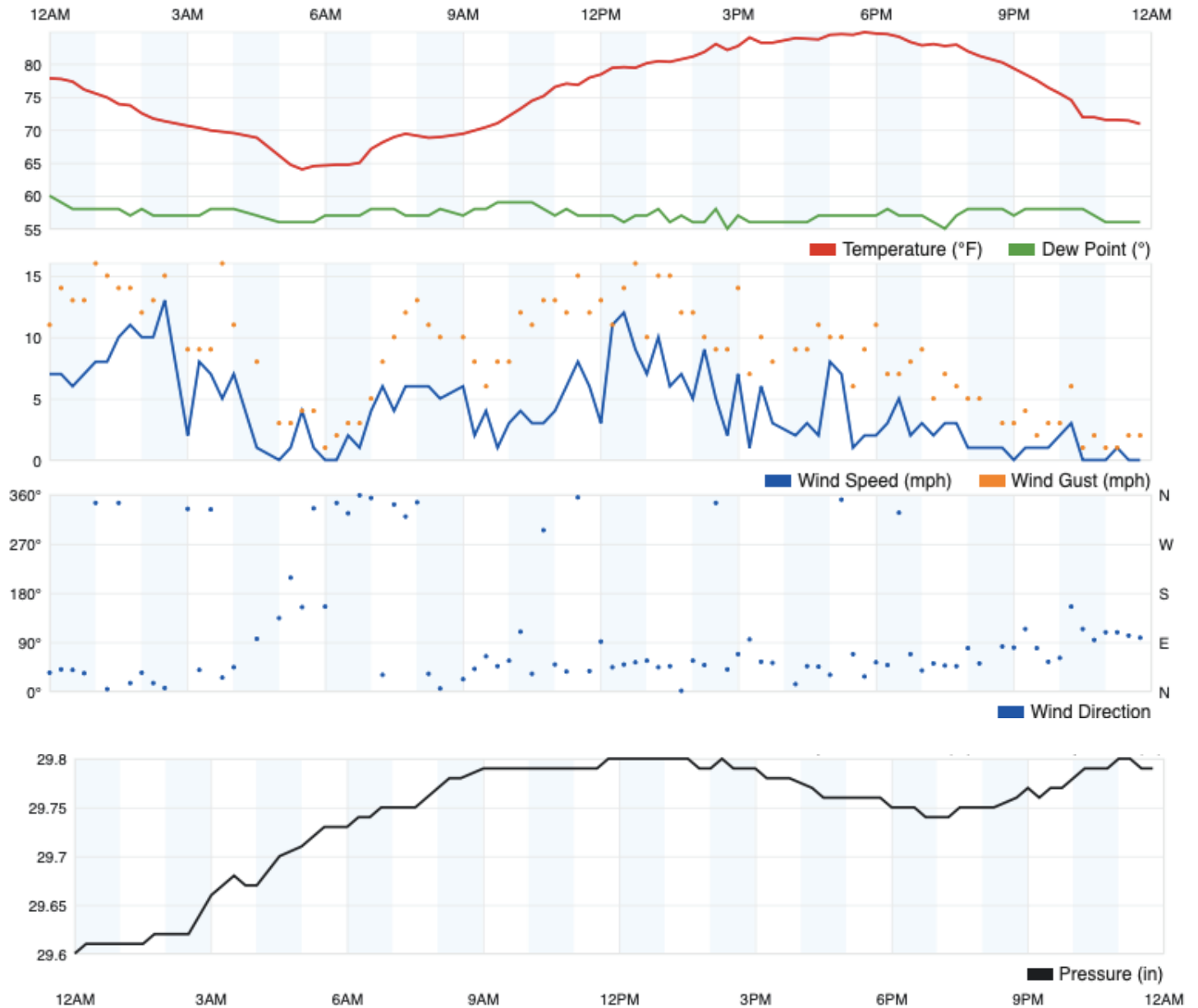
High Plains

Rainfall was paltry in areas of ongoing drought and abnormal dryness in the High Plains region. The dry weather combined with warmer than normal temperatures in much of Nebraska, Kansas, and western South Dakota to lead to widespread worsening of drought and abnormal dryness in these areas. Extreme drought developed along the Missouri River in northern Nebraska and southern South Dakota, and severe and moderate drought expanded around this. Widespread extreme and exceptional drought still covered North Dakota, where adverse effects to crops and pastures from drought is widespread. In eastern Wyoming, short-term dryness and hot weather led to expansions of moderate, severe, and extreme drought as well.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Partly Sunny then Slight Chance Showers	Chance Showers	Chance Showers then Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms
High: 85 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 80 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 81 °F

The Weekend Outlook

Today:

Partly sunny with a chance of showers/storms
mainly central/western South Dakota
Highs 71-88°

Saturday:

Partly sunny, chance showers/storms.
Highs 72-83°

Sunday:

Mostly cloudy with a chance showers/storms.
Highs 74-83°



Updated 3:15 AM CDT Friday – NWS Aberdeen SD



There are chances for showers and thunderstorms through the upcoming weekend, but coverage will be scattered at best, and rainfall amounts are likely to be light. Most of the activity will occur with the heating of the day. Meanwhile, temperatures will reside within a few degrees of normal. #sdwx #mnwx

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Today in Weather History

June 25, 1914: An estimated F2 tornado moved east from 6 miles southeast of Isabel in Dewey County. Three small homes and two barns were destroyed. Twelve tons of hay was said to have vanished.

June 25, 1969: On the northeast side of Groton, an F2 to near F3 tornado destroyed a large grain elevator and uprooted huge trees. Four people were hospitalized. Estimated property damage was a quarter million dollars. Also, locally heavy rains caused flash flooding in Sully and Hughes Counties. A bridge near Harrold was washed out. Some rainfall amounts include; 5.34 inches at 23N of Highmore; 4.24 at 2N of Onaka; 4.14 at 12SSW of Harrold; 3.90 at 1NW of Faulkton; and 3.73 inches at Ipswich. Unofficial reports of 6 inches fell in and around Harrold.

1957: Hurricane Audrey moved northward, slowly strengthening until the 26th. At that time, a strong upper-level trough led to its acceleration and the hurricane deepened rapidly on its final approach to the Texas/Louisiana border. Audrey became the strongest hurricane on record for June upon landfall, as it reached category four strength. Its acceleration was unanticipated, and despite hurricane warnings in place, 418 people perished in the storm, mainly across southwest Louisiana.

1967: Three, F3 tornadoes crossed the Netherlands on this day. The first tornado touched down at 4:17 PM in Oostmalle. This storm destroyed the church and the center of the village. More than half of the 900 homes in the community were damaged with 135 completely gone. The second tornado touched down near Ulicoten and tracked northward through woodlands area. This storm killed two people at a camping site near Chaam, Netherlands. The third tornado destroyed 50 houses in Tricht, killing five and injuring 32 others.

1749 - A general fast was called on account of drought in Massachusetts. It was the year of the famous dry spring in which fields and villages burned. (David Ludlum)

1925 - The mercury hit 101 degrees at Portland, OR, their earliest 100 degree reading of record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders)

1953 - The temperature at Anchorage soared to 86 degrees, their hottest reading of record. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Afternoon highs of 97 degrees at Miami, FL, 107 degrees at Medford, OR, and 111 degrees at Redding CA were new records for the date. It was the third of six straight days of record heat for Miami. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 70 mph at Austin, and gusts to 75 mph at Tulsa OK. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Fifty-two cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Highs of 100 degrees at Erie, PA, and 104 degrees at Cleveland OH established all-time records for those two locations. Highs of 101 degrees at Flint, MI, 105 degrees at Chicago, IL, and 106 degrees at Fort Wayne, IN, equalled all-time records. Thunderstorms in Idaho produced wind gusts to 100 mph west of Bliss and north of Crouch, injuring 29 persons. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Tropical depression Allison, the remnants of what was earlier Cosme (a hurricane over the Pacific Ocean which dissipated as it crossed northern Mexico), began to spread heavy rain into southeast Texas and southwest Louisiana. (The National Weather Summary)

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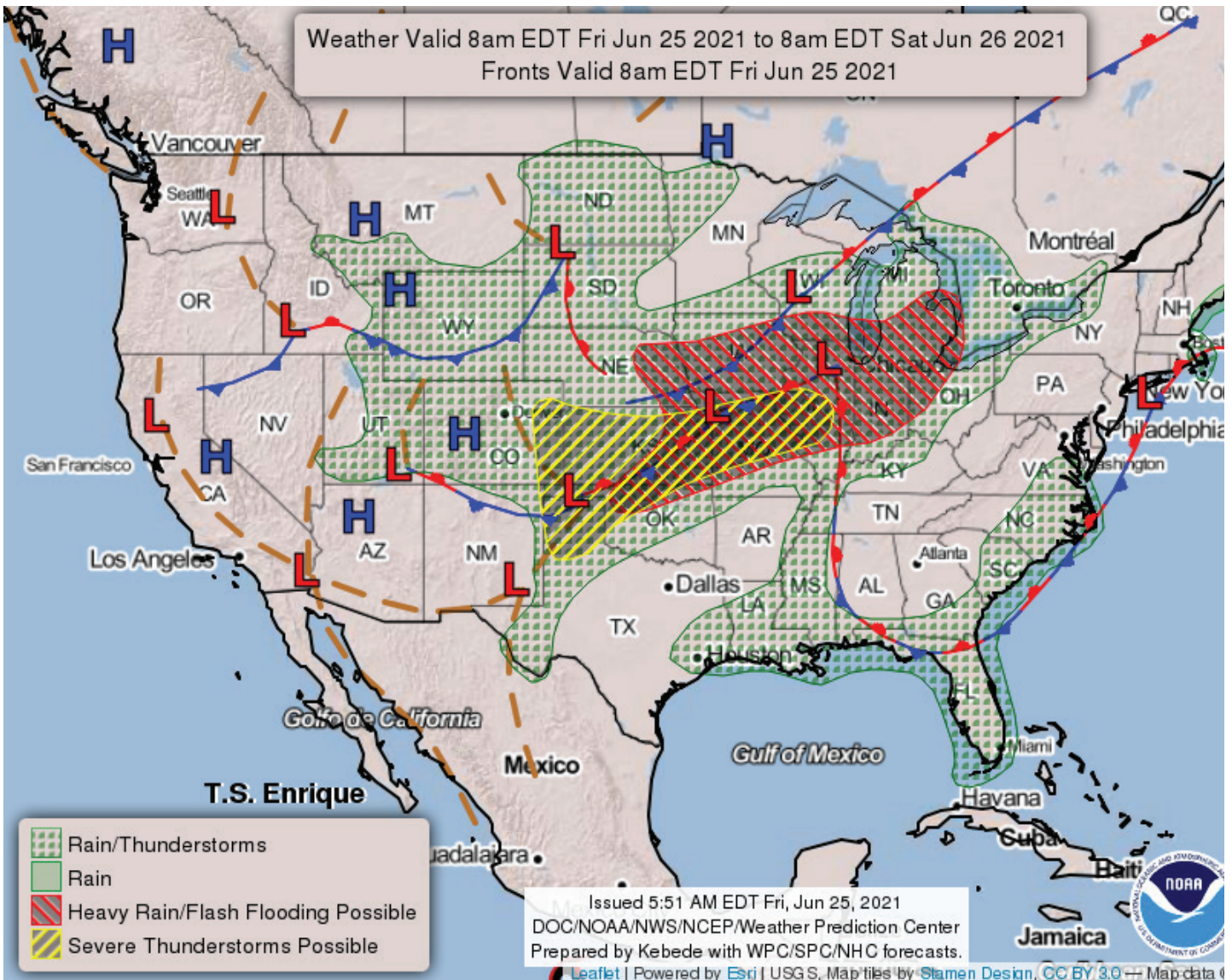
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 85 °F at 5:41 PM
Low Temp: 64 °F at 5:22 AM
Wind: 17 mph at 12:50 AM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 106° in 1936
Record Low: 41° in 1907, 2017
Average High: 83°F
Average Low: 58°F
Average Precip in June.: 2.96
Precip to date in June.: 0.60
Average Precip to date: 10.21
Precip Year to Date: 4.54
Sunset Tonight: 9:26 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:47 a.m.



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DAILY DELIVERANCE

A preacher was complaining to a close friend, "Oh my, I have so many burdens to bear on behalf of others that I am ready to give up!"

"I am so very sorry," replied his friend. "But wait until you hear what I discovered this morning. David left me a note in the Psalms that said, 'Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens.' Why don't you share them with the Lord rather than trying to carry the load by yourself?"

Often we feel crushed with the cares of life. There are times when we dwell on our defeats. We sometimes assume that our grief is so great that it will be with us for a lifetime. We expect to be overwhelmed with life's obstacles and even want to hang on to past failures and seem to take pride when life is unfair.

Could it be that we take pleasure in thinking we have more problems than anyone else in the world? Do we want to be known for having the longest list of unanswered prayers or for being forgotten and forsaken by God? Is it possible that we might even take great pleasure for what we do not have so we can be constant complainers?

Or do we need to change our view of God?

Remember the words of the Psalmist. "Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior," said David, "who daily bears our burdens!" Peter put it this way: "Cast all your cares upon Him because He cares for You." And Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." We can "cast or carry" – be "burdened or blest."

Prayer: It's really up to us, Lord. Either we take You at Your Word or reject Your offer to bear our burdens. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. Psalm 68:19

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2021 Community Events

- Cancelled** Legion Post #39 Spring Fundraiser (Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, every other year)
03/27/2021 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
04/10/2021 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
04/24/2021 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/25/2021 Princess Prom (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/01/2021 Lions Club Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
05/31/2021 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
6/7-9/2021 St. John's Lutheran Church VBS
06/17/2021 Groton Transit Fundraiser, 4-7 p.m.
06/18/2021 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
06/19/2021 U8 Baseball Tournament
06/19/2021 **Postponed to Aug. 28th:** Lions Crazy Golf Fest at Olive Grove Golf Course, Noon
06/26/2021 U10 Baseball Tournament
06/27/2021 U12 Baseball Tournament
07/04/2021 Firecracker Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
07/11/2021 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 10am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
07/22/2021 Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
07/30/2021-08/03/2021 State "B" American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
08/06/2021 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course
08/28/2021 Lions Club Crazy Golf Fest 9am Olive Grove Golf Course
09/11/2021 Lions Club Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
09/12/2021 Sunflower Classic Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
09/18-19 Groton Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
10/08/2021 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
10/09/2021 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm (Saturday before Columbus Day)
10/29/2021 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
10/31/2021 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
11/13/2021 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/25/2021 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/11/2021 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon

News from the Associated Press

Unstable Abandoned Mines Pose Greater Safety Risk, Potentially Extend Under Interstate Near Rapid City

RAPID CITY, S.D., June 24, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- Unstable subsurface mines that have forced evacuations in the Hideaway Hills neighborhood extend farther than previously disclosed and pose a broader risk to the region, including potentially a stretch of Interstate 90, according to recent independent geophysical studies.

Data from soil-resistivity studies indicate that unstable mines that caused an April 2020 sinkhole in Hideaway Hills extend to the north, east and south of the Blackhawk-area neighborhood. Western Engineers & Geologists and other consultants commissioned by the Fox Rothschild law firm have previously concluded that flooded voids exist under a portion of Interstate 90. Now a separate analysis by Montana Technological University using Electrical Resistivity Tomography has provided more data about those voids.

"The state has been aware of these findings but continues to deny the extent of the problem," trial lawyer Kathleen Barrow, of the Fox Rothschild law firm, said. "Too many families are already suffering because of the state's long history of disregard for these abandoned mines. These latest findings confirm that urgency is needed in the state's response."

Separate soil-resistivity studies reached similar conclusions about the extent of gypsum mining undertaken by the state of South Dakota starting in the 1910s. The Fox Rothschild law firm represents Hideaway Hills homeowners who were forced to evacuate because of the sinkhole and increasingly unsteady ground shifting. The lawsuit charges that the state failed to properly remediate the mines before the surface rights were sold to developers who built the Hideaway Hills neighborhood.

The Fox Rothschild complaints are the only lawsuits to survive legal challenges, and the legal team is now working to consolidate them in class-action litigation. The case is Andrew Morse and John and Emily Clarke et al. v. State of South Dakota et al., No. 46CIV-20-000295 in the Circuit Court, 4th Judicial District, County of Meade, South Dakota.

Boom in Native American oil complicates Biden climate push

By MATTHEW BROWN and FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

NEW TOWN, N.D. (AP) — On oil well pads carved from the wheat fields around Lake Sakakawea, hundreds of pump jacks slowly bob to extract 100 million barrels of crude annually from a reservation shared by three Native American tribes.

About half their 16,000 members live on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation atop one of the biggest U.S. oil discoveries in decades, North Dakota's Bakken shale formation.

The drilling rush has brought the tribes unimagined wealth -- more than \$1.5 billion and counting -- and they hope it will last another 20 to 25 years. The boom also propelled an almost tenfold spike in oil production from Native American lands since 2009, federal data shows, complicating efforts by President Joe Biden to curb carbon emissions.

Burning of oil from tribal lands overseen by the U.S. government now produces greenhouse gases equivalent to about 12 million vehicles a year, according to an Associated Press analysis. But Biden exempted Native American lands from a suspension of new oil and gas leases on government-managed land in deference to tribes' sovereign status.

A judge in Louisiana temporarily blocked the suspension June 15, but the administration continues to develop plans that could extend the ban or make leases more costly.

With tribal lands now producing more than 3% of U.S. oil and huge reserves untapped, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland — the first Native American to lead a U.S. cabinet-level agency — faces competing pressures to help a small number of tribes develop their fossil fuels while also addressing climate change

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that affects all Native communities.

"We're one of the few tribes that have elected to develop our energy resources. That's our right," tribal Chairman Mark Fox told AP at the opening of a Fort Berthold museum and cultural center built with oil revenue. "We can develop those resources and do it responsibly so our children and grandchildren for the next 100 years have somewhere to live."

Smallpox nearly wiped out the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara tribes in the mid-1800s. They lost most of their territory to broken treaties — and a century later, their best remaining lands along the Missouri River were flooded when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers created Lake Sakakawea. With dozens of villages uprooted, many people moved to a replacement community above the lake — New Town.

Today, leaders of the three tribes view oil as their salvation and want to keep drilling before it's depleted and the world moves past fossil fuels.

And they want the Biden administration to speed up drilling permits and fend off efforts to shut down a pipeline carrying most reservation oil to refineries.

PIPELINE FIGHT

Yet tribes left out of the drilling boom have become outspoken against fossil fuels as climate change worsens. One is the Standing Rock Sioux about 100 miles (160 kilometers) to the south.

Home to the Dakota and Lakota nations, Standing Rock gained prominence during a months-long stand-off between law enforcement and protesters, including tribal officials, who tried to shut down the Dakota Access Pipeline that carries Fort Berthold crude.

A judge revoked the pipeline's government permit because of inadequate environmental analysis and allowed crude to flow during a new review. But Standing Rock wants the administration to halt the oil for good, fearing a pipeline break could contaminate its drinking water.

Meantime, attention surrounding the skirmish provided the Sioux with foundation backing to develop a wind farm in Porcupine Hills, an area of scrub oak and buffalo grass with cattle ranches.

The pipeline fight stirs bitter memories in Fawn Wasin Zi, a teacher who chairs the Standing Rock renewable power authority. She grew up hearing her father and grandmother tell about a government dam that created Lake Oahe — how they had to leave their home then watch government agents burn it, only to be denied housing, electricity and other promised compensation.

Wasin Zi, whose ancestors followed legendary Lakota leader Sitting Bull, wants to ensure the tribe doesn't fall victim yet again to a changing world, where fossil fuels warm the planet and bring drought and wildfire.

"We have to find a way to use the technology that's available right now, whether it's geothermal or solar or wind," she said.

Only a dozen of the 326 tribal reservations produce significant oil, according to a drilling analysis provided to AP by S&P Global Platts.

Biden's nominee to oversee them as assistant secretary for Indian affairs, Bryan Newland, recently told a U.S. Senate committee the administration recognizes the importance of oil and gas to some reservations and pledged to let tribes determine resource development.

Interior officials denied interview requests about tribal energy plans, but said tribes were consulted in April after Biden ordered the department to "engage with tribal authorities" on developing renewables and fossil fuels.

Joseph McNeill Jr, manager of Standing Rock's energy authority, said a conference call with Interior yielded no pledges to further the tribe's wind project. Fort Berthold officials said they've had no offers of discussions with the administration.

ONE TRIBE'S BUILDING BOOM

Fort Berthold still reels from ills oil brought — worse crime and drugs, tanker truck traffic, road fatalities, spills of oil and wastewater. Tribal members lament that stars are lost in the glare of flaring waste gas from wells.

Yet oil brought positive changes, too. As the tribes' coffers fattened, dozens of projects got underway. The reservation now boasts new schools, senior centers, parks, civic centers, health and drug rehab facilities. Oil money is building a \$26 million greenhouse complex heated by electricity from gas otherwise wasted.

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The \$30 million cultural center in New Town pieces together the tribes' fractured past through displays and artifacts. A sound studio captures stories from elders who lived through dam construction and flooding along the Missouri. And one exhibit traces the oil boom after fracking allowed companies to tap reserves once too difficult to drill.

"Our little town, New Town, changed overnight," said MHA Nation Interpretive Center Director Delphine Baker. "We never had traffic lights growing up. It's like I moved to a different town."

HOPING FOR "MORNING LIGHT"

Lower on the Missouri, Standing Rock grapples with high energy costs. There's no oil worth extracting, no gas or coal. The biggest employer beside tribal government is a casino, where revenue plummeted during the pandemic.

"There's nothing here. No jobs. Nothing," said Donald Whitelighting, Jr., who lives in Cannon Ball, near the Dakota Access Pipeline protest.

Whitelighting, who cares for his mother in a modest home, said he pays up to \$500 a month for electricity in winter. Utility costs, among North Dakota's highest, severely strain a reservation officials say has 40% poverty and 75% unemployment.

The tribe hopes its wind project, Anpetu Wi, meaning "morning light," will help. Officials predict its 235 megawatts — enough for roughly 94,000 homes — would double their annual revenue and fund benefits like those Fort Berthold derives from oil — housing, health care, more jobs.

Standing Rock's power authority can directly negotiate aspects of the project. Yet it needs Interior approval because the U.S. holds tribal lands in trust.

"AN OIL FIELD TO PROTECT"

Outside North Dakota, tribes with oil — the Osage in Oklahoma, the Navajo in the Southwest and Native corporations in Alaska — also are pushing the Biden administration to cede power over energy development, including letting tribes conduct environmental reviews.

A Navajo company's operations in the Aneth field in southern Utah bring about \$28 million to \$35 million annually. Active since the 1950s, the field likely has another 30 years of life, said James McClure, chief executive of the Navajo Nation Oil and Gas Co..

The company has considered expanding into federal land in New Mexico and Colorado. Biden's attempts to suspend new leases could slow those plans, and it's considering helium production as an option.

In northern Oklahoma, the Osage have been drilling oil for more than a century.

Cognizant of global warming and shifting energy markets, they are pondering renewables, too. For now, they want the Biden administration to speed up drilling permits.

"We are looking at what is going to be best for us," said Everett Waller, chairman of the tribe's energy regulator. "I wasn't given a wind turbine. I was given an oil field to protect."

Shipping delays, 2020 sales impacting fireworks availability

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Shipping delays from China and record-breaking sales from last year are having an impact on fireworks supplies this Fourth of July, according to industry experts.

The owner of Extreme Fireworks in Rapid City, Douglas Bellinger, said a shortage is limiting the amount of products he can sell this year.

"It's quite a shortage on the 24-shot artillery shells and a lot of our littler stuff that we sell," Bellinger tells the Rapid City Journal.

According to Bellinger, fireworks supplies from China normally take 30 days for shipping, but this year it's taking 60 days.

"There's also trouble when they hit the docks and yards in California, getting a truck here is taking longer, too," he said.

The fireworks industry was not immune to the coronavirus pandemic that caused closures and staffing problems in the supply chain.

"For example, we ordered seven containers and only got two of them, so we are five short," Bellinger said.

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"Each container holds 800 to 1,000 cases, so the supply issues are impacting how much we have to sell."

On top of that, Bellinger said fireworks have been in high demand since last year when more people celebrated Independence Day at home.

"Last year was a great year. They were wanting to get out and were tired of being cooped up," he said. "It ran the supplies short here and emptied a lot of the warehouses. Plus, China did not have the people or the supplies or the materials to restock. That's kind of where we are today."

Analysis: Biden rebuts doubts, wins bet on bipartisanship

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Day after day, as the partisan battle lines hardened on Capitol Hill over President Joe Biden's domestic agenda, his calls for bipartisanship seemed increasingly out of step.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said his goal was to focus "100%" on stopping Biden's agenda. Progressive Democrats, meanwhile, pushed Biden to use the brute force power of a majority, even the most slender one, to pass legislation without any GOP support.

But on Thursday, it was Biden, the Washington careerist schooled in the ways of compromise, standing in front of the White House, flanked by Democrats and Republicans alike, claiming a bipartisan deal had been struck on a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package.

And, like a dream sequence from another era, senators from both parties dutifully spoke about the virtues of not getting all you want and trying to reach something that has been highly elusive in Washington for more than a decade: consensus.

"It's been a very long time since the last time our country was able to strike a major bipartisan deal on American infrastructure, which is so badly needed, I might add," Biden said. "We've devoted far too much energy to competing with one another and not nearly enough energy in competing with the rest of the world to win the 21st century."

Biden had campaigned on his ability to get deals done across the aisle, and Thursday's announcement was an undeniable victory, one that may give nervous moderate Democrats cover as they likely will be asked to support the rest of the president's agenda on a party-line basis.

But the accomplishment itself was fragile, one that faces opposition on the liberal flank of his own party and one that is far smaller than Biden first proposed. And the president's promise that he would sign the bipartisan deal only if a far larger, \$4 trillion reconciliation bill — which would contain his other priorities — also came to his desk made very real the possibility that Thursday's celebration of bipartisanship may end up being fleeting.

A new "era of good feeling" it is not.

Still, Biden proved that all his stated intentions about working with Republicans were not simply to burnish his image as a moderate with swing voters.

From the moment he announced his 2020 campaign, his third try at the White House, he insisted that he could restore a sense of bipartisan comity to Washington. He seemed oblivious to hyperpartisanship that had gripped the capital, one building since the 1990s and dramatically accelerated under the divisive presidency of Donald Trump.

The quest to successfully reach across the aisle remained quixotic after he took office.

Although the nation was in the grips of the pandemic, not a single Republican lawmaker on Capitol Hill voted for the president's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill even though it enjoyed widespread support among GOP voters. Goaded by Trump, who had incited an insurrection at the Capitol to prevent the certification of Biden's very election, an increasing number of Republicans propagated the lie that the 2020 campaign was fraudulent and doubted the president's legitimacy.

And McConnell, whom Biden frequently referred to as a friend with whom he could do business, had built a solid wall of defiance among Republicans bent on thwarting the president's agenda.

The Republicans' vocal intransigence only fueled Democrats' worries about Biden's approach, which many felt was a pointless waste of time. They asked why a president who promised to act with such urgency

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and who outlined a far-reaching liberal agenda to rival those authored by Franklin D. Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson, would fritter away time courting obstructionist Republicans.

Historically, however, bipartisanship is not unusual for infrastructure packages — the last big infrastructure bill in 2015, costing over \$300 billion, passed Congress overwhelmingly.

But the Democrats' current margins are small: Only a handful of seats in the House while the Senate is 50-50, with ties broken by Vice President Kamala Harris. And with the clock ticking toward the midterms, many on the party's left flank urged Biden to ditch the effort at bipartisanship and go it alone.

But Biden had bet his political capital that he could work with Republicans and showcase that "that American democracy can deliver" and be a counterexample to rising global autocracies, and namely China.

"This agreement signals to the world that we can function, deliver, and do significant things," the president said. "These investments represent the kind of national effort that throughout our history has literally -- not figuratively — literally transformed America and propelled us into the future."

Biden and his aides also believed that they needed a bipartisan deal on infrastructure to create a permission structure for more moderate Democrats — including Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona and Joe Manchin of West Virginia — to then be willing to go for a party-line vote for the rest of the president's agenda.

And some liberals, meanwhile, like Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, have been floating the theory that giving the moderates in his party a win on this will help others on the left keep the pressure on to pass the bigger bill.

But there were limits to what was achieved.

Congress had to do an annual infrastructure bill by the end of September, which required 10 Republican votes, so the bill agreed to on Thursday, in essence, was simply expanding and accelerating a package that was already on the horizon.

Moreover, the new bill was for far less than the approximately \$2 trillion he originally sought, which continued to raise some ire on the left. And while it focused on hard infrastructure — things like highways and subways and broadband — it left unaddressed so much of what Biden had proposed earlier this year, including sweeping reforms to housing, child care and efforts to combat climate change.

Those White House priorities, the administration said, would now be tackled separately in a congressional budget process known as reconciliation, which requires only a simple majority to pass. And Biden made clear that the two items would be done "in tandem" and that he would not sign the bipartisan deal without the other, bigger piece.

Both Manchin and Sinema signaled Thursday that they supported the approach, but some doubts remained about whether all the Democrats would stay in line to pass the massive piece of legislation.

But McConnell said that Biden's insistence on pairing the two bills — one of which would almost surely not receive GOP support — undermined his bipartisan outreach and "almost makes your head spin."

"An expression of bipartisanship, and then an ultimatum on behalf of your left-wing base," the Republican leader proclaimed.

But Biden was only reveling Thursday in achieving GOP support for the deal, an agreement that he said evoked his political North Star: the bipartisan spirit of yore. As if to symbolize his effort, the former Delaware senator even put his hand on the shoulder of a stoic-looking Republican Sen. Rob Portman of Ohio as the president made a surprise appearance with a bipartisan group of senators to announce the basis for an accord outside the White House.

"This reminds me of the days when we used to get an awful lot done up in the United States Congress," Biden said.

Harris heads to border after facing criticism for absence

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Kamala Harris faces perhaps the most politically challenging moment of her vice presidency Friday when she visits the U.S. southern border as part of her role leading the Biden administration's response to a steep increase in migration.

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While in El Paso, Texas, she will tour a Customs and Border Patrol processing center, hold a conversation with advocates from faith-based organizations as well as shelter and legal service providers and deliver remarks.

The vice president has faced months of criticism from members of both parties for declining to make the trip thus far and for her muddled explanations as to why.

Republicans have seized on the absence of both Harris and President Joe Biden from the border to paint the administration as weak on border security, seeking to revive a potent political weapon against Democrats in time for the 2022 midterm elections. With former President Donald Trump visiting the area less than a week after Harris, Republicans will be watching the vice president's visit closely for fodder for further attacks.

While various administration officials have made multiple visits to the border, the absence of Biden and Harris has left some Democrats worried that damage already has been done.

"The administration is making Democrats look weak," said Texas Democratic Rep. Henry Cuellar in an interview with The Associated Press. "I've heard, from Democrats and Republicans in my area, what the heck is going on with this administration?"

Cuellar's district spans from south of San Antonio to the U.S.-Mexico border, and last year he won reelection by the slimmest margin of his nearly two-decade-long career. While he says he's not worried about his own reelection fight, he adds, "I worry about my colleagues."

Cuellar's comments reflect a broader concern among some Democrats and immigration activists that the Biden administration has ceded the border security debate to Republicans.

Biden's first few months in office have seen record numbers of migrants attempting to cross the border. U.S. Customs and Border Protection recorded more than 180,000 encounters on the Mexican border in May, the most since March 2000. Those numbers were boosted by a coronavirus pandemic-related ban on seeking asylum, which encouraged repeated attempts to cross the border because getting caught carried no legal consequences.

Republicans have seized on those figures to attack Biden and Harris as weak on border security, a message the GOP used with success during the 2020 campaign.

Administration officials, including Harris, have sought to push back against that perception, with Harris repeatedly sending the message to migrants during her recent visit to Guatemala: "Do not come."

But those comments drew fire from some progressives, most notably New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, who called the message "disappointing."

It was an incident that underscored the political no-win situation Harris finds herself in, taking on an intractable problem that's bedeviled past administrations and been used by both parties to drive wedges and turnout during campaign season. If Biden chooses not to run for a second term, Harris will be seen as the leading contender to replace him, and the immigration issue could become either a chance for her to showcase her accomplishments or an albatross.

Indeed, Republicans preemptively hammered Harris over her border visit, with Trump claiming credit for her decision to go.

Harris advisers have been careful to emphasize that her main focus related to immigration is addressing the root causes of migration. She has been seeking economic and humanitarian solutions to improve conditions for residents of Central and North American countries who flee to the U.S. Her aides framed her trip to the border as part of an effort to better understand how to solve the problem.

"What happens at the border matters, and is directly connected to what is happening in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras," said Harris spokeswoman Symone Sanders. "It is directly connected to the work of addressing the root causes of migration."

Harris was being joined on the trip by Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, Illinois Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin and Democratic Rep. Veronica Escobar, who represents the district there.

Harris had no plans to visit the migrant detention facility at the Fort Bliss military post, which has drawn criticism from advocates who have described unsafe conditions and allegations of abuse toward some of the thousands of children housed there. Cuellar called her decision to visit El Paso "politically safe,"

because, he said, most of the activity at the border happens farther south.

Domingo Garcia, president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, a Latino civil rights organization, expressed concerns that Harris's visit was "a day late and a dollar short."

"It almost feels like they're being kind of forced into it by the local communities, as well as the Republicans' political attacks from the right," Garcia said.

But, still, Garcia said he was glad she was going, and expressed optimism that her visit could help the Biden administration correct its course on the immigration issue and show a contrast to the Trump administration's hardline stance on border security.

"They should own this, and they should solve it, because it does need a bipartisan solution," he said.

Collapsed Florida building drew global visitors, residents

By TERRY SPENCER and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — The Champlain Towers South drew people from around the globe to enjoy life on South Florida's Atlantic Coast, some for a night, some to live. A couple from Argentina and their young daughter. A beloved retired Miami-area teacher and his wife. Orthodox Jews from Russia. Israelis. The sister of Paraguay's first lady. Others from South America.

They were among the nearly 100 people who remained missing Friday morning, a day after the 12-story building collapsed into rubble early Thursday. Much of the Champlain's beach side sheared off for unknown reasons, pancaking into a pile of concrete and metal more than 30 feet (10 meters) high.

Only one person had been confirmed dead, but officials feared that number could skyrocket. Eleven injuries were reported, with four people treated at hospitals.

"These are very difficult times, and things are going to get more difficult as we move forward," Miami-Dade Police Director Freddy Ramirez said.

Fire Rescue personnel and others worked through the night in hopes of finding survivors.

State Sen. Jason Pizzo of Miami Beach told the Miami Herald he watched as tactical teams of six worked early Friday to pull bodies from the rubble. He said he saw one body taken in a yellow body bag and another that was marked. They were taken to a homicide unit tent that was set up along the beach.

Many people remained at the reunification center set up near the collapse site early Friday morning, awaiting results of DNA swabs that could help identify victims.

Officials said no cause for the collapse has been determined.

Video of the collapse showed the center of the building appearing to tumble down first and a section nearest to the ocean teetering and coming down seconds later, as a huge dust cloud swallowed the neighborhood.

About half the building's roughly 130 units were affected, and rescuers pulled at least 35 people from the wreckage in the first hours after the collapse.

Raide Jadallah, an assistant Miami-Dade County fire chief, said that while listening devices placed on and in the wreckage had picked up no voices, they had detected possible banging noises, giving rescuers hope some are alive. Rescuers were tunneling into the wreckage from below, going through the building's underground parking garage.

Personal belongings were evidence of shattered lives amid the wreckage of the Champlain, which was built in 1981 in Surfside, a small suburb northwest of Miami. A children's bunk bed perched precariously on a top floor, bent but intact and apparently inches from falling into the rubble. A comforter lay on the edge of a lower floor. Televisions. Computers. Chairs.

Argentines Dr. Andres Galfrascoli, his husband, Fabian Nuñez and their 6-year-old daughter, Sofia, had spent Wednesday night there at an apartment belonging to a friend, Nicolas Fernandez.

Galfrascoli, a Buenos Aires plastic surgeon, and Nuñez, a theater producer and accountant, had come to Florida to get away from a COVID-19 resurgence in Argentina and its strict lockdowns. They had worked hard to adopt Sofia, Fernandez said.

"Of all days, they chose the worst to stay there," Fernandez said. "I hope it's not the case, but if they

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die like this, that would be so unfair.”

They weren't the only South Americans missing. Foreign ministries and consulates of four countries said 22 nationals were missing in the collapse: nine from Argentina, six from Paraguay, four from Venezuela and three from Uruguay.

The Paraguayans included Sophia López Moreira — the sister of first lady Silvana Abdo and sister-in-law of President Mario Abdo Benítez — and her family.

Israeli media said the country's consul general in Miami, Maor Elbaz, believes that 20 citizens of that country are missing.

Also missing was Arnie Notkin, a retired Miami-area elementary school physical education teacher, and his wife, Myriam. They lived on the third floor.

“Everyone's been posting, 'Oh my God, he was my coach,'" said Fortuna Smukler, a friend who turned to Facebook in hopes of finding someone who would report them safe.

“They were also such happy, joyful people. He always had a story to tell, and she always spoke so kindly of my mother," Smukler said. “Originally there were rumors that he had been found, but it was a case of mistaken identity. It would be a miracle if they're found alive.”

Security chief named Hong Kong No. 2 official amid clampdown

HONG KONG (AP) — China on Friday promoted Hong Kong's top security official to the territory's No. 2 spot as Beijing looks to the government of the Asian financial hub to clamp down on free speech and political opponents to restore stability following anti-government protests.

Chief Executive Carrie Lam said Secretary for Security John Lee would replace Matthew Cheung as the city's chief secretary, while police chief Chris Tang would take over Lee's role. Raymond Siu Chak-ye, Tang's deputy, will be the new head of the police force.

Hong Kong's government has long been lauded for its professionalism and efficiency, but its image has been battered in recent years by its banning and suppression of pro-democracy protests and its hard-line enforcement of Beijing's security policies. The U.S. and other Western democracies have imposed visa bans and other sanctions on Lam, Lee and other members of the administration.

Violent clashes between police and pro-democracy demonstrators in 2019 prompted the central government to adopt a firm line against political concessions, a policy seen through by Lam, Lee, Tang and Siu, who made restoring public order their top priority.

“They have had distinguished performance in the government over the years and possess proven leadership skills," Lam said of those promoted. “I am confident that they are competent for their new posts and would rise to the challenges in serving the community.”

Cheung, the former No. 2, will be retiring from government service.

The leadership changes come a year after Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law on the former British colony and one day after Hong Kong's last remaining pro-democracy newspaper, the Apple Daily, published its final edition.

Police froze \$2.3 million of the newspaper's assets, searched its office and arrested five top editors and executives last week, accusing them of foreign collusion to endanger national security. Its founder, Jimmy Lai, is facing charges under the national security law of foreign collusion and is currently serving a prison sentence for involvement in the 2019 pro-democracy protest movement.

On Thursday, U.S. President Joe Biden said it was a “sad day for media freedom in Hong Kong and around the world," and accused Beijing of having “insisted on wielding its power to suppress independent media and silence dissenting views.”

“People in Hong Kong have the right to freedom of the press. Instead, Beijing is denying basic liberties and assaulting Hong Kong's autonomy and democratic institutions and processes, inconsistent with its international obligations," Biden said in a statement on the White House website.

Apple Daily continues to be published online in Taiwan, the self-governing island democracy that China claims as its own territory.

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Beijing promised Hong Kong could maintain its civil liberties for 50 years after the former British colony was handed over to Chinese rule in 1997, but has essentially abandoned that commitment to impose total political control and end what it sees as undue foreign influence on the semi-autonomous city's institutions.

China effectively ended multiparty democracy in Hong Kong by having the ceremonial Chinese legislature in Beijing impose the national security law without debate or a vote in the city's Legislative Council. It then moved to pack the Legislative Council with Beijing loyalists while radically reducing the proportion of legislators directly elected by voters.

Opposition legislators earlier resigned as a group after four colleagues were barred on national security grounds.

In recent months, police have arrested most of the city's pro-democracy activists. Most are still in police custody, while others have sought asylum abroad, under threat from Lam's administration for past statements and actions seen as disloyal to China or in violation of Hong Kong law as it now stands.

Despite the overwhelming emphasis on security, Lam told reporters that the role of the chief secretary in helping oversee the city's daily administration, including dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, had not changed.

Yet she appeared to acknowledge Beijing's increasingly assertive role in managing the city's affairs and the central government's demand for absolute loyalty from Hong Kong officials and members of the Legislative Council.

"Now today as chief executive, I am responsible not only to Hong Kong but also to the central government, performing national duties, particularly in safeguarding national security," Lam told reporters. "So for people with commitment, integrity, leadership and spirit to serve the nation and Hong Kong ... we will put in our best."

China has dismissed foreign sanctions and criticism as interference in its internal affairs, and Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian on Friday defended the national security law as focused on "cracking down on a small group of anti-China elements in Hong Kong who have seriously endangered national security, and which protects the rights and freedoms enjoyed by the vast majority of Hong Kong residents in accordance with the law, including freedom of the press."

"Since the enforcement of the Hong Kong national security law, Hong Kong society has returned to stability, the rule of law and justice has been upheld, and the legal rights and freedoms of Hong Kong residents and foreign citizens have been better protected in a safer environment," Zhao said at a daily briefing.

"Accusing China of suppressing press freedom just because the organization involved in the case is a news outlet and the individuals punished are working in the field of journalism is an attempt to confuse the public out of ulterior motives," Zhao said.

"The U.S. should respect the facts, stop using excuses of any form to obstruct law enforcement in (Hong Kong), stop shielding suspects and interfering in Hong Kong affairs and China's internal affairs in any way," he said.

House GOP leader to meet with Capitol officer hurt on Jan. 6

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, NOMAAN MERCHANT and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A police officer who was injured in the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection and has pushed for an independent commission to investigate the attack will meet with House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy on Friday, according to two people familiar with the meeting.

Officer Michael Fanone has said for weeks that he wanted to meet with McCarthy, who has opposed a commission and remained loyal to former President Donald Trump. It was a violent mob of Trump's supporters that attacked the Capitol and interrupted the certification of Joe Biden's presidential election victory after Trump told them to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat.

The meeting comes after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced Thursday that she is creating a special committee to investigate the attack. She said a partisan-led probe was the only option left after Senate

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Republicans blocked legislation to form a bipartisan commission.

Fanone is expected to be joined by Capitol Police Officer Harry Dunn, who was also among the officers who responded to the rioting, and Gladys Sicknick, the mother of Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, according to one of the people and a third person familiar with the meeting. Brian Sicknick collapsed and died after engaging with the mob; a medical examiner ruled that he died of natural causes.

The three people spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the private meeting.

The meetings are part of an effort by the officers and family members to bring attention to the violence of that day and to win Senate approval of a bipartisan commission. The group has become more active as some House Republicans have begun to downplay the severity of the insurrection, in which Trump's supporters brutally beat officers, broke through windows and doors of the Capitol and hunted for lawmakers.

Fanone, Dunn and Gladys Sicknick have all aggressively lobbied for the commission — which would be modeled after a similar panel that investigated the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks — and they visited the offices of several Republican senators before the vote last month. Seven Republican senators voted with Democrats to consider the legislation that would form the bipartisan panel, but it still fell short of the 60 votes needed to move forward.

Fanone, a Metropolitan Police officer who has described being dragged down the Capitol steps by rioters who shocked him with a stun gun and beat him, said then that it is "necessary for us to heal as a nation from the trauma that we all experienced that day."

Similarly, Dunn has described fighting the rioters in hand-to-hand combat and being the target of racial slurs.

The House passed the bill to form a commission last month, and Pelosi, D-Calif., said it was her preference to have an independent panel lead the inquiry. But she said Thursday that Congress could not wait any longer to begin a deeper look at the insurrection.

"Jan. 6 was a day of darkness for our country," Pelosi said, and the "terror and trauma" to members and staff who were there is something she cannot forgive. She said there is no fixed timeline for the committee, which will investigate and report on the facts and causes of the attack and make recommendations to prevent it from happening again.

She did not say who will lead or serve on the panel.

Pelosi's official announcement, two days after she signaled to colleagues that she would create the committee, means Democrats will lead what probably will be the most comprehensive look at the siege. More than three dozen Republicans in the House and the seven Republicans in the Senate said they wanted to avoid such a partisan investigation and supported the legislation to form a commission.

Pelosi says that the select committee could be complementary to an independent panel and that she is "hopeful there could be a commission at some point." Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has said he might hold a second vote, but there's no indication that any GOP votes have changed.

McCarthy didn't comment on the select panel after Pelosi's announcement, saying only in a brief interview that he hadn't heard about it.

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 attack.

And some Republicans have gone further, with one suggesting the rioters looked like tourists and another insisting that a Trump supporter named Ashli Babbitt, who was shot and killed that day while trying to break into the House chamber, was "executed."

And last week, 21 Republicans voted against giving medals of honor to the U.S. Capitol Police and the Metropolitan Police to thank them for their service on Jan. 6. Dozens of those officers suffered injuries, including chemical burns, brain injuries and broken bones.

McCarthy voted for the measure.

Seven people died during and after the rioting, including Babbitt and three other Trump supporters who died of medical emergencies. In addition to Sicknick, two police officers died by suicide in the days that followed.

Cases challenge no-parole terms for young adult killers

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — They were convicted of the same crime: the 2011 killing of a Boston teen as part of a gang feud. But Nyasani Watt — who pulled the trigger — will be able to fight for his release on parole after 15 years because he was only 17 at the time of the killing.

Sheldon Mattis, who was just eight months older, was ordered to spend the rest of his life behind bars.

U.S. Supreme Court rulings and state laws in recent years have limited or banned the use of life sentences without the possibility of parole for people who commit crimes as juveniles because of the potential for change.

Now, research showing that the brain continues to develop after 18 is prompting some states to examine whether to extend such protections to young adults like Mattis, who say they too deserve a second chance.

“People who say that a person of 18 and six weeks is biologically different than a person of 17 and 364 days belong to the Flat Earth Society,” said Mattis’ attorney, Ruth Greenberg. “There is no support for a bright-line rule at 18, biologically, neuro-scientifically speaking. And the scientific community is in broad agreement,” she said.

Mattis’ case and another, involving a man convicted of participating in a killing at 19, hope to ban life-without-parole sentences in Massachusetts for people who were 18, 19 and 20 at the time of their crimes. The two cases were recently sent up to the state’s highest court, which did away with such sentences for juveniles eight years ago.

The U.S. Supreme Court in 2012 struck down automatic life terms with no chance of parole for killers under 18. But this year, the more conservative court made it easier to hand down those punishments for juveniles, ruling that it doesn’t require a finding that a minor is incapable of being rehabilitated.

Despite that case, more than two dozen states — including Massachusetts — and the District of Columbia have already disallowed putting juveniles behind bars for life with no chance at parole.

Research indicating the brains of adolescents are still developing has convinced courts and lawmakers that punishing teens with the same severity as adults is cruel and unusual because it fails to account for the differences of youth or the potential for rehabilitation.

Defense attorneys say the same rationale should apply to young adults. In the case of Jason Robinson, who was 19 when authorities say he participated in a killing in Boston, the defense points to one psychological study of people from nearly a dozen countries showing that young adults have higher risk-taking tendencies and are more influenced by their peers than older adults.

Washington state’s high court earlier this year abolished automatic life without parole sentences given to people for murders committed as 18- to 20-year-olds. Courts in Washington can still sentence young adult offenders to life with no chance at parole, but only after first considering whether their youth justifies a lesser punishment.

A new Washington, D.C., law allows those under the age of 25 at the time of their crime to apply for a new sentence after 15 years, said Josh Rovner, who works on juvenile justice issues for The Sentencing Project. And bills introduced in Connecticut and Illinois would get rid of life without parole sentences for people who commit crimes as young adults, Rovner said.

Watt was 10 days away from turning 18 when authorities say Mattis handed him a gun and Watt fatally shot 16-year-old Jaivon Blake in Boston’s Dorchester neighborhood. The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court last year ordered a lower court to gather more information about brain development so it could decide whether to extend the ban on life without parole sentences to young adults.

Boston’s progressive top prosecutor, Suffolk County District Attorney Rachael Rollins, agrees there needs to be a change — though not as drastic as defense attorneys would like. Even so, Rollins took the unusual step this year of signing a brief in the case against Robinson to push for an end to mandatory life without parole for those who committed killings between 18 and 20.

She argues in court documents that the studies the defense points to are flawed, and that while it is

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“undisputed” that the brain continues to develop into early adulthood, “there is an absence of direct evidence linking these anatomical changes to specific behaviors.”

Rollins said she will urge the Supreme Judicial Court to follow Washington State and rule that those young adults must get a special sentencing hearing to consider their youth before punishments can be handed down. She said they should be ordered to die in prison in only “extremely egregious” circumstances — if the judge finds them to be “irretrievably depraved.”

“I will no longer be legally right and morally wrong,” Rollins, the first woman of color to serve as district attorney in Massachusetts, said in an interview.

“We are going to move now to make sure that overwhelmingly Black and brown men aren’t disproportionately impacted by the criminal legal system,” Rollins said. “We’re going to do what’s right and at least have them have more hope and opportunity ... to believe that they can change after 10, 15, 20 or so years.”

It’s unclear when Massachusetts’ high court will take up the issue. But it’s likely to anger victims’ families whose loved ones won’t get a second chance, and face fierce pushback from some other prosecutors across the state.

Michael O’Keefe, the top prosecutor for the Cape and Islands, said he believes the matter should be left for lawmakers — not the courts — to sort out.

“We’ve taken the step of eliminating life without parole for those between 14 and 18. This has to stop somewhere,” he said. “At some point there has to be accountability for heinous criminal behavior,” he said.

Rollins’ proposal could result in new sentencing hearings for dozens of young offenders across Massachusetts. More than 200 people are serving life without parole sentences in Massachusetts prisons for killings committed as 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds, according to data obtained by the Committee for Public Counsel Services, the state’s public defender agency. If the court sides with defense attorneys, those inmates could get a chance to be released someday on parole.

“There’s a huge uproar that these people are going to get out, and you know, maybe some of them deserve to,” said Robinson’s attorney, Rosemary Scapicchio. “But it doesn’t mean the door is open. What it means is they now become parole-eligible and they still have to get through the seven members of the parole board and get a majority vote before they can ever get out,” she said.

UNESCO watching as Venice grapples with over-tourism

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

VENICE, Italy (AP) — Away from the once-maddening crowds of St. Mark’s Square, tiny Certosa island could be a template for building a sustainable future in Venice as it tries to relaunch its tourism industry without boomeranging back to pre-pandemic day-tripping hordes.

Private investment has converted the forgotten public island just a 15-minute waterbus ride from St. Mark’s Square into a multi-faceted urban park where Venetians and Venice conoscianti can mix, free from the tensions inherent to the lagoon city’s perennial plague of mass tourism.

“This is the B-side of the Venetian LP,” said Alberto Sonino, who heads the development project that includes a hotel, marina, restaurant and woodland. “Everyone knows the first song of the A-side of our long-play, almost nobody, not even the most expert or locals, know the lagoon as an interesting natural and cultural environment.”

It may be now or never for Venice, whose fragile city and lagoon environment alike are protected as a UNESCO world heritage site. Citing overtourism, UNESCO took the rare step this week of recommending Venice be placed on its list of World Heritage in Danger sites. A decision is expected next month.

After a 15-month pause in mass international travel, Venetians are contemplating how to welcome visitors back to its picture-postcard canals and Byzantine backdrops without suffering the past indignities of crowds clogging narrow alleyways, day-trippers picnicking on stoops and selfie-takers crowding the Rialto Bridge.

The recommendation by UNESCO’s World Heritage Center took into account mass tourism, in particular the passage of cruise ships through the historic center, a steady decline in permanent residents as well as governance and management problems.

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"This is not something we propose lightly," Mechtild Roessler, director of the World Heritage Center, told AP. "It is to alert the international community to do more to address these matters together."

Veneto regional officials have submitted a plan for relaunching the tourism-dependent city to Rome that calls for controlling arrivals of day-trippers, boosting permanent residents, encouraging startups, limiting the stock of private apartment rentals and gaining control over commercial zoning to protect Venetian artisans.

The proposal, submitted in March, aims to make Venice a "world sustainability capital," and hopes to tap some of the 222 million euros (\$265 million) in EU recovery funds to help hard-hit Italy relaunch from the pandemic.

"Venice is in danger of disappearing. If we don't stop and reverse this, Venice in 10 years will be a desert, where you turn the lights on in the morning, and turn them off in the evening," said Nicola Pianon, a Venice native and managing director of the Boston Consulting Group whose strategic plan for Venice informed the region's proposal.

The proposal responds to Venetians' urgency to reclaim their city from the mass tourism that peaked at some 25 million individual visitors in 2019, and stanch the exodus of 1,000 Venetians each year. It envisions investments of up to 4 billion euros to attract 12,000 new residents and create 20,000 new jobs.

As much as Venetians groan at the huge tourist flows, the pandemic also revealed the extent to which the relationship is symbiotic.

Along with lost tourist revenue, Venetians suffered a drastic reduction in public transport, heavily subsidized by tourist traffic. Even city museums could not afford to reopen to residents when lockdowns eased.

"Venice without tourists became a city that could not serve its own citizens," said Anna Moretti, an expert in destination management at Venice's Ca' Foscari University.

The pandemic paused the city's plans to introduce a day-tripper tax last year on visitors who sleep elsewhere — 80% of the total tourist footfall.

Some 19 million day-trippers visited in 2019, spending just 5 euros (\$6) to 20 euros each, according to Boston Consulting. On the other side of that equation, the 20% of tourists who spend at least one night in Venice contribute more than two-thirds of all tourist revenue.

A reservation system with an access fee is expected to launch sometime in 2022 to manage day visitors.

With an eye on monitoring daily tourist arrivals, the city set up a state-of-the-art Smart Control Room near the main railroad bridge last year that identifies how many visitors are in Venice at any moment using cell-phone data that also reveals their country of origin and location in the city.

The technology means that future reservations can be monitored with QR codes downloaded on phones, without the need to set up check points. Pianon said the plan is feasible in a city like Venice, which has a limited number of access points and is just 5 square kilometers (2 square miles) in area.

Relaunching more sustainable tourism in Venice would require diverting tourists to new destinations, encouraging more over-night stays, discouraging day trips and enabling the repopulation of the city with new residents.

Much could go wrong. Tourist operators are desperate for business to return, and there is a pent-up global desire to travel. In addition, many changes being sought by regional and city officials must be decided in Rome, including any limits on commercial zoning or Airbnb rental properties.

"I think the level of dystopia that we had reached was of such a scale that there has to be a reaction," said Carlo Bagnoli, head of an innovation lab, VeniSia, at Ca Foscari University. "There are many projects emerging from many places."

Certosa island, after more than a decade, is still a work in progress, but its success is in the numbers: 3,000 visitors each weekend.

Sonino sees another 10 public sites in the lagoon with redevelopment potential, including former hospitals, abandoned islands and military bases.

He blames Venetians themselves for the city's predicament, being long on talk, short on action. But he feels the pandemic -- coupled with the world's abiding interest in Venice's future -- might just be the push the city needs to change.

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"I prefer to hope that we catch the opportunity. Carpe diem is not only a slogan but an opportunity," Sonino said. "We need a lot of ideas and a lot of passion to take Venice from the past to the future."

Late Philippine leader hailed for integrity, guts vs China

By JOEAL CALUPITAN and AARON FAVILA Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Late Philippine President Benigno Aquino III was hailed Friday for his integrity in a Southeast Asian nation long plagued by corruption and for standing up to China over long-raging territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Hundreds of people lined up at a Catholic church in Manila despite coronavirus restrictions to pray before a silver urn with the cremated remains of Aquino, who died Thursday at age 61 of kidney disease arising from diabetes.

"I just want to show my support and big thanks to Pnoy," Ivy Roque, a 41-year-old call center employee said, using Aquino's nickname. "In his time, we were given hope that the Philippines can rise from poverty."

President Rodrigo Duterte declared 10 days of national mourning and ordered Philippine flags to be flown at half-staff across the country to honor Aquino, who led the country from 2010 to 2016.

Aquino's remains are to be interred Saturday in a private cemetery beside the tombs of his parents, the pro-democracy icons who helped topple dictator Ferdinand Marcos in the 1980s.

Ordinary Filipinos took to Facebook and other social media platforms to mourn Aquino and hail him as an honest leader who reminded the country that nobody was above the law.

Condolences also poured in from around the globe.

"He was a valued friend and partner to the United States, and he will long be remembered for serving his country with integrity and selfless dedication," U.S. President Joe Biden said in a statement.

Aquino's "steadfast commitment to advancing peace, upholding the rule of law, and driving economic growth for all Filipinos, while taking bold steps to promote the rules-based international order, leaves a remarkable legacy at home and abroad that will endure for years to come," Biden said.

Duterte, who has publicly ridiculed the political opposition to which Aquino was associated, called for the outpouring of sympathy for his predecessor to be turned into an "opportunity to unite in prayer and set aside our differences."

"His memory and his family's legacy of offering their lives for the cause of democracy will forever remain etched in our hearts," Duterte said.

Aquino's late parents, including former President Corazon Aquino, are revered for helping lead the resistance against dictator Ferdinand Marcos, who was ousted in a 1986 army-backed revolt that helped spark similar peaceful uprisings in authoritarian regimes worldwide.

Philippine TV networks ran tributes to Aquino and his advocacy for good governance. DZMM radio network broadcast messages from listeners, including one who praised Aquino "as the president with the biggest guts against China."

Aquino authorized the filing in 2013 of a complaint that questioned the validity of China's sweeping claims in the South China Sea before an international arbitration tribunal. The Philippines largely won. But China refused to join in the arbitration and dismissed the tribunal's 2016 ruling, which invalidated Beijing's claims.

Aquino's legal challenge and the eventual ruling was praised by Western and Asian governments but plunged relations between Beijing and Manila to an all-time low.

One of Aquino's major successes was the signing of a 2014 peace deal with the largest Muslim separatist rebel group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, that eased decades of fighting in the country's south.

But while Aquino moved against corruption — detaining his predecessor Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and three powerful senators — and initiated anti-poverty programs, the deep-seated inequalities and weak institutions in the Philippines remained too daunting.

Opponents pounded on missteps, but Aquino retained high approval ratings when his six-year term ended in 2016. Philippine presidents are limited to a single term.

Aquino campaigned against Duterte, warning he could be a looming dictator and could set back the

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democratic and economic momentum achieved in his own term. Duterte, however, won with a large margin on a vow to eradicate illegal drugs and government corruption in his first three to six months in office.

Duterte failed to fulfill his bold promise, acknowledging that he underestimated the magnitude of the problems. Aside from his brash rhetoric, he has been condemned for an anti-drug crackdown that has killed thousands of mostly petty suspects and alarmed Western governments and human rights groups.

Antonio Trillanes IV, a former senator and leading Duterte critic who went to Aquino's wake, said the former president's death rekindled memories of his integrity and leadership style that starkly contrast with the "culture of hate, killing and deaths" under Duterte.

"We're now fondly recalling the pleasant conditions in our country before compared to what we're seeing now," Trillanes said.

Parts of Sydney going into lockdown as virus outbreak grows

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Parts of Sydney will go into lockdown late Friday as a coronavirus outbreak in Australia's largest city continued to grow.

Health authorities reported an additional 22 locally transmitted cases and imposed a weeklong lockdown in four areas, saying people could leave their homes only for essential purposes.

The outbreak of the highly contagious delta variant was first detected last week, and 65 people have been infected.

"If you live or work in those local government areas, you need to stay at home unless absolutely necessary," said Gladys Berejiklian, the premier of New South Wales state.

She said the lockdown, which was due to go into effect just before midnight, would have a significant impact on businesses, especially in the central business district of the city of more than 5 million people.

"This is in order for us to ensure that this doesn't take a hold for weeks and weeks, and we believe this is a proportionate response to the risk," Berejiklian said.

A day earlier, the premier had said there wasn't any need for further restrictions despite it being the "scariest period" the state had been through during the pandemic.

Berejiklian herself tested negative for the virus after her Agriculture Minister Adam Marshall tested positive. Health Minister Brad Hazzard is self-isolating as a close contact of a suspected COVID-19 case in Parliament House.

The local council areas in Sydney headed for lockdown are Woollahra, Waverley, Randwick and the City of Sydney. People can leave their homes only for reasons such as essential work or education, shopping, and exercise. The lockdown is expected to affect more than 1 million people who live or work in those areas.

Authorities say the cluster spread from a Sydney airport limousine driver. He was not vaccinated, reportedly did not wear a mask and is suspected to have been infected while transporting a foreign air crew.

Australian states have closed their borders to travelers either from parts of Sydney or from anywhere in New South Wales. New Zealand has stopped quarantine-free travel with the state until at least July 6.

One of the people infected traveled to New Zealand's capital Wellington last weekend, visiting restaurants, bars and tourist spots. That prompted some restrictions in Wellington, although no one in the city has tested positive so far.

The Sydney outbreak prompted New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern to cancel a planned trade trip to Australia in early July. She said she would reschedule it for later in the year.

Australia has been relatively successful in containing coronavirus clusters, although the delta variant first detected in India is proving more challenging. And the nation's vaccine rollout has been slower than in many other developed countries, with only about one-quarter of the population having gotten at least one dose.

The pandemic has claimed 910 deaths in Australia, which has a population of 26 million. The only COVID-19 death since October was an 80-year-old man who became infected overseas and was diagnosed in hotel quarantine.

Riviera campaign is key to hopes of France's far-right party

By ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The best chance of victory for Marine Le Pen's far-right party in this weekend's French regional election runoff is a European lawmaker who meets regularly with Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad and celebrated Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Thierry Mariani is in a tight race with a mainstream conservative incumbent to run the prized region that includes the French Riviera and Provence — a race that epitomizes his party's challenges after it stumbled in the first-round vote.

If Mariani wins Sunday, it would be a first-time victory in regional elections for the anti-immigration National Rally party and an important step in Le Pen's push for the presidency next year.

"The election isn't over," Le Pen said Wednesday on France-Inter radio, urging voters who skipped the first round to show up for the runoff and "correct this situation."

In the first round last Sunday, the 62-year-old Mariani finished slightly ahead of conservative incumbent Renaud Muselier in the sprawling region of southeast France known as PACA, which covers the Cote d'Azur, Provence and a corner of the Alps. Polls had predicted a much stronger showing by the National Rally in PACA and five other regions.

But they were wrong. The political map of France's 12 mainland regions could remain unchanged after the final round of voting. The left currently heads five regions and the mainstream right seven.

The battle between Mariani and Muselier in one of the most picturesque swaths of France has been nasty, and it is crucial for Le Pen. Like other party leaders, she has put a national spin on the regional elections, looking toward the presidential race in 10 months. Candidates from President Emmanuel Macron's centrist party endorsed by Muselier are running with him in the PACA region.

Le Pen is considered likely to reach the runoff next year against Macron in a repeat scenario of his 2017 election. Le Pen wants regional roots for her party and the respect that goes with them. Macron's centrist party, just four years old, suffered an embarrassing defeat in the first round of regional voting.

Record-low turnout last week of 34% hit the usually motivated far right hard. Without an enthusiastic rebound by voters, Mariani's chances of winning the PACA region could be dimmed. Le Pen scolded her party's supporters for the "civic disaster" and with other far-right leaders ordered them to "Move!" during the final round.

Further magnifying Mariani's challenge was a decision this week by the leftist candidate, an ecologist, to drop out of Sunday's runoff in what the French call a "republican front" to block the far right from power. The same sacrificial maneuver by the left stopped Le Pen's niece, Marion Marechal, from her march toward victory in PACA in 2015 regional elections, despite a powerful first-round lead.

This time Le Pen's party enters the runoff on weaker ground. In France's north, conservative incumbent Xavier Bertrand crowed that he "broke the jaws" of the far right after taking 40% of the first-round vote, leaving National Rally candidate Sebastien Chenu in the dust. Other regions where far-right hopes ran high also failed to deliver.

That leaves Mariani to kindle flames of hope for Le Pen. Now a European lawmaker, he was a transport minister under former President Nicolas Sarkozy, with a host of eyebrow-raising acquaintances in his long political career. Although he was a conservative for four decades, Mariani's far-right bent made him something of a misfit, and he is at home in Le Pen's circle.

Like Mariani, the entire Le Pen clan has a history of rubbing shoulders with Russian officialdom, starting decades ago with the patriarch, Jean-Marie Le Pen, Marine's father. Some have also visited Syria's Assad — despite Marine Le Pen's decade-long effort to rebrand her party and shed the antisemitism and racism associated with the party once known as the National Front.

A year ago, Mariani was part of a French delegation to Crimea, which was annexed by Russia from Ukraine in 2014. Though the annexation was condemned by the international community — and not recognized by France or the EU — Mariani has made several visits to Crimea, including in 2019 for "celebrations" mark-

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ing the fifth anniversary of "reunification with Russia," Russia's TASS news agency reported at the time. Le Pen herself met with Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin in 2017 — just weeks before the French presidential election. She pledged to recognize Crimea if elected, and promised to work to repeal European Union sanctions levied over the annexation.

Meanwhile, Mariani met with Assad in 2017, along with two other French lawmakers, and again in 2019 with three European lawmakers from the National Rally, his sixth such trip. He has told French media that each time he visits Syria he meets with Assad.

"He's buddies with all the dictators in the East, starting with Mr. Putin," Muselier, his chief opponent in the elections, said.

Mariani, shooting back, said his opponent once received "with great fanfare the ambassador of Qatar, the international sponsor of terrorism."

Assad, "on the contrary, fought terrorists." Perhaps Muselier "would have preferred that the Islamic State group run Syria," Mariani said in an interview this week on RTL radio. He said he far prefers Assad, "with all his faults," running Syria.

The National Rally's opponents have pushed to maintain its image as a pariah. Bertrand, the candidate in the north, consistently refers to the party as the National Front to evoke its past. And Muselier, who conceded this week that the electoral battle "has been extremely violent," at one point called candidates on Mariani's list "skinheads and dumbbells."

Marine Le Pen tweeted angrily that Muselier, with his deal to include Macron party candidates on his lists and further bolster chances of victory with the withdrawal of the left, "will be the candidate of an entire system, with all its nuances of betrayal, denial and hypocrisy."

If his opponent wins, Mariani said on LCI television, PACA "will be the only region that Mr. Macron can take home as a trophy."

Russia mandates vaccinations for some as virus cases surge

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — They tried grocery giveaways and lotteries for new cars and apartments. But an ambitious plan of vaccinating 30 million Russians by mid-June still has fallen short by a third.

So now, many regional governments across the vast country are obligating some workers to get vaccinated and requiring the shots to enter certain businesses, like restaurants.

As many Western countries lift coronavirus restrictions and plan a return to normal life after mass vaccinations, Russia is battling a surge of infections — even though it was the first in the world to authorize a vaccine and among the first to start administering it in December.

Daily new cases have grown from about 9,000 in early June to about 17,000 on June 18 and over 20,000 on Thursday, with Moscow, its outlying region and St. Petersburg combining for about half of all new infections.

Officials have blamed Russians' lax attitude toward taking necessary precautions and the growing prevalence of more infectious variants. But perhaps the biggest factor is the lack of vaccinations.

Only 20.7 million people, or 14% of its population of 146 million, have received at least one shot as of Wednesday, and only 16.7 million, or about 11%, have been fully vaccinated.

Experts say those numbers are due to several factors, including the public's wariness of the rushed approval and rollout of the Sputnik V vaccine; an official narrative that Russia had tamed its outbreak; criticism on state TV of other vaccines as dangerous; and a weak promotional campaign that included incentives such as consumer giveaways.

In light of the surge, at least 14 Russian regions — from Moscow and St. Petersburg to the remote far-eastern region of Sakhalin — made vaccinations mandatory this month for employees in certain sectors, such as government offices, retail, health care, education, restaurants, fitness centers, beauty parlors and other service industries.

Moscow authorities said companies should suspend without pay employees unwilling to get vaccinated,

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and they threatened to temporarily halt operations of businesses that don't meet the goal of having 60% of staff get at least one shot by July 15 and both shots by Aug. 15.

As of Monday, all Moscow restaurants, cafes and bars will admit only customers who have been vaccinated, have recovered from COVID-19 in the past six months, or can provide a negative coronavirus test from the previous 72 hours. City officials also limited most elective hospital care to those who are fully vaccinated or can provide tests showing they have antibodies to fight the infection.

The moves seem to be an act of desperation by authorities.

"They backed themselves into a corner, they have no choice now," said Judy Twigg, a political science professor specializing in global health at Virginia Commonwealth University.

"They overhyped this vaccine so that people didn't trust it. Then they took a series of measures that were clearly attempted to make it seem as though the government had everything under control, the pandemic was no big deal. ... And now they're in this situation, not surprisingly, where low vaccination rates have left an opening for the delta variant to come in," she said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov insisted Thursday the vaccinations in Moscow were "voluntary," because those refusing to get the shot can still seek a different job.

The governor of the southern region of Krasnodar, home to the Black Sea resort of Sochi, said hotels and sanitariums will only accommodate vacationers with a negative coronavirus test or a vaccination certificate starting July 1. As of Aug. 1, only vaccinated individuals will be admitted.

The mandates have drawn mixed responses, with some saying they are welcome if they prevent closures of businesses, while other say it's unclear how employers can persuade those who don't want the shots.

"Most restaurateurs believe that vaccination is necessary," said Sergei Mironov, founder of a restaurant chain and vice president of the Federation of Restaurateurs and Hoteliers. "But it is necessary to create (the right) conditions for the vaccination (drive)."

"There are too many rumors, and even doctors say different things," and convincing younger employees to get vaccinated is especially difficult, he said.

Tatyana Moskalkova, the government's human rights commissioner, said the unvaccinated have cited discrimination by employers, with threats of dismissal or withholding bonuses.

At a TV awards ceremony Tuesday, popular actor Yegor Beroyev wore a yellow star akin to those worn by Jews under the Nazis in World War II, and he spoke of "waking up in a world where (COVID-19 vaccination) became an identification mark of whether you are a citizen, ... will you be able to visit institutions and events, will you enjoy all the benefits and rights."

As proof of vaccination for entering a restaurant, customers must visit a government website and get a QR code, a digital pattern designed to be read by a scanner.

Restaurant owners won concessions Thursday when Moscow agreed the QR codes aren't needed for the next two weeks at establishments with outdoor terraces, and underage customers won't have to provide documentation if accompanied by their parents.

Still, the situation for many restaurants "is hard and will be harder by the day," Mironov said.

In Moscow, online searches for fake inoculation documents increased shortly after the mayor announced mandatory vaccinations, social anthropologist Alexandra Arkhipova told an online lecture on vaccine hesitancy.

Police quickly cracked down, launching 24 criminal cases last week against sellers of fake vaccination certificates. Still, several accounts offering the bogus documents could be found easily on the Telegram messaging app this week.

The number of such offers has grown about 19% every month since March, said Evgeny Egorov, digital risk protection analyst at Group-IB, a Singapore-based cybersecurity company. In mid-June, Group-IB found at least 90 active offers, he said.

The independent pollster Levada Center said polls show about 60% of Russians are unwilling to get vaccinated.

Levada director and sociologist Denis Volkov said the vaccination mandates could change the minds of many because it's a clear signal from the government that the shots are necessary.

"I often hear (from respondents) that they wouldn't do it, are afraid and so on, but if there are restrictions, and it is required for travel, state services, or at work, then yes," Volkov said.

It could be starting to change attitudes. Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova said the average vaccination rate across Russia has almost doubled in the past week, and long lines have been seen at pop-up vaccination clinics in Moscow shopping malls.

A demand for vaccines could also lead to shortages. As of mid-May, just over 33 million doses were produced in Russia, and a significant amount was exported.

Several regions have reported supply problems this week, but Peskov said those were "temporary logistical difficulties."

Taliban gains drive Afghan government to recruit militias

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KOH DAMAN, Afghanistan (AP) — For two days the fighting was blistering. Rockets and heavy machine gun fire pounded Imam Sahib, a key district on Afghanistan's northern border with Tajikistan.

When the explosions died down and Syed Akram finally emerged from his home earlier this week, three of his neighbor's children had been killed, and a tank was burning on a nearby street corner. Several shops and a petrol station were still smoldering. In the streets, the Taliban were in control.

There were maybe 300 of them, he said. That had been plenty to overwhelm the government troops defending the town, who had numbered fewer than 100. Akram saw several bodies of soldiers in the street, but many had fled the district center.

In recent days, the Taliban have made quick gains in Afghanistan's north, overrunning multiple districts, some of them reportedly with hardly a fight, even as the U.S. and NATO press forward with their final withdrawal from Afghanistan. By all accounts their departure will be complete long before the Sept. 11 deadline set by President Joe Biden when he announced in mid-April an end to America's "forever war."

The Taliban gains are significant because of the transportation routes they provide the insurgents. But equally significant is that the north is the traditional stronghold of Afghanistan's minority ethnic groups, who aided the U.S.-led invasion that drove the Taliban from power nearly 20 years ago and have been part of the ruling leadership since.

The traditional stronghold of the Taliban, who are mostly ethnic Pashtuns, has been in the country's south and east.

With the recent gains, Taliban now control the main border crossing with Tajikistan, a main trade route. They also hold the strategic district of Doshi, critical because the one road linking Kabul to northern Afghanistan runs through it.

As a result, a worried government this week launched what it called National Mobilization, arming local volunteers. Observers say the move only resurrects militias that will be loyal to local commanders or powerful Kabul-allied warlords, who wrecked the Afghan capital during the inter-factional fighting of the 1990s and killed thousands of civilians.

"The fact that the government has put out the call for the militias is a clear admission of the failure of the security forces ... most certainly an act of desperation," said Bill Roggio, senior fellow at the U.S.-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies. Roggio tracks militant groups and is editor of the foundation's Long War Journal.

"The Afghan military and police have abandoned numerous outposts, bases, and district centers, and it is difficult to imagine that these hastily organized militias can perform better than organized security forces," he said.

On Wednesday at Koh Daman on Kabul's northern edge, dozens of armed villagers in one of the first National Mobilization militias gathered at a rally. "Death to criminals!" and "Death to Taliban!" they shouted, waving automatic rifles. Some had rocket propelled grenade launchers resting casually on their shoulders.

A handful of uniformed Afghan National Police officers watched. "We need them, we have no leadership, we have no help," said Moman, one of the policemen.

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He criticized the Defense and Interior Ministries, saying they were stuffed with overpaid officials while the front-line troops receive little pay.

"I'm the one standing here for 24 hours like this with all this equipment to defend my country," he said, indicating his weapons and vest jammed with ammunition. "But in the ministries, officials earn thousands" of dollars. He spoke on condition he be identified only by his first name for fear of reprisals.

The other police standing nearby joined in with the criticism, others nodding in agreement. New recruits in the security forces get 12,000 Afghanis a month, about \$152, with higher ranks getting the equivalent of about \$380.

The U.S. and NATO have committed to paying \$4 billion annually until 2024 to support the Afghanistan National Security and Defense Forces. Still, even Washington's official watchdog auditing spending says Afghan troops are disillusioned and demoralized with corruption rife throughout the government.

As the districts fell, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani swept through his Defense and Interior Ministries, appointing new senior leadership, including reinstating Bismillah Khan as defense minister. Khan was previously removed for corruption, and his militias have been criticized for summary killings. They were also deeply involved in the brutal civil war that led to the Taliban's takeover in 1996.

Afghan and international observers fear a similar conflict could erupt once more. During the 1990's war, multiple warlords battled for power, nearly destroying Kabul and killing at least 50,000 people — mostly civilians — in the process.

Those warlords returned to power after the Taliban's fall and have gained wealth and strength since. They are jealous of their domains, deeply distrustful of each other, and their loyalties to Ghani are fluid. Ethnic Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum Uzbek, for example, violently ousted the president's choice for governor of his Uzbek-controlled province of Faryab earlier this year.

A former adviser to the Afghan government, Torek Farhadi, called the national mobilization "a recipe for future generalized violence."

He noted the government has promised to pay the militias, even as official security forces complain salaries are often delayed for months. He predicted the same corruption would eat away at the funds meant for militias, and as a result "local commanders and warlords will quickly turn against him (Ghani) and we will have fiefdoms and chaos."

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told The Associated Press on Thursday that the insurgents captured 104 districts since May 1, including at least 29 in recent fighting. That brought the total area of Taliban control to 165 of Afghanistan's 471 districts nationwide.

There was no way to immediately verify his statements, and some areas often change hands back and forth. Most analysts tracking the front lines say the Taliban control or hold sway in roughly half the country. Their areas of control are mostly in rural areas.

Officials and observers say many across the country have allegiance to neither side and are deeply disillusioned by corruption, which has resulted in ordinary Afghans benefiting little from the trillions of dollars in international assistance pumped into the country the past 20 years.

"There is no stability. There is no peace," said Abdul Khasani, an employee at a bus station not far from the Koh Daman militia gathering.

"In Afghanistan, under the Taliban people are suffering, and under the government people are suffering," he said.

Conan O'Brien ends TBS late-night show with snark, gratitude

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Conan O'Brien stayed true to form as he wrapped his TBS show "Conan" after nearly 11 years, bouncing between self-deprecating and smart-aleck humor before allowing himself a touch of sentiment.

"Try to do what you love with people you love, and if you can manage that, it's the definition of heaven on Earth," he said, marking the end of his third late-night show over 28 years. It's a tenure second only

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to Johnny Carson's 30 years on "Tonight."

O'Brien's next venture is a weekly variety series for HBO Max, set to arrive in 2022 with an as-yet unannounced format.

The hour-long "Conan" finale Thursday was largely a trip down memory lane with clips of guests including Steve Martin, Tom Hanks and Sarah Silverman, and highlights of specials taped outside the United States. Will Ferrell appeared by Zoom from Boston, with Jack Black on hand to salute O'Brien.

Ferrell noted that he's been a guest for the conclusions of O'Brien's previous shows, "Late Night With Conan O'Brien" and "Tonight," both on NBC but with widely varying runs: the former from 1993 to 2009, the latter for less than eight months in 2009-10.

"It's kind of become a tradition," O'Brien said of Ferrell's presence.

"It's become (expletive) exhausting," Ferrell replied. He then proceeded to perform farewells that he suggested O'Brien should bank for probable future need, including for his new HBO Max series.

"People would say six episodes isn't a lot, but you packed enough entertainment in them for eight episodes," Ferrell said. He then lauded him for a string of projected talk show flops on Al Jazeera and Delta Airlines, and his YouTube "classic unboxing videos."

O'Brien, a writer for "The Simpsons" in his salad days, sat for his exit interview with surprise HR rep Homer Simpson, who was unimpressed when reminded that O'Brien was a talk show host.

"Wow, a dying breed," Simpson told the animated version of O'Brien. "There's only like 800 of you left."

Black limped onto the stage wearing an orthopedic boot, which he and O'Brien explained was because of a badly sprained ankle Black suffered during pre-taping of what was supposed to be a big-finish action and dancing skit.

In its place, Black serenaded O'Brien and his longtime sidekick Andy Richter with revamped lyrics set to the signature Frank Sinatra standard, "My Way."

"Conan, you are my friend. You are the best, and so is Andy," Black sang, switching up the lyrics to honor "Con's way."

The host, whose gravity-defying, trademark swoop of red hair has remained virtually unchanged through the years, wrapped up the show with heartfelt thanks to his colleagues, family and fans. He also shared a slice of philosophy.

"I have devoted all of my adult life, all of it, to pursuing this strange, phantom intersection between smart and stupid," things he said many people believe can't coexist. But when the two come together, he said, there is a tiny flicker of "what is a kind of magic."

O'Brien, formerly a writer for "Saturday Night Live," was championed by "SNL" creator Lorne Michaels to succeed David Letterman as "Late Night" host. Letterman moved to CBS in "The Late Show" after losing the post-Carson "Tonight" job to Jay Leno, a rivalry that became a media fixation.

In an effort to design an orderly transition, NBC executives in 2004 anointed O'Brien to take over for Leno in 2009. After ratings for "Tonight" faltered with O'Brien, Leno ended up reclaiming the show and O'Brien found a new home and, he said, more creative freedom at TBS.

Britney Spears' public support may not mean much in court

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Britney Spears' powerful plea to a judge to end the conservatorship that has controlled her life since 2008 brought sympathy and outrage from fans, famous supporters and even casual observers who say she deserves independence.

Yet lawyers who deal in such matters say the speech itself may not have helped her in the legal process, which will be long and arduous.

"When Britney spoke, I mean, the world listened. This was amazing," family law attorney Peter Walzer said. "Now, whether the judge will buy it, whether the judge will let her out of her conservatorship, my bet is no."

Spears' passionate, at times emotional address Wednesday to Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Brenda

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Penny was the first time in 13 years she has spoken in open court on the conservatorship, which she called "abusive" and "stupid." The conservatorship was put in place as Spears, hounded by paparazzi and media scrutiny while a new mother, underwent a very public mental health crisis in 2008.

Spears revisited the speech in an Instagram post Thursday, apologizing "for pretending like I've been ok the past two years.

"I did it because of my pride and I was embarrassed to share what happened to me," she said, later adding, "Believe it or not pretending that I'm ok has actually helped."

In court, Spears said she is forced to keep using an intrauterine device for birth control and take other medications, is prevented her from getting married or having another child, and is not allowed let her have her own money. She condemned her father and the others who control it.

The speech was compelling for the same reasons it may be problematic to the court. She spoke very quickly, often profanely, and could seem out of control as she rattled off injustices and the emotional turmoil they have brought her.

"It just seems to me that her presentation to her court didn't do herself any favors," said David Glass, a family law attorney with a doctorate in psychology. "The words came out like bullets. She shifted rapidly between thoughts and ideas. She also admitted to being depressed and crying all the time. I'm not her psychologist, but these are things that potentially point to being in the middle of mental illness."

Penny did not tip her hand or offer much reaction to the dramatic presentation, other than to say Spears' speech was "courageous." It's unclear how much the judge has heard before, either during Spears' previous addresses to the court in closed sessions or in the numerous sealed documents filed in the case.

"The court didn't say 'I don't agree with you,' or 'I'm concerned for you' or 'I'm disappointed these issues were not brought before me previously,'" Glass said.

There is evidence that Penny considers Spears' opinions in her decisions.

She recently appointed estate-management firm the Bessemer Trust as co-conservator of Spears' finances, though kept her father James Spears as its co-conservator against her wishes. And Penny has been keeping court hearings like Wednesday's increasingly public and leaving more documents unsealed since Spears pushed for greater transparency in the case last year.

Short of ending the conservatorship, Penny may alter it to make it more palatable to Spears, and could order an immediate investigation into some of the allegations.

"I'm alarmed if I'm the judge," said Sarah Wentz, an attorney who specializes in estates and conservatorships. "I'm going to find out ASAP if there are things we need reviewed or corrected, for the court to see if there are not human rights violations."

There is plenty of room for Penny to make changes that don't end the conservatorship entirely.

"What they can do is try to put together a plan that meets her goals and wishes in every way possible, so she only has a few things that she needs to check in on," Wentz said. "It doesn't have to be an all-in kind of thing."

Spears' court-appointed attorney, Samuel Ingham III, said that despite his client's pleas to Penny to end the conservatorship, she has yet to even ask him to file a petition to do so. He said before the presentation Wednesday that he made no attempt to "control, or filter, or edit" his client's words.

That most likely meant that while he felt compelled to pass along Spears' request to speak, it doesn't necessarily mean he agreed with her approach.

"This is why lawyers don't like their clients speaking a lot," family law attorney Chris Melcher said. "We know what to say and how to say it. Sometimes what the client says can really come back and bite them and end up proving the other side's case."

Melcher said a different approach could have proven more effective.

"I think she would be best served by a calm demeanor, acknowledgement of her past problems, and acceptance of the court's previous decisions," he said.

That was the approach taken by Ingham in recent filings for Spears that attempted to get her father removed and assert more control. Those documents acknowledged that the conservatorship had done a lot of good in its early days while forcefully arguing for change and saying she reserved the right to end

it eventually.

One thing that will certainly not happen is the conservatorship being terminated, as Spears requested, without any further evaluation of her.

A petition to terminate the conservatorship, which Ingham said he may file soon, would be only the beginning of a process that places the burden on Spears to show her competence.

"It's up to Britney or another interested person to convince the court that it needs to end," Melcher said. "This is not a voluntary process where she can just walk out the door."

Is Japan's remarkable vaccine drive in time for Olympics?

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — After months of frustration and delay, Japan has hit the remarkable benchmark of 1 million vaccines a day. But with the Olympics set to start in less than a month, and only a small portion of the country vaccinated, a question lingers: Is it enough?

The vaccination pace is quickening even as the young remain hesitant amid an anti-vaccination misinformation campaign and officials have slowed vaccination reservations as demand outpaces supply.

Add in continued political and bureaucratic bungling and the arrival of highly contagious coronavirus variants, and there are worries that the government's effort to ramp up vaccinations before the Olympics will fall short.

Thousands of private companies and some universities have joined the vaccination drive, complementing the government's effort to prioritize the full vaccination of elderly people by the end of July.

The acceleration is causing worries about a supply shortage, and further progress is now uncertain. Taro Kono, the minister in charge of inoculations, on Wednesday abruptly announced a temporary suspension of many new vaccination reservations, saying vaccine distribution cannot keep pace with demand.

"It's a tightrope situation," Kono said.

Much will depend on whether the nation's young embrace the vaccination program.

Even as more people are getting the jabs, and fully inoculating the country's 36 million senior citizens now looks likely, younger people are still largely unvaccinated, and their movements during summer vacations and the Olympics could trigger another upsurge of infections, propelled by the more contagious Delta strain, which is expected to be dominant by then, experts say.

A resurgence of cases among the young has already begun in Tokyo, which reported 619 new cases Wednesday, up from the last seven-day average of 405.

The inoculation drive could lose steam if younger people, many of whom believe they are less likely to develop serious symptoms, don't get inoculated. Skeptics are sometimes swayed by rumors and online misinformation about vaccines.

"How we might encourage younger generations to get vaccinated is a big issue," Kono said. Officials plan to reach out to them on social media to provide accurate information.

Despite worries that things will slow again, observers are acknowledging an unexpected turnaround in the vaccine campaign.

As recently as early May, only a quarter million shots were being given daily, with only 2-3% of the population fully vaccinated. The pace has since picked up to hit 1 million a day, a target set by Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga that was once widely considered overly ambitious.

As of Tuesday, about 8.2% of the country was fully vaccinated. While impressive here, given the slow rollout, it's still low compared to the U.K.'s 46.3%, America's 44.9% and the global average of 10%, according to Our World in Data.

The workplace vaccination program kicked off Monday. The government has received applications from nearly 4,000 sites run by companies and universities, covering more than 15 million employees, their families and students, the Prime Minister's Office said.

Suga now has a new target of fully vaccinating everyone who wants one by October or November. Officials haven't said when new vaccination reservations may resume, but have noted the overall timeline

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for the program won't be affected.

Japan's vaccination rollout started with medical workers in mid-February, months behind many other countries. The delay was because of additional clinical testing required for foreign-developed vaccines.

Inoculations for the elderly started in mid-April but were slowed by supply and distribution uncertainties, bungled reservation procedures and a lack of medical workers to give shots.

Japan, still without any home-developed vaccines ready for use, relies on imports. Supply has increased from May, and despite earlier expectations of vaccine hesitancy in general, senior citizens fearing the virus have rushed to get shots.

Since May 24, Japan has opened military-run vaccination sites in Tokyo and Osaka, while local municipalities have established tens of thousands of other centers nationwide.

Japanese government and Olympic officials, despite their early pledge to hold a "safe and secure" Games without vaccines, accepted the International Olympic Committee's donation of Pfizer doses for participants, while they scramble to accelerate vaccinations of the public.

If things continue apace, 70% of elderly people will be fully vaccinated by August, while 70% of workplace inoculations will be completed in late November, Mizuho Research & Technologies said in a recent report. If achieved, that would push up GDP by 1%, it said.

An array of major retailers, automakers and trading companies have started providing Moderna shots distributed by the government for free for their employees and families.

Anna Hatakeyama, a 26-year-old office worker, said she is getting her first jab next Tuesday as part of her workplace's vaccination efforts. She welcomes the shot, though believes that the rollout is still slow.

"Most of my friends haven't gotten it," she said. "I was lucky that my company will administer vaccines."

To lure younger people, tech giant SoftBank Group Corp. is offering discount tickets to SoftBank Hawks professional baseball games for those who complete vaccinations. The company opened its first inoculation site Monday in Tokyo and aims to set up more by the end of July for as many as 250,000 employees, their families and neighbors.

Japan has had a historic mistrust of vaccines, partly because rare side effects have often been played up by the media. A court ruling that held the government responsible for side effects linked to several vaccines led to the scrapping of mandatory inoculations in the 1990s.

Vaccination officials have also faced protests from skeptical parents opposed to coronavirus inoculations of children aged 12-15 who have recently been added as eligible recipients.

Earlier this month, a Kyoto town office was flooded with calls accusing officials of attempted murder by inoculating children.

Even if vaccinations climb significantly in coming months, waves of infections could still occur as long as the young are largely unvaccinated, said Dr. Shigeru Omi, a top government COVID-19 advisor.

"Though vaccines are very effective, they are not 100%, and I believe it will take some time before we can get the infections under control," Omi said. "We have to wait a while before dropping our guard."

US to keep about 650 troops in Afghanistan after withdrawal

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and ROBERT BURNS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Roughly 650 U.S. troops are expected to remain in Afghanistan to provide security for diplomats after the main American military force completes its withdrawal, which is set to be largely done in the next two weeks, U.S. officials told The Associated Press.

In addition, several hundred additional American forces will remain at the Kabul airport, potentially until September, to assist Turkish troops providing security, as a temporary move until a more formal Turkey-led security operation is in place, the officials said Thursday. Overall, officials said the U.S. expects to have American and coalition military command, its leadership and most troops out by July Fourth, or shortly after that, meeting an aspirational deadline that commanders developed months ago.

The officials were not authorized to discuss details of the withdrawal and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

The departure of the bulk of the more than 4,000 troops that have been in the country in recent months

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is unfolding well before President Joe Biden's Sept. 11 deadline for withdrawal. And it comes amid accelerating Taliban battlefield gains, fueling fears that the Afghan government and its military could collapse in a matter of months.

Officials have repeatedly stressed that security at the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul is a critical requirement to keeping any U.S. diplomatic staff in Afghanistan. Still, the decision to keep additional troops there for several more months makes it more complicated for the Biden administration to declare a true end to America's longest war until later this fall. And it keeps the embattled country near the forefront of U.S. national security challenges, even as the White House tries to put the 20-year-old war behind it and focus more on threats from China and Russia.

In a statement Thursday night, Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said that as Biden has ordered, the U.S. will complete the withdrawal by early September. "Nothing has changed about that goal," Kirby said. "The situation is dynamic, and we review our progress daily. Speculation by unnamed sources about potential changes to that timeline should not be construed as predictive."

On Friday, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, chair of the High Council for National Reconciliation, are meeting with Biden at the White House. The two Afghan leaders also are to meet at the Pentagon with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and possibly other administration officials, the Pentagon announced.

Getting most troops out by early July had been in doubt because of complications including an outbreak of COVID-19 at the U.S. Embassy and the push to get Afghan interpreters and others who helped the U.S. out of the country. Officials said U.S. commanders and NATO allies in Afghanistan have been able to overcome logistical hurdles that might have prolonged the withdrawal process. But they also warned that plans in place for the final stages of the U.S. military withdrawal could change if airport security agreements fall through or there are other major, unforeseen developments.

As recently as last week, there was discussion of possibly extending the U.S. troop presence at Bagram Airfield, north of Kabul, but officials said the U.S. presence at the base is expected to end in the next several days.

The roughly 650 U.S. troops that are planned to be a more permanent force presence in Afghanistan will provide security for the U.S. Embassy and some ongoing support at the airport. Officials said the U.S. has agreed to leave a C-RAM — or Counter-Rocket, Artillery, Mortar system — at the airport, as well as troops to operate it, as part of an agreement with Turkey. The U.S. also plans to leave aircrew for helicopter support at the airport.

According to the officials, Turkey has largely agreed to provide security at the airport as long as it receives support from American forces. U.S. and Turkish military officials are meeting in Ankara this week to finalize arrangements.

On Wednesday, Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said there is not yet a written agreement with Turks on airport security. He said he did not want to speak about specifics before there is a final agreement, but added, "I feel very comfortable that security at the Kabul airport will be maintained and the Turks will be a part of that."

The U.S. troop departure, which began with Biden's announcement in April that he was ending U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan, is ramping up just as the administration moves ahead with plans to evacuate tens of thousands of interpreters and others who worked with American forces during the war and now fear for their safety.

A senior administration official said Thursday that planning has accelerated in recent days to relocate the Afghans and their families to other countries or U.S. territories while their visa applications are processed. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss unannounced plans. The administration intends to carry out the evacuation later this summer, likely in August, according to a second official familiar with the deliberations but not authorized to discuss them publicly.

The Pentagon has said the military is prepared to assist the State Department as needed but indicated that charter flights might be adequate to move the Afghan visa applicants, thus not necessarily requiring a military airlift.

Officials said that NATO allies, such as Germany, are also very close to being completely out of the country. Senior Pentagon leaders, including Austin, have been cautious in recent weeks when asked about the troop withdrawal, and they have declined to provide any public details on when the last troops would leave, citing security concerns.

Biden extols bipartisan infrastructure deal as a good start

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, JOSH BOAK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has announced a hard-earned bipartisan agreement on a pared-down infrastructure plan that would make a start on his top legislative priority and validate his efforts to reach across the political aisle.

But he openly acknowledged Thursday that Democrats will likely have to tackle much of the rest on their own.

The bill's price tag at \$973 billion over five years, or \$1.2 trillion over eight years, is a scaled-back but still significant piece of Biden's broader proposals.

It includes more than a half-trillion dollars in new spending and could open the door to the president's more sweeping \$4 trillion proposals for child care and what the White House calls human infrastructure later on.

"When we can find common ground, working across party lines, that is what I will seek to do," said Biden, who deemed the agreement "a true bipartisan effort, breaking the ice that too often has kept us frozen in place."

The president stressed that "neither side got everything they wanted in this deal; that's what it means to compromise," and said that other White House priorities would be taken on separately in a congressional budget process known as reconciliation, which allows for majority passage without the need for Republican votes.

He insisted that the two items would be done "in tandem" and that he would not sign the bipartisan deal without the other, bigger piece. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and progressive members of Congress declared they would hold to the same approach.

"There ain't going to be a bipartisan bill without a reconciliation bill," Pelosi said.

Claiming a major victory five months into his presidency, Biden said, "This reminds me of the days when we used to get an awful lot done up in the United States Congress." Biden, a former Delaware senator, said that as he put his hand on the shoulder of a stoic-looking Republican Sen. Rob Portman of Ohio as the president made a surprise appearance with a bipartisan group of senators to announce the deal outside the White House.

But the next steps are not likely to be nearly so smooth.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell complained that Biden was "caving" to Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's plan to "hold the bipartisan agreement hostage" for the president's bigger package of what he called "wasteful" spending.

"That's not the way to show you're serious about getting a bipartisan outcome," McConnell said.

And there is plenty of skepticism on Biden's own left flank. Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut said the bipartisan agreement is "way too small — paltry, pathetic. I need a clear, ironclad assurance that there will be a really adequate robust package" that will follow.

Thursday's deal was struck by the bipartisan group led by Portman and Democrat Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, including some of the more independent lawmakers in the Senate, some known for bucking their parties.

"You know there are many who say bipartisanship is dead in Washington," Sinema said. "We can use bipartisanship to solve these challenges."

And Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said, "It sends an important message to the world as well that America can function, can get things done."

The proposal includes both new and existing spending on long-running programs and highlights the

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struggle lawmakers faced in coming up with ways to pay for what have typically been popular ideas.

The investments include \$109 billion on roads and highways and \$15 billion on electric vehicle infrastructure and transit systems as part of \$312 billion in transportation spending. There's \$65 billion toward broadband and expenditures on drinking water systems and \$47 billion in resiliency efforts to tackle climate change.

Rather than Biden's proposed corporate tax hike that Republicans oppose or the gas tax increase that the president rejected, funds will be tapped from a range of sources — without a full tally yet, according to a White House document.

Money will come from \$125 billion in COVID-19 relief funds approved in 2020 but not yet spent, as well as untapped unemployment insurance funds that Democrats have been hesitant to poach. Other revenue is expected by going harder after tax cheats by beefing up Internal Revenue Service enforcement that Portman said could yield \$100 billion.

The rest is a hodgepodge of asset sales and accounting tools, including funds coming from 5G telecommunication spectrum lease sales, strategic petroleum reserve and an expectation that the sweeping investment will generate economic growth — what the White House calls the "macroeconomic impact of infrastructure investment."

The senators from both parties stressed that the deal will create jobs for the economy and rebuild the nation's standing on the global stage, a belief that clearly transcended the partisan interests and created a framework for the deal.

"We're going to keep working together — we're not finished," Republican Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah said. "But America works, the Senate works."

Democratic Sen. Jon Tester of Montana said it will show the world "we're not just, you know, a hot mess here."

For Biden, the deal was a welcome result. Though for far less than he originally sought, Biden had bet his political capital that he could work with Republicans toward major legislation.

Moreover, Biden and his aides believed that they needed a bipartisan deal on infrastructure to create a permission structure for more moderate Democrats — including Sinema and Joe Manchin of West Virginia — to then be willing to go for a party-line vote for the rest of the president's agenda.

The announcement leaves unclear the fate of Biden's promises of massive investment to slow climate change, which Biden this spring called "the existential crisis of our times."

Biden's presidential campaign had helped win progressive backing with pledges of major spending on electric vehicles, charging stations, and research and funding for overhauling the U.S. economy to run on less oil, gas and coal. The administration is expected to push for some of that in future legislation.

Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La, stressed that there are billions of dollars for resiliency against extreme weather and the impact of climate change and deemed Thursday's deal a "beginning investment."

Biden has sought \$1.7 trillion in his American Jobs Plan and the \$1.8 trillion American Families Plan for child care centers, family tax breaks and other investments that Republicans reject as far outside the scope of "infrastructure."

The broad reconciliation bill would likely include tax increases on the wealthy, those earning more than \$400,000 a year, and hike the corporate rate from 21% to 28%, so a tension still exists over funding for some Republicans and business groups.

It's still a long haul to a bill signing at the White House. The Senate expects to consider the bipartisan package in July, but Biden's bigger proposal is not expected to see final votes until fall.

Chauvin could face decadeslong sentence in Floyd's death

By AMY FORLITI and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Former Minneapolis police Officer Derek Chauvin learns his sentence Friday for murder in George Floyd's death, closing a chapter in a case that sparked global outrage and a reckoning on racial disparities in America.

Chauvin, 45, faces decades in prison, with several legal experts predicting a sentence of 20 to 25 years.

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Though Chauvin is widely expected to appeal, he also still faces trial on federal civil rights charges, along with three other fired officers who have yet to have their state trials.

The concrete barricades, razor wire and National Guard patrols that shrouded the county courthouse for Chauvin's three-week trial are gone, and so is most of the tension in the city as it awaited a verdict in April. Still, there's a recognition that Chauvin's sentencing will be another major step forward for a city that has been on edge since Floyd's death on May 25, 2020.

"Between the incident, the video, the riots, the trial — this is the pinnacle of it," Mike Brandt, a local defense attorney who has closely followed Chauvin's case, said. "The verdict was huge too, but this is where the justice comes down."

Chauvin was convicted of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter for pressing his knee against Floyd's neck for about 9 1/2 minutes as the Black man said he couldn't breathe and went limp. Bystander video of Floyd's arrest for suspicion of passing a counterfeit \$20 bill prompted protests around the world and a nationwide reckoning on race and police brutality.

Under Minnesota statutes, Chauvin will be sentenced only on the most serious charge, which has a maximum sentence of 40 years. But case law dictates that a 30-year sentence would be the practical maximum sentence Judge Peter Cahill could impose without risk of being overturned on appeal.

Prosecutors asked for 30 years, saying Chauvin's actions were egregious and "shocked the nation's conscience." Defense attorney Eric Nelson requested probation, saying Chauvin was the product of a "broken" system and "believed he was doing his job."

Cahill has already found that aggravating factors in Floyd's death warrant going higher than the 12 1/2-year sentence recommended by the state's sentencing guidelines. The judge found Chauvin abused his position of authority, treated Floyd with particular cruelty, and that the crime was seen by several children. He also wrote that Chauvin knew the restraint of Floyd was dangerous.

"The prolonged use of this technique was particularly egregious in that George Floyd made it clear he was unable to breathe and expressed the view that he was dying as a result of the officers' restraint," Cahill wrote last month.

Attorneys on both sides are expected to make brief arguments Friday, and victims or family members of victims can make statements. No family members have said publicly that they will speak.

Chauvin can also make a statement, but it's not clear if he will. Experts say it could be tricky for Chauvin to talk without implicating himself in the pending federal case accusing him of violating Floyd's civil rights.

Chauvin chose not to testify at his trial. The only explanation the public has heard from him came from body-camera footage in which he told a bystander at the scene: "We got to control this guy 'cause he's a sizable guy ... and it looks like he's probably on something."

Several experts said they doubted Chauvin would take the risk and speak, but Brandt thought he would. He said Chauvin could say a few words without getting himself into legal trouble.

"I think it's his chance to tell the world, 'I didn't intend to kill him,'" Brandt said. "If I was him, I think I would want to try and let people know that I'm not a monster."

Several people interviewed in Minneapolis days before Chauvin's sentencing said they want to see a tough sentence.

Thirty years "doesn't seem like long enough to me," said Andrew Harer, a retail worker who is white. "I would be fine if he was in jail for the rest of his life."

Joseph Allen, 31, who is Black, said he thinks Chauvin should receive "at least" 30 years, and said he'd prefer a life sentence. He cited nearly 20 complaints filed against the now-fired officer during his career.

Allen said he hopes other police officers can learn "not to do what Derek Chauvin did."

Nekima Levy Armstrong, a civil rights attorney and activist, called for Chauvin to be sentenced "to the fullest extent of the law." She called Floyd's death "a modern day lynching" and predicted community outrage if Chauvin is sentenced lightly.

When asked if she would like to hear Chauvin speak, Levy Armstrong said: "For me as a Black woman living in this community, there's really nothing that he could say that would alleviate the pain and trauma

that he caused ... I think that if he spoke it would be disingenuous and could cause more trauma.”

No matter what sentence Chauvin gets, he’s likely to serve only about two-thirds behind bars presuming good behavior. The rest would be on supervised release.

He’s been held since his conviction at the state’s only maximum security prison, in Oak Park Heights. The former officer is held away from the general population for his safety, in a 10-by-10-foot cell, with meals brought to his room. He is allowed out for solitary exercise for an hour a day.

It’s not clear if Chauvin will remain there. State prisons officials said that decision wouldn’t be made until after Cahill’s formal sentencing order.

Chauvin and the three other officers involved in Floyd’s arrest are awaiting trial in federal court on charges of violating Floyd’s civil rights. No trial date has been set.

The three other officers are also scheduled for trial in March on state charges of aiding and abetting both murder and manslaughter.

House GOP leader to meet with officer hurt in Capitol riot

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, NOMAAN MERCHANT and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A police officer who was injured in the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection and has pushed for an independent commission to investigate the attack will meet with House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy on Friday, according to two people familiar with the meeting.

Officer Michael Fanone has said for weeks that he wanted to meet with McCarthy, who has opposed a commission and remained loyal to former President Donald Trump. It was a violent mob of Trump’s supporters that attacked the Capitol and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden’s victory after the former president told them to “fight like hell” to overturn his defeat.

The meeting comes after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced Thursday that she is creating a special committee to investigate the attack. She said a partisan-led probe was the only option left after Senate Republicans blocked legislation to form a bipartisan commission.

Fanone is expected to be joined by Capitol Police Officer Harry Dunn, who was also among the officers who responded to the rioting, and Gladys Sicknick, the mother of Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, according to one of the people and a third person familiar with the meeting. Brian Sicknick collapsed and died after engaging with the mob; a medical examiner ruled that he died of natural causes.

The three people spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private meeting.

The meetings are part of an effort by the officers and family members to bring attention to the violence of that day and to win Senate approval of a bipartisan commission. The group has become more active as some House Republicans have begun to downplay the severity of the insurrection, in which Trump’s supporters brutally beat officers, broke through windows and doors of the Capitol and hunted for lawmakers.

Fanone, Dunn and Gladys Sicknick have all aggressively lobbied for the commission — which would be modeled after a similar panel that investigated the 9/11 terrorist attacks — and they visited the offices of several Republican senators before the vote last month. Seven Republican senators voted with Democrats to consider the legislation that would form the bipartisan panel, but it still fell short of the 60 votes needed to move forward.

Fanone, a Metropolitan Police officer who has described being dragged down the Capitol steps by rioters who shocked him with a stun gun and beat him, said then that it is “necessary for us to heal as a nation from the trauma that we all experienced that day.”

Similarly, Dunn has described fighting the rioters in hand-to-hand combat and being the target of racial slurs.

The House passed the bill to form a commission last month, and Pelosi, D-Calif., said it was her preference to have an independent panel lead the inquiry. But she said Thursday that Congress could not wait any longer to begin a deeper look at the insurrection.

“Jan. 6 was a day of darkness for our country,” Pelosi said, and the “terror and trauma” to members and staff who were there is something she cannot forgive. She said there is no fixed timeline for the commit-

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tee, which will investigate and report on the facts and causes of the attack and make recommendations to prevent it from happening again.

She did not say who will lead or serve on the panel.

Pelosi's official announcement, two days after she signaled to colleagues that she would create the committee, means Democrats will lead what probably will be the most comprehensive look at the siege. More than three dozen Republicans in the House and the seven Republicans in the Senate said they wanted to avoid such a partisan investigation and supported the legislation to form a commission.

Pelosi says that the select committee could be complementary to an independent panel and that she is "hopeful there could be a commission at some point." Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has said he might hold a second vote, but there's no indication that any GOP votes have changed.

McCarthy didn't comment on the select panel after Pelosi's announcement, saying only in a brief interview that he hadn't heard about it.

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 attack.

And some Republicans have gone further, with one suggesting the rioters looked like tourists and another insisting that a Trump supporter named Ashli Babbitt, who was shot and killed that day while trying to break into the House chamber, was "executed."

And last week, 21 Republicans voted against giving medals of honor to the U.S. Capitol Police and the Metropolitan Police to thank them for their service on Jan. 6. Dozens of those officers suffered injuries, including chemical burns, brain injuries and broken bones.

McCarthy voted for the measure.

Seven people died during and after the rioting, including Babbitt and three other Trump supporters who died of medical emergencies. In addition to Sicknick, two police officers died by suicide in the days that followed.

Affidavit: FBI feared Pennsylvania would seize fabled gold

By MICHAEL RUBINKAM Associated Press

An FBI agent applied for a federal warrant in 2018 to seize a fabled cache of U.S. government gold he said was "stolen during the Civil War" and hidden in a Pennsylvania cave, saying the state might take the gold for itself if the feds asked for permission, according to court documents unsealed Thursday.

The newly unsealed affidavit confirms previous reporting by The Associated Press that the government had been looking for a legendary cache of gold at the site, which federal authorities had long refused to confirm. In any case, the FBI said, the dig came up empty.

The AP and The Philadelphia Inquirer petitioned a federal judge to unseal the case. Federal prosecutors did not oppose the request, and the judge agreed, paving the way for Thursday's release of documents.

"I have probable cause to believe that a significant cache of gold is secreted in the underground cave" in Dent's Run, holding "one or more tons" belonging to the U.S. government, wrote Jacob Archer of the FBI's art crime team in Philadelphia.

Archer told the judge he needed a seizure warrant because he feared that if the federal government sought permission from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to excavate the site, the state would claim the gold for itself, setting up a costly legal battle.

"I am concerned that, even if DCNR gave initial consent for the FBI to excavate the cache of gold secreted at the Dent's Run Site, that consent could be revoked before the FBI recovered the United States property, with the result of DCNR unlawfully claiming that that cache of gold is abandoned property and, thus, belongs to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania," the affidavit said.

Archer also revealed allegations against a legislative staffer who, he wrote, tried to get some of the loot for himself.

In 2013, the affidavit said, the legislative staffer contacted a pair of treasure hunters who had identified

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the likely site of the gold. The staffer "corruptly" offered to get the treasure hunters a state permit to dig "in return for three bars of gold or ten percent" of whatever they recovered. The staffer said he was acting on behalf of others in state government, according to Archer, including "someone who controlled money going to DCNR and someone working in the Pennsylvania governor's office."

No one has been charged in connection with the case, and federal prosecutors say they consider the matter closed. A spokesperson for the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources declined comment.

The FBI had long refused to explain exactly why it went digging on state-owned land in Elk County in March 2018, saying only in written statements over the years that agents were there for a court-authorized excavation of "what evidence suggested may have been a cultural heritage site."

According to the affidavit, the FBI based its request for a seizure warrant partly on the work done by the treasure hunters, who had made hundreds of trips to the area. The father-son duo told authorities they believed they had found the location of the fabled Union gold, which, according to legend, was either lost or stolen on its way to the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia in 1863.

After meeting with the treasure hunters in early 2018, the FBI brought in a contractor with more sophisticated instruments. The contractor detected an underground mass that weighed up to nine tons and had the density of gold, the affidavit said.

That amount of gold would today be worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Archer wrote that he also spoke with a journalist, identified as "Person 3," who had done extensive research on a Civil War-era group called the Knights of the Golden Circle. The KGC, Archer wrote, was a secret society of Confederate sympathizers that had purportedly "buried secret caches of weapons, coins, and gold and silver bullion, much of which was stolen from robberies of banks, trains carrying payroll of the Union Army during the Civil War and from northern army military posts, in southern, western and northern states."

Archer said that a turtle carving found on a rock near the proposed dig site was "very likely ... a KGC marker for that site."

Archer wasn't able to confirm the U.S. Mint had actually missed any expected shipments of gold because the Mint did not have records for the Civil War period, the affidavit said.

The FBI apparently did not indicate to the judge, in writing, what it found at the site, according to the documents unsealed Thursday. A spokesperson for the U.S. attorney's office in Philadelphia said that no such document was filed with the court because the dig came up empty.

Dennis and Kem Parada, co-owners of the treasure-hunting outfit Finders Keepers, have said they believe the FBI found gold at the site. They are seeking thousands of pages of FBI documents about the investigation as well as video files of the dig.

Their attorney, Bill Cluck, said the court documents revealed Thursday simply raise more questions.

He noted the warrant granted by U.S. Magistrate Judge Richard Lloret gave FBI agents permission to dig from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. But residents have told of hearing a backhoe and jackhammer overnight — when the excavation was supposed to have been paused — and seeing a convoy of FBI vehicles, including large armored trucks.

In addition, it is telling that the FBI never checked back with the contractor whose sensitive instruments had indicated the possible presence of gold to ask what went wrong, said Warren Getler, the journalist identified as "Person 3" in the affidavit.

"Did the science really go wrong? I am not so sure about that," said Getler, author of "Rebel Gold," a book exploring the possibility of buried Civil War-era caches of gold and silver.

"Why did they send four or five armored cars after the fact?" he asked. "Why did they work under cover of darkness? Why did they kick us off the mountain at 3 p.m. that day when we were supposed to be working as partners?"

The FBI assertion of an empty hole is "insulting all the credible people who did this kind of work," Dennis Parada previously told the AP. "It was a slap in the face, really, to think all these people could make that kind of mistake."

Many feared dead after Florida beachfront condo collapses

By WILFREDO LEE, TERRY SPENCER and DAVID FISCHER Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — A beachfront condo building partially collapsed Thursday outside Miami, killing at least one person and trapping others in the tower that resembled a giant fractured dollhouse, with one side sheared away. Dozens of survivors were pulled out, and rescuers kept up a desperate search for more.

A wing of the 12-story building in the community of Surfside came down with a roar around 1:30 a.m. By late evening, nearly 100 people were still unaccounted for, authorities said, raising fears that the death toll could climb sharply. Officials did not know how many were in the tower when it fell.

"The building is literally pancaked," Surfside Mayor Charles Burkett said. "That is heartbreaking because it doesn't mean, to me, that we are going to be as successful as we wanted to be in finding people alive."

Hours after the collapse, searchers were trying to reach a trapped child whose parents were believed to be dead. In another case, rescuers saved a mother and child, but the woman's leg had to be amputated to remove her from the rubble, Frank Rollason, director of Miami-Dade emergency management, told the Miami Herald.

Video showed fire crews removing a boy from the wreckage, but it was not clear whether he was the same person mentioned by Rollason. Teams were trying to enter the building from a parking garage beneath the structure.

Gov. Ron DeSantis, who toured the scene, said television did not capture the scale of what happened.

Rescue crews are "doing everything they can to save lives. That is ongoing, and they're not going to rest," he said.

Teams of 10 to 12 rescuers at a time entered the rubble with dogs and other equipment, working until they grew tired from the heavy lifting, then making way for a new team, said Florida Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis, the state's fire marshal.

"They're not going to stop just because of nightfall," Patronis told Miami television station WPLG. "They just may have a different path they pursue."

Patronis said he was deeply moved by the image of a bunk bed near the now-exposed top of the building.

"Somebody was probably sleeping in it," he said. "There's all those what-ifs."

Authorities did not say what may have caused the collapse. On video footage captured from nearby, the center of the building appeared to fall first, with a section nearest the ocean teetering and coming down seconds later as a huge dust cloud swallowed the neighborhood.

Work was being done on the building's roof, but Burkett said he did not see how that could have been the cause.

President Joe Biden promised to provide federal aid if requested.

Hotels opened to some displaced residents, the mayor said, and deliveries of food, medicine and more were being hastily arranged.

About half of the building's roughly 130 units were affected, the mayor told a news conference. Rescuers pulled at least 35 people from the rubble by mid-morning, and heavy equipment was being brought in to help stabilize the structure to provide more access, Raide Jadallah of Miami-Dade Fire and Rescue said.

The tower has a mix of seasonal and year-round residents, and while the building keeps a log of guests, it does not keep track of when owners are in residence, Burkett said.

Fortuna Smukler posted about the disaster on Facebook, hoping that someone would know the whereabouts of Myriam Caspi Notkin and Arnie Notkin, an elderly couple who lived on the third floor.

Arnie Notkin spent years teaching physical education at a local elementary school, said Smukler, a North Miami Beach commissioner who is friends with Myriam Notkin's daughters.

"He was such a well-liked P.E. teacher from people's past," she said. "Everyone's been posting, 'Oh my god, he was my coach.'"

"It would be a miracle if they're found alive," she added.

Nicholas Fernandez spent hours after the collapse trying to call two friends who were staying in the build-

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ing with their young daughter. The family had come to the United States to avoid the COVID-19 outbreak in their home country of Argentina, said Fernandez, of Miami.

"The hope is that, perhaps, someone hears the call. I know there are dogs inside," he said. "I know it may sound ridiculous what I'm saying but there's always hope until we hear different."

A total of 22 South Americans were missing in the collapse — nine from Argentina, six from Paraguay, four from Venezuela and three from Uruguay, according to officials in those countries.

The collapse, which appeared to affect one leg of the L-shaped tower, tore away walls and ripped open some homes in the still-standing part of the building. Television footage showed beds, tables and chairs inside. Air conditioners hung from some parts of the building, where wires dangled.

Barry Cohen, 63, said he and his wife were asleep in the building when he first heard what he thought was a crack of thunder. The couple went onto their balcony, then opened the door to the building's hallway to find "a pile of rubble and dust and smoke billowing around."

"I couldn't walk out past my doorway," said Cohen, the former vice mayor of Surfside.

Surfside City Commissioner Eliana Salzhauer told WPLG that the building's county-mandated 40-year recertification process was ongoing. Salzhauer said the process was believed to be proceeding without difficulty. A building inspector was on-site Wednesday.

"I want to know why this happened," Salzhauer said. "That's really the only question. ... And can it happen again? Are any other of our buildings in town in jeopardy?"

The seaside condo development was built in 1981. It had a few two-bedroom units on the market, with asking prices of \$600,000 to \$700,000. The area's neighborhood feel offers a stark contrast to the glitz and bustle of nearby South Beach.

The area has a mix of new and old apartments, houses, condominiums and hotels, with restaurants and stores serving an international combination of residents and tourists. The main oceanside drag is lined with glass-sided, luxury condominium buildings, but more modest houses are on the inland side. Among the neighborhood's residents are snowbirds, Russian immigrants and Orthodox Jewish families.

Falling short: Why the White House will miss its vax target

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Standing in the State Dining Room on May 4, President Joe Biden laid out a lofty goal to vaccinate 70% of American adults by Independence Day, saying the U.S. would need to overcome "doubters" and laziness to do it. "This is your choice," he told Americans. "It's life and death."

As for the ambition of his 70% goal, Biden added: "I'd like to get it at 100%, but I think realistically we can get to that place between now and July Fourth."

He won't.

With the July Fourth holiday approaching, the White House acknowledged this week that Biden will fall shy of his 70% goal and an associated aim of fully vaccinating 165 million adults in the same time frame. The missed milestones are notable in a White House that has been organized around a strategy of underpromising and overdelivering for the American public.

White House officials, while acknowledging they are set to fall short, insist they're unconcerned. "We don't see it exactly like something went wrong," press secretary Jen Psaki said this week, stressing that Americans' lives are better off than they were when Biden announced the goal.

As of Wednesday, 65.6% of Americans age 18 and older had received at least one shot, according to the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control. The figure is expected to be over 67% by July 4.

A half-dozen officials involved in the vaccination campaign, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the missed target candidly, pointed to a combination of factors, including the lessened sense of urgency that followed early success in the vaccination campaign; a decision to reach for a higher goal; and unexpectedly strong recalcitrance among some Americans toward getting a shot.

Nonetheless, the White House says it's not letting up on its vaccination efforts. Biden flew to Raleigh, North Carolina, on Thursday to urge people to roll up their sleeves as part of a nationwide "month of action"

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to drive up the vaccination rate before the holiday. The White House is rolling out increasingly localized programs to encourage specific communities to get vaccinated.

"The best way to protect yourself against the virus and its variants is to be fully vaccinated," Biden said after he toured a mobile vaccination unit and met with frontline workers and volunteers. "It works. It's free. It's safe. It's easy."

The White House always expected a drop-off in vaccination rates, but not as sharp as has proved to be the case. The scale of American reluctance to get vaccinated remains a source of global curiosity, particularly as many nations are still scrambling for doses to protect their most vulnerable populations.

When the 70% goal was first announced by Biden seven weeks ago, more than 800,000 Americans on average were getting their first vaccine dose each day — down from a high of nearly 2 million per day in early April. Now that figure is below 300,000.

Paradoxically, officials believe the strong response to the early vaccination campaign has served to reduce motivation to get a shot for some. One of the most potent motivators was the high rate of COVID-19 cases and deaths. Now that those figures have dropped to levels not seen since the onset of the pandemic, officials say it's become harder to convince Americans of the urgency to get a shot — particularly for younger populations that already knew they were at low risk of serious complications from the virus.

Separately, two officials involved in the crafting of the 70% goal said that officials knew 65% would have been a safer bet, but that the White House wanted to reach for a figure closer to experts' projections of what would be needed for herd immunity to bring down cases and deaths. Aiming for the higher target, the officials said, was seen as adding to the urgency of the campaign and probably increased the vaccination rate above where it would have been with a more modest goal.

Other officials said the White House, which has always cast the vaccination campaign as "hard," nevertheless failed to grasp the resistance of some Americans to getting a shot when it set the 70% goal.

"The hesitation among younger Americans and among Trump voters has been too hard to overcome," said GOP pollster Frank Luntz, who has worked with the White House and outside groups to promote vaccinations. "They think they are making a statement by refusing to be vaccinated. For Trump voters, it's a political statement. For younger adults, it's about telling the world that they are immune."

Of the White House, Luntz said, "I think they did as good a job as they could have done."

The White House points to all that the nation has achieved to play down the significance of the goals it will miss.

Back in March, Biden projected a July Fourth holiday during which Americans would be able to safely gather in small groups for outdoor barbecues — a milestone reached months ago. Nearly all states have lifted their virus restrictions, businesses and schools are open and large gatherings are resuming nationwide.

"The most important metric at the end of the day is: What are we able to do in our lives? How much of 'normal' have we been able to recapture?" said Surgeon General Vivek Murthy. "And I think what we are seeing now is that we have exceeded our expectations."

The White House also has taken to crunching the vaccination numbers in new ways to put a positive spin on the situation. On Tuesday, the administration announced that 70% of adults 30 and over have been vaccinated — removing the most hesitant population from its denominator. But even that statistic glosses over lower vaccination rates among middle-aged adults (62.4% for those aged 40-49) and millennials (52.8% for those aged 25-39).

The administration's predicament is all the more notable given what had been an unbroken streak of fulfilled vaccination goals. Before taking office, Biden pledged to vaccinate 100 million Americans in the first 100 days of his presidency — a rate that the U.S. was exceeding by the time he was sworn in. Within days he suggested a goal of 150 million and ultimately easily met a revised goal of 200 million shots in the first 100 days.

Biden's 70% goal also was achievable, officials say — if in retrospect too ambitious — but critically relied less on the government's ability to procure shots and build capacity to inject them and more on individuals' willingness to get vaccinated.

"We did that as a team, relying very heavily or exclusively on the docs and scientists," White House

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COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients said Tuesday on how the targets were selected.

More significant than the 70% statistic, officials said, is the vast regional disparities in vaccination, with a state like Vermont vaccinating more than 80% of its population while some in the South and West are below 50%. Within states, there's even greater variation. In Missouri, some southern and northern counties are well short of 40% and one county is at just 13%.

With the delta variant first identified in India taking hold in the U.S., officials say the next vaccination boost may not come from incentives like lotteries or giveaways, but out of renewed fears of preventable illness and death. Other officials project a significant increase in vaccine uptake once the shots, which have received emergency-use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration, receive final approval from the agency.

Heading into the end of the month, another Biden goal also was in doubt.

The president last month set a target of shipping 80 million COVID-19 excess vaccine doses overseas by the end of June. U.S. officials say the doses are ready to go, but that regulatory and legal roadblocks in recipient countries are slowing deliveries.

About 10 million have been shipped so far, including 3 million sent Wednesday to Brazil. Shipments are expected to pick up, but meeting the goal by June 30 appears unlikely.

Biden extols bipartisan infrastructure deal as a good start

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, JOSH BOAK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden announced on Thursday a hard-earned bipartisan agreement on a pared-down infrastructure plan that would make a start on his top legislative priority and validate his efforts to reach across the political aisle. But he openly acknowledged that Democrats will likely have to tackle much of the rest on their own.

The bill's price tag at \$973 billion over five years, or \$1.2 trillion over eight years, is a scaled-back but still significant piece of Biden's broader proposals.

It includes more than a half-trillion dollars in new spending and could open the door to the president's more sweeping \$4 trillion proposals for child care and what the White House calls human infrastructure later on.

"When we can find common ground, working across party lines, that is what I will seek to do," said Biden, who deemed the agreement "a true bipartisan effort, breaking the ice that too often has kept us frozen in place."

The president stressed that "neither side got everything they wanted in this deal; that's what it means to compromise," and said that other White House priorities would be taken on separately in a congressional budget process known as reconciliation, which allows for majority passage without the need for Republican votes.

He insisted that the two items would be done "in tandem" and that he would not sign the bipartisan deal without the other, bigger piece. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and progressive members of Congress declared they would hold to the same approach.

"There ain't going to be a bipartisan bill without a reconciliation bill," Pelosi said.

Claiming a major victory five months into his presidency, Biden said, "This reminds me of the days when we used to get an awful lot done up in the United States Congress." Biden, a former Delaware senator, said that as he put his hand on the shoulder of a stoic-looking Republican Sen. Rob Portman of Ohio as the president made a surprise appearance with a bipartisan group of senators to announce the deal outside the White House.

But the next steps are not likely to be nearly so smooth.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell complained that Biden was "caving" to Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's plan to "hold the bipartisan agreement hostage" for the president's bigger package of what he called "wasteful" spending.

"That's not the way to show you're serious about getting a bipartisan outcome," McConnell said.

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And there is plenty of skepticism on Biden's own left flank. Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut said the bipartisan agreement is "way too small — paltry, pathetic. I need a clear, ironclad assurance that there will be a really adequate robust package" that will follow.

Thursday's deal was struck by the bipartisan group led by Portman and Democrat Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, including some of the more independent lawmakers in the Senate, some known for bucking their parties.

"You know there are many who say bipartisanship is dead in Washington," Sinema said. "We can use bipartisanship to solve these challenges."

And Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said, "It sends an important message to the world as well that America can function, can get things done."

The proposal includes both new and existing spending on long-running programs and highlights the struggle lawmakers faced in coming up with ways to pay for what have typically been popular ideas.

The investments include \$109 billion on roads and highways and \$15 billion on electric vehicle infrastructure and transit systems as part of \$312 billion in transportation spending. There's \$65 billion toward broadband and expenditures on drinking water systems and \$47 billion in resiliency efforts to tackle climate change.

Rather than Biden's proposed corporate tax hike that Republicans oppose or the gas tax increase that the president rejected, funds will be tapped from a range of sources — without a full tally yet, according to a White House document.

Money will come from \$125 billion in COVID-19 relief funds approved in 2020 but not yet spent, as well as untapped unemployment insurance funds that Democrats have been hesitant to poach. Other revenue is expected by going harder after tax cheats by beefing up Internal Revenue Service enforcement that Portman said could yield \$100 billion.

The rest is a hodgepodge of asset sales and accounting tools, including funds coming from 5G telecommunication spectrum lease sales, strategic petroleum reserve and an expectation that the sweeping investment will generate economic growth — what the White House calls the "macroeconomic impact of infrastructure investment."

The senators from both parties stressed that the deal will create jobs for the economy and rebuild the nation's standing on the global stage, a belief that clearly transcended the partisan interests and created a framework for the deal.

"We're going to keep working together — we're not finished," Republican Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah said. "But America works, the Senate works."

Democratic Sen. Jon Tester of Montana said it will show the world "we're not just, you know, a hot mess here."

For Biden, the deal was a welcome result. Though for far less than he originally sought, Biden had bet his political capital that he could work with Republicans toward major legislation.

Moreover, Biden and his aides believed that they needed a bipartisan deal on infrastructure to create a permission structure for more moderate Democrats — including Sinema and Joe Manchin of West Virginia — to then be willing to go for a party-line vote for the rest of the president's agenda.

The announcement leaves unclear the fate of Biden's promises of massive investment to slow climate change, which Biden this spring called "the existential crisis of our times."

Biden's presidential campaign had helped win progressive backing with pledges of major spending on electric vehicles, charging stations, and research and funding for overhauling the U.S. economy to run on less oil, gas and coal. The administration is expected to push for some of that in future legislation.

Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La, stressed that there are billions of dollars for resiliency against extreme weather and the impact of climate change and deemed Thursday's deal a "beginning investment."

Biden has sought \$1.7 trillion in his American Jobs Plan and the \$1.8 trillion American Families Plan for child care centers, family tax breaks and other investments that Republicans reject as far outside the scope of "infrastructure."

The broad reconciliation bill would likely include tax increases on the wealthy, those earning more than \$400,000 a year, and hike the corporate rate from 21% to 28%, so a tension still exists over funding for

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some Republicans and business groups.

It's still a long haul to a bill signing at the White House. The Senate expects to consider the bipartisan package in July, but Biden's bigger proposal is not expected to see final votes until fall.

Bargainers say have policing 'framework,' but issues remain

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congressional bargainers said Thursday they've agreed to a bipartisan framework for overhauling policing procedures, producing an upbeat but bare-bones statement that provided no details, conceded that disagreements remained and left uncertain their prospects for crafting a compromise that has eluded them for a year.

Negotiators vaguely described the status of their talks with three sentences released around dinner time Thursday as the Senate left town for a two-week recess. It came 13 months after George Floyd's killing and with the shadow of next year's elections lengthening over Congress' work.

"After months of working in good faith, we have reached an agreement on a framework addressing the major issues for bipartisan police reform," the statement read. "There is still more work to be done on the final bill, and nothing is agreed to until everything is agreed to. Over the next few weeks we look forward to continuing our work toward getting a finalized proposal across the finish line."

Aides of both parties said they could provide no detail about what exactly was in the framework. It was also unclear why only three of the five negotiators' names were on the release: Sens. Tim Scott, R-S.C., and Cory Booker, D-N.J., and Rep. Karen Bass, D-Calif. The names of Sens. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., and Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., did not appear, though Durbin endorsed its thrust in comments to reporters.

"When you get to this level, the little things are the big things," he said. "We want to make sure that we clear them up."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki released a brief statement offering President Joe Biden's thanks to the bargainers, adding, "He looks forward to collaborating with them on the path ahead."

Scott, the chief GOP negotiator, had set a "June or bust" goal for producing results last month. But by Thursday morning, senators of both parties said it was unlikely a deal would be reached by day's end because some details would have to be resolved when lawmakers return to Washington next month.

According to people familiar with the talks, the two most divisive issues have been Democrats' efforts to make individual police officers accused of abuses liable for civil penalties and whether to make it easier to bring criminal cases against officers for excessive use of force. The legislation is to be aimed at curbing the use of force by police and making them more accountable for abuses.

A failure to nail down a full agreement Thursday was a further blow to bargainers' efforts, draining away more time as they address an issue that came to the forefront last year with Floyd's killing. Lawmakers have already spent months trying to resolve differences, reflecting the complex web of issues and political imperatives that have prevented action so far.

Lawmakers already missed a May 25 deadline set by Biden. That date marked one year since Floyd, a Black man, died under the knee of a white Minneapolis police officer, who has since been convicted in his killing.

The further into the year the talks remain unresolved, the more next year's elections for congressional control will make bipartisan cooperation harder. Efforts to curb police practices are entwined with public concerns about race and crime, and all are potent, emotional issues for both parties to use as they appeal to their most ardent base voters.

Floyd's death, which ignited racial justice protests across the country, was a campaign issue during President Donald Trump's failed reelection bid and prompted debates over crime and authorities' use of force that rage still. An agreement would let each party assert it has addressed a consuming national problem, while a stalemate would let each blame the other and fuel next year's political campaigns.

The Democratic-led House approved a wide-ranging bill in March that's gone nowhere in the 50-50 Senate, with Republicans arguing it goes too far. Democrats blocked a Senate GOP measure last year, saying it was too weak.

Other provisions would curb police use of chokeholds, bolster national data systems of complaints against officers and limit the types of military equipment that police departments can obtain.

The talks' painfully slow pace has fueled partisan distrust, though not among the bargainers themselves, who appear to have retained harmonious relationships.

Some in each party voice suspicions that rather than an agreement, some of their political opponents would rather have policing and crime left intact as campaign issues. Each side denies that motive, though some openly assert that should the talks collapse, they could effectively use the issue in next year's elections.

Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., who leads his party's Senate campaign committee, said if the talks fail, it would help Republicans accuse Democrats of wanting to defund the police, a progressive proposal that Biden and many Democrats have disavowed.

"Republicans are known for supporting law enforcement. We're known for trying to bring crime down," Scott said.

Democrats said deadlock would anger their supporters, bolstering election turnout.

"We're doing the right thing, and they're trying to stop it," said Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney, D-N.Y., who heads House Democrats' political organization. "And if they pay a political price for that, well, that's how politics should work."

The talks have been closely watched by powerful outside groups representing police and sheriff organizations, civil rights organizations and Floyd's relatives, who have met with Biden and members of Congress.

US to keep about 650 troops in Afghanistan after withdrawal

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and ROBERT BURNS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Roughly 650 U.S. troops are expected to remain in Afghanistan to provide security for diplomats after the main American military force completes its withdrawal, which is set to be largely done in the next two weeks, U.S. officials told The Associated Press on Thursday.

In addition, several hundred additional American forces will remain at the Kabul airport, potentially until September, to assist Turkish troops providing security, as a temporary move until a more formal Turkey-led security operation is in place, the officials said. Overall, officials said the U.S. expects to have American and coalition military command, its leadership and most troops out by July Fourth, or shortly after that, meeting an aspirational deadline that commanders developed months ago.

The officials were not authorized to discuss details of the withdrawal and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

The departure of the bulk of the more than 4,000 troops that have been in the country in recent months is unfolding well before President Joe Biden's Sept. 11 deadline for withdrawal. And it comes amid accelerating Taliban battlefield gains, fueling fears that the Afghan government and its military could collapse in a matter of months.

Officials have repeatedly stressed that security at the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul is a critical requirement to keeping any U.S. diplomatic staff in Afghanistan. Still, the decision to keep additional troops there for several more months makes it more complicated for the Biden administration to declare a true end to America's longest war until later this fall. And it keeps the embattled country near the forefront of U.S. national security challenges, even as the White House tries to put the 20-year-old war behind it and focus more on threats from China and Russia.

In a statement Thursday night, Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said that as Biden has ordered, the U.S. will complete the withdrawal by early September. "Nothing has changed about that goal." Kirby said. "The situation is dynamic, and we review our progress daily. Speculation by unnamed sources about potential changes to that timeline should not be construed as predictive."

On Friday, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, chair of the High Council for National Reconciliation, are meeting with Biden at the White House. The two Afghan leaders also are to meet at the Pentagon with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and possibly other administration officials, the Pentagon

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announced.

Getting most troops out by early July had been in doubt because of complications including an outbreak of COVID-19 at the U.S. Embassy and the push to get Afghan interpreters and others who helped the U.S. out of the country. Officials said U.S. commanders and NATO allies in Afghanistan have been able to overcome logistical hurdles that might have prolonged the withdrawal process. But they also warned that plans in place for the final stages of the U.S. military withdrawal could change if airport security agreements fall through or there are other major, unforeseen developments.

As recently as last week, there was discussion of possibly extending the U.S. troop presence at Bagram Airfield, north of Kabul, but officials said the U.S. presence at the base is expected to end in the next several days.

The roughly 650 U.S. troops that are planned to be a more permanent force presence in Afghanistan will provide security for the U.S. Embassy and some ongoing support at the airport. Officials said the U.S. has agreed to leave a C-RAM — or Counter-Rocket, Artillery, Mortar system — at the airport, as well as troops to operate it, as part of an agreement with Turkey. The U.S. also plans to leave aircrew for helicopter support at the airport.

According to the officials, Turkey has largely agreed to provide security at the airport as long as it receives support from American forces. U.S. and Turkish military officials are meeting in Ankara this week to finalize arrangements.

On Wednesday, Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said there is not yet a written agreement with Turks on airport security. He said he did not want to speak about specifics before there is a final agreement, but added, "I feel very comfortable that security at the Kabul airport will be maintained and the Turks will be a part of that."

The U.S. troop departure, which began with Biden's announcement in April that he was ending U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan, is ramping up just as the administration moves ahead with plans to evacuate tens of thousands of interpreters and others who worked with American forces during the war and now fear for their safety.

A senior administration official said Thursday that planning has accelerated in recent days to relocate the Afghans and their families to other countries or U.S. territories while their visa applications are processed. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss unannounced plans. The administration intends to carry out the evacuation later this summer, likely in August, according to a second official familiar with the deliberations but not authorized to discuss them publicly.

The Pentagon has said the military is prepared to assist the State Department as needed but indicated that charter flights might be adequate to move the Afghan visa applicants, thus not necessarily requiring a military airlift.

Officials said that NATO allies, such as Germany, are also very close to being completely out of the country.

Senior Pentagon leaders, including Austin, have been cautious in recent weeks when asked about the troop withdrawal, and they have declined to provide any public details on when the last troops would leave, citing security concerns.

Songwriter Diane Warren saves escaped cow from slaughter

By RYAN PEARSON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Songwriter Diane Warren stepped in Thursday to save the life of a cow that eluded capture for more than a day after a herd escaped from a Southern California slaughterhouse and stampeded through a suburb.

The Grammy-winning artist contacted the city of Pico Rivera to arrange to have the cow sent to the Farm Sanctuary north of Los Angeles, Warren and City Manager Steve Carmona said.

Carmona said the City Council had already authorized him to open a dialogue about the cow with the owner of the slaughterhouse when Warren stepped in. He said the transfer was dependent on a state agriculture health check.

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"Cows are very smart, empathetic animals. I mean, they knew there was a door open," said Warren, who has been a vegetarian for 23 years. "This morning, I woke up and I saw there was one cow that hadn't been caught yet — and they're trying to catch her and getting close to her. I saw her crying out and I couldn't unsee that."

Warren, who wrote the LeAnn Rimes hit "How Do I Live" and won a Grammy for "Because You Loved Me" from the 1996 film "Up Close and Personal," said she has a farm animal rescue in Malibu and felt compelled to act.

"This isn't my first cow I've saved. But this feels like a special cow. Because this was that one. So it's almost like she represents all cows wanting to be free," she said.

The cow became a celebrity as it vanished in the nation's most populous county until it was spotted before dawn Thursday in the sprawling Whittier Narrows recreation area in South El Monte, about 10 miles (16 kilometers) east of downtown Los Angeles.

It did not give up without a fight.

Two wranglers lassooed the cow but it knocked down and kicked one of them during the capture covered by TV news helicopters. At one point, Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies used their patrol cars to keep the big animal from bolting into rush-hour traffic on a nearby major road.

The cow was among 40 that escaped from a slaughterhouse Tuesday evening in Pico Rivera and ran through a neighborhood, where one was shot and killed when it charged at a family and all but one were soon rounded up.

The fugitive ended up several miles from the Pico Rivera slaughterhouse, which Carmona said has been in business since the 1920s.

The agriculture that once dominated the area has since all but vanished amid urban sprawl.

"This whole thing, it's so heartbreaking," Warren said. "Right now, I'm calling it a good moos. A little good moos when there's so much stuff that isn't good news. So that was just a little bright spot today."

Congress repeals Trump-era regulations on payday lenders

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Congress on Thursday overturned a set of regulations enacted in the final days of the Trump administration that effectively allowed payday lenders to avoid state laws capping interest rates.

The House voted 218-208 to overturn the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency's payday lending regulations, with one Republican voting with Democrats.

Thursday's vote to overturn the OCC's "true lender rules" marked the first time Democrats in Congress successfully overturned regulations using the Congressional Review Act.

The act was enacted in the mid-1990s and gives Congress the authority to overrule federal agency rules and regulations with a simple majority vote in the House and Senate. Its powers are limited to a certain period after an agency finalizes its regulations, usually around 60 legislative days.

The Senate voted 52-47 to overturn the OCC rules on May 11. The bill now goes to President Joe Biden, who is expected to sign it.

By overturning the Trump administration rule enacted in late 2020, Democrats aimed to stem a payday lender practice that critics had dubbed a "rent-a-bank" scheme.

While payday lenders are regulated at the state level, the payday lender would partner with a bank with a national banking charter when making high-cost installment loans. Because a national bank is not based in any one state, it is not subject to individual state usury laws.

"State interest rate limits are the simplest way to stop predatory lending, and the OCC's rules would have completely bypassed them," said Lauren Saunders, associate director at the National Consumer Law Center, a consumer advocacy group.

This isn't the first time that "rent-a-bank" has been an issue. Federal regulators clamped down on the practice in the 1990s, but with the proliferation of online banking and fintech companies specializing in online-only financial services, the practice is growing once again.

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An example on how the practice works can be seen in Elevate, a Texas-based fintech company that offers high-cost installment loans like a payday loan. Elevate offers loans in several states, including Arizona, which has a state law capping interest rates on payday loans at 36%. Because Elevate uses banks out of Utah and Kentucky to originate those loans, Elevate is able to make loans in Arizona for as high as 149%. In other states, Elevate makes loans with annual interest rates as high as 299%.

In a statement, Biden's appointee to the Comptroller of the Currency said he would "respect" Congress overturning their regulations.

"I want to reaffirm the agency's long-standing position that predatory lending has no place in the federal banking system," acting Comptroller of the Currency Michael J. Hsu said in a statement.

While Thursday's vote marked a first for Democrats, former President Donald Trump and a Republican-controlled Congress used the Congressional Review Act when they came to power in 2017, overturning 15 rules and regulations enacted in the waning days of the Obama administration.

Before Trump, the law was used only once, in 2001, when Republicans in Congress voted to repeal a set of ergonomic regulations enacted in the final day of the Clinton administration.

On Thursday, the House also used the act to overturn a set of regulations approved by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission under Trump regarding employment discrimination issues. The vote was 219-210.

On Friday, the House is expected to use it again to overturn Trump-era regulations that would have allowed oil and gas companies to produce more methane when they drill.

Both the bills have passed in the Senate.

Kentucky to allow college athletes to earn off likeness

By BRUCE SCHREINER and PIPER HUDSPETH BLACKBURN Associated Press

FRANKFORT, Ky. (AP) — Kentucky's governor signed an order Thursday allowing the state's college athletes — including players on the nationally renowned Kentucky and Louisville men's basketball teams — to make money through the use of their name, image or likeness.

Gov. Andy Beshear said he wielded his executive authority as a matter of fairness for college athletes, adding that for decades companies and institutions have profited off them.

"Those athletes deserve to be compensated for their image and likeness," the Democratic governor told reporters. "Think about what image and likeness is? It's your name. It's what you look like. It is intrinsically yours. And while I don't think these athletes mind that they also lift up their school, they deserve to be a part of that as well."

His executive order also will spare Kentucky's colleges from being at a competitive disadvantage with rival schools in other states that will have laws enabling athletes to profit off their name, image or likeness, Beshear said.

Beshear said his executive order takes effect July 1, when similar measures passed in several other states will become law. His office said he was the first governor to make the change by executive order. Existing state law gave him the authority to take the action, the governor said.

"This is going to last until either the NCAA fully and finally acts, or the legislature is back in session, at which time we all agree we would need legislation," Beshear said.

The move comes just days after the Supreme Court ruled against the NCAA in an antitrust case that complicated how the association is going about reform to its rule regarding compensation for athletes for use of their name, image or likeness. The NCAA is moving towards a more hands-off approach that will provide no uniform national rules and let schools follow state laws or set their own guidelines if no state laws apply.

Federal lawmakers also are working on legislation that would govern how college athletes can earn money off their fame and celebrity.

Beshear's action won praise from the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville. UK plays in the Southeastern Conference and UofL competes in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

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"Bringing the state of Kentucky into competitive balance with other states across the country and, more specifically, the Atlantic Coast Conference is critical," Vince Tyra, U of L's vice president for intercollegiate athletics, said in a release issued by the governor's office.

UK athletics director Mitch Barnhart said the governor's action "provides us the flexibility we need at this time to further develop policies around name, image and likeness."

"We are appreciative of that support, as it is a bridge until such time as state and/or federal laws are enacted," Barnhart said in the same release from Beshear's office. "The landscape of college sports is now in the midst of dramatic and historic change — perhaps the biggest set of shifts and changes since scholarships were first awarded decades ago."

Beshear, who feuded with the state's Republican-dominated legislature over his coronavirus-related executive actions, won an endorsement Thursday from a key lawmaker for using his executive authority to enable college athletes to monetize their name, image and likeness.

Kentucky Senate President Robert Stivers, a Republican, said "we are supportive of the governor's narrow and temporary action today, as it provides the tools needed to ensure that Kentucky's student-athletes are given ample opportunity. Our commitment to permanent protections for these students will be addressed early in the next legislative session."

Kentucky lawmakers will reconvene in early January for their next regular session.

In Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, New Mexico and Texas, laws go into effect July 1 that make it impermissible for the NCAA and members schools to prevent athletes from being paid by third parties for things like sponsorship deals, online endorsements and personal appearances.

The NCAA had hoped for a national law from Congress that has not come, and its own rule-making has been bogged down for months. College sports leaders are instead moving toward the type of patchwork regulation they have been warning against for months.

Report: Over 600 bodies found at Indigenous school in Canada

By JIM MORRIS Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — Leaders of Indigenous groups in Canada said Thursday investigators have found more than 600 unmarked graves at the site of a former residential school for Indigenous children — a discovery that follows last month's report of 215 bodies found at another school.

The bodies were discovered at the Marieval Indian Residential School, which operated from 1899 to 1997 where the Cowessess First Nation is now located, about 85 miles (135 kilometers) east of Regina, the capital of Saskatchewan.

A search with ground-penetrating radar resulted in 751 "hits," indicating that at least 600 bodies were buried in the area, said Chief Cadmus Delorme of the Cowessess. The radar operators have said their results could have a margin of error of 10%.

"We want to make sure when we tell our story that we're not trying to make numbers sound bigger than they are," Delorme said. "I like to say over 600, just to be assured."

He said the search continues and the radar hits will be assessed by a technical team and the numbers will be verified in coming weeks.

Delorme said that the graves were marked at one time, but that the Roman Catholic Church that operated the school had removed the markers.

On Twitter, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he was "terribly saddened" to learn of the latest discovery.

"My heart breaks for the Cowessess First Nation following the discovery of Indigenous children buried at the former Marieval Residential School," he said, adding that "we will tell the truth about these injustices."

Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe said the entire province mourns the discovery of the unmarked graves.

Don Bolen, Archbishop of Regina, Saskatchewan, posted a letter to the Cowessess First Nation on the archdiocese's website.

"The news is overwhelming and I can only imagine the pain and waves of emotion that you and your

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people are experiencing right now," Bolen wrote.

Bolen said two years ago he apologized to the Cowessess people for the "failures and sins of Church leaders in the past."

"I know that apologies seem a very small step as the weight of past suffering comes into greater light, but I extend that apology again, and pledge to do what we can to turn that apology into meaningful concrete acts - including assisting in accessing information that will help to provide names and information about those buried in unmarked graves," he said.

Florence Sparvier, 80, said she attended the Marieval Indian Residential School.

"The nuns were very mean to us," she said. "We had to learn how to be Roman Catholic. We couldn't say our own little blessings."

Nuns at the school were "condemning about our people" and the pain inflicted continues generations later, Sparvier said.

"We learned how to not like who we were," she said. "That has gone on and it's still going on."

Last month the remains of 215 children, some as young as 3 years old, were found buried on the site of what was once Canada's largest Indigenous residential school near Kamloops, British Columbia.

Following that discovery, Pope Francis expressed his pain over the discovery and pressed religious and political authorities to shed light on "this sad affair." But he didn't offer the apology sought by First Nations and by the Canadian government.

"An apology is one stage in the way of a healing journey," Delorme said.

"This was a crime against humanity, an assault on First Nations," said Chief Bobby Cameron of the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous First Nations in Saskatchewan. He said he expects more graves will be found on residential school grounds across Canada.

"We will not stop until we find all the bodies," he said.

From the 19th century until the 1970s, more than 150,000 Indigenous children were forced to attend state-funded Christian schools, the majority of them run by Roman Catholic missionary congregations, in a campaign to assimilate them into Canadian society.

The Canadian government has admitted that physical and sexual abuse was rampant in the schools, with students beaten for speaking their native languages.

In the United States, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland announced this week that the federal government is launching an investigation into its past oversight of Native American boarding schools. She said the work will include compiling and reviewing records to identify past schools, locate burial sites and uncover the names and tribal affiliations of students.

New York court suspends Rudy Giuliani's law license

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — An appeals court suspended Rudy Giuliani from practicing law in New York on Thursday because he made false statements while trying to get courts to overturn Donald Trump's loss in the presidential race.

An attorney disciplinary committee had asked the court to suspend Giuliani's license on the grounds that he'd violated professional conduct rules as he promoted theories that the election was stolen through fraud.

The court agreed and said suspension should be immediate, even though disciplinary proceedings aren't yet complete, because there was an "immediate threat" to the public.

"The seriousness of respondent's uncontroverted misconduct cannot be overstated," the court wrote. "This country is being torn apart by continued attacks on the legitimacy of the 2020 election and of our current president, Joseph R. Biden."

Trump called the suspension a politically motivated "witch hunt," while Giuliani said it was a "disgrace" on his afternoon radio show. The court's opinion, Giuliani said, was based on hearsay and "could have been written by the Democratic National Committee."

"The bar association should give me an award," the Republican told listeners on WABC-AM. "I defended

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an unpopular client. I've been threatened with death. I've had a good deal of my income taken away. I've lost friends over it."

"This is happening to shut me up," he added. "They want Giuliani quiet."

The court held that Giuliani, as a lawyer for Trump, "communicated demonstrably false and misleading statements to courts, lawmakers and the public at large."

Giuliani, a former New York City mayor and U.S. attorney in Manhattan, claimed the investigation violated his First Amendment right to free speech and that he did not knowingly make false statements.

The court rejected those arguments, noting that in Pennsylvania, Giuliani failed to "provide a scintilla of evidence for any of the varying and wildly inconsistent numbers of dead people he factually represented voted in Philadelphia during the 2020 presidential election."

"False statements intended to foment a loss of confidence in our elections and resulting loss of confidence in government generally damage the proper functioning of a free society," the court wrote.

Interim suspensions are often a precursor to disbarment but are typically "reserved for lawyers convicted of a crime," said Bruce Green, a former federal prosecutor who directs the Louis Stein Center for Law and Ethics at the Fordham University School of Law. "It's rarely done in cases involving lying lawyers."

Still, Giuliani will be allowed to fight the suspension and even call witnesses as part of his challenge — a process that could take months to play out — and Giuliani's attorneys said they expect him to be reinstated "once the issues are fully explored at a hearing."

"He gets another day in court," Green said.

The ruling prevents Giuliani from representing clients as a lawyer, but it could have limited practical impact. Before pleading Trump's case in November, the former mob prosecutor had not appeared in court as an attorney since 1992, according to court records.

Giuliani was the primary mouthpiece for Trump's false claims of election fraud after the 2020 vote, standing at a press conference in front of Four Seasons Total Landscaping outside Philadelphia on the day the race was called for Biden and saying they would challenge what he claimed was a vast conspiracy by Democrats.

Lies around the election results helped push an angry mob of pro-Trump rioters to storm the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 in an effort to stop the certification of President Biden's victory. Since that time, Republicans have used that lie to push stricter voting laws nationwide.

The suspension comes as Giuliani is under scrutiny by federal prosecutors over his interactions with figures in Ukraine while he was trying to get that country to launch an investigation of Biden's son.

Federal agents raided Giuliani's home and office in April, taking electronic devices including phones and computers.

The investigation includes an examination of whether Giuliani was required to register as a foreign agent in the U.S. Some of the Ukrainian figures Giuliani was worked with were also interested in getting his help lobbying the Trump administration.

Giuliani has said he is innocent of any wrongdoing and that the investigations are politically motivated.

Giuliani could also face consequences in Georgia, where he made statements to legislative committees casting doubt on the legitimacy of that state's election that are cited in the New York court's decision.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis has opened a criminal investigation into potential attempts to influence the 2020 election in Georgia, including looking into "the making of false statements to state and local governmental bodies."

Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a Republican who has come under attack from Trump and his allies for not taking steps to overturn the former president's loss in the state, saw vindication in the New York court's decision.

"The judges recognized that the baseless conspiracy theories Giuliani repeated were not true and punished him for spreading lies, particularly about Georgia's election," he said Thursday.

The suspension won't affect Giuliani's ability to act as a lobbyist or do security consulting, but will likely prevent him from practicing law in jurisdictions even beyond New York, said David S. Weinstein, a former federal prosecutor.

Giuliani would be obligated to tell other states about the suspension, he said, which "in all likelihood will cause them to say, 'You won't be able to practice here.'"

Soderbergh, Cheadle return to Detroit in 'No Sudden Move'

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — During the pandemic, Steven Soderbergh has shot two feature films, released a pair of movies, written a sequel to his first film (1989's "Sex, Lies and Videotape"), re-edited some of his older movies (mostly for fun) and co-produced the Academy Awards.

It's an amount of accomplishment that really puts to shame the 1,000-piece puzzle some of us are still proud of assembling last May.

Yet at a time when much of Hollywood is going through profound change, Soderbergh has, like few others, seized an uncertain moment.

"I think it's fair to say that I'm the cockroach of this industry," he said smiling on a recent interview by Zoom. "I can find a way to survive in any version that I'm confronted with."

Soderbergh has averaged a film every one of his 35 years in movies, amassing a nimble, frenetic body of work spanning experimental iPhone indies ("High Flying Bird," "Unsane") to commercial crowd-pleasers ("Ocean's Eleven," "Erin Brockovich," "Magic Mike"). His latest, "No Sudden Move," nearly didn't happen. It was initially scheduled to begin shooting in April 2020. The pandemic scuttled those plans but by early fall, after he helped create return-to-set safety protocols, Soderbergh remounted it — albeit without one star, George Clooney, who withdrew out of health concerns for his asthmatic son.

Still, "No Sudden Move," which debuts July 1 on HBO Max, doesn't lack for stars. And while Clooney's presence would have reinforced a spirit of get-the-band-back-together, "No Sudden Move" remains a cousin to one of Soderbergh's most celebrated movies: 1998's "Out of Sight," the slinky, sublime caper adapted from Elmore Leonard.

That film opened in Miami sunshine but descended into wintery Detroit. Twenty-three years later, "No Sudden Move" returns Soderbergh to the Motor City with Don Cheadle, who memorably played Maurice "Snoop" Miller in "Out of Sight." Since then, Cheadle has co-starred in four more films with Soderbergh ("Traffic," the "Ocean's" movies). But he's front-and-center this time.

"This was designed as vehicle for Don, whether he wanted it or not," Soderbergh says. "Literally: I wanted to see this guy walking, walking, walking — and we parachute into this story."

"No Sudden Move" opens with Cheadle, as Curt Goynes, strolling through 1950s Detroit. Soderbergh and screenwriter Ed Solomon conceived of the film from the start as a heist movie with a trio of thieves brought together not unlike those in Robert Wise's electric 1959 noir "Odds Against Tomorrow." (That was one inspiration. The classic '70s crime film "The Friends of Eddie Coyle" was another.)

But while working on the script, Solomon came upon the history of the automotive industry's efforts to avoid emissions controls. "No Sudden Move" begins with three hired guns (Cheadle, Benicio del Toro, Kieran Culkin), but in a multiplying series of double-crosses, expands in scope to encapsulate some of Detroit's original sins, a little like how "Chinatown" does for Los Angeles. The rest of the cast includes Bill Duke, Jon Hamm, David Harbour, Julia Fox, Brendan Frazier, Matt Damon and Ray Liotta.

"We were able to talk about redlining and community and the devastation of Detroit and the greed of the car manufacturers without proselytizing or hitting it on the head," says Cheadle. "It was all part of the narrative intrigue. It felt in a lot of ways like 'Out of Sight 2.0' or 1.0, 30 years beforehand — revisiting that kind of energy."

Cheadle wasn't necessarily eager to return to a film set at the time. But he also realized that if he didn't, a-stuck-at-home Soderbergh would probably keep writing and sending him scripts. The director managed the shoot without incident by frequent testing in two mobile COVID-19 testing units that were personally paid for. The central cast and crew members were kept in a quarantine bubble.

"I know that I put Steven through some version of hell in my uncertainty about coming back," Cheadle says. "I lost family members to COVID. I was really gun shy about even leaving my house."

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Cheadle smiles. "I also blame him for 'Contagion,'" referring to Soderbergh's prophetic pandemic drama from 2011. "I think he's Patient Zero."

In April, Soderbergh led an effort to mount an in-person Oscars despite COVID-19 protocols. The telecast was handsomely shot, opening with a fluid tracking shot of Regina King, and it made an often impersonal ceremony warmly intimate. But it was also talky, with lengthy introductions and speeches, and one gambit to rearrange the final awards ended awkwardly.

Overall, Soderbergh is pleased with the show. The broadcast did what it set out to do: pull off an in-person Oscars safely while experimenting with an often inflexible format.

"As far as I know, we're the first show in a long time where nobody ever got played off, and I'm proud of that. This is what happens when you hire the director of a movie called 'Let Them All Talk,'" he jokes, referring to his 2020 film for HBO Max, with Meryl Streep, shot largely on an ocean liner crossing.

But Soderbergh did walk away from the experience — a satisfying and unique one, he says — with a gnawing sense of a larger existential crisis for movies. Ratings, like they have for most pandemic award shows, plummeted.

"I just look at it as a larger issue than the specifics of what our show looked like, and that is: How do we make people care about the movies the way they used to?" Soderbergh says. "To me, this is the real question that needs to be confronted."

But the conditions, and the opportunities of streaming, are also ripe for a protean, fast-working filmmaker like Soderbergh. He recently shot his third film for HBO Max, "KIMI," a pandemic-set thriller with Zoë Kravitz. "No Sudden Move," a period crime film for adults, is very much the kind of movie that before the streaming flood gates opened would have been unlikely to get made.

"It's a really good time for somebody who makes things. I honestly would not like to be running these companies. Nobody knows what's coming. Nobody knows what's a cyclical thing as opposed to a real secular change," says Soderbergh. "I have a long history with Warner. We both seem to be in sync with the purpose of my deal which is for me to be really busy."

Other things never change. "No Sudden Move" is Soderbergh's sixth heist film, a cycle begun with "Out of Sight" that includes the three "Ocean's" films and "Logan Lucky," a self-financed meta-heist movie in that it sought to pull one over on Hollywood, too. The genre, the director says, encourages a filmmaker to bring something to the table — to "style it up." "It's just made for the movies," he says.

As time wound down before Soderbergh and Cheadle had to leave for the Tribeca Festival premiere of "No Sudden Move," he wondered if returning to the scene of his first crime movie was pushing his luck.

"I've had two really good experiences in Detroit and gotten out of there with two movies I'm really happy with," said Soderbergh. "The question is: Should I just let that go?"

Cheadle didn't hesitate. "Tee it up! Go to the well!" he encouraged. "Spin the wheel!"

In pandemic, drug overdose deaths soar among Black Americans

CLAIRE GALOFARO AP National Writer

ST. LOUIS (AP) — She screamed and cried, banged on the dashboard, begging her husband to drive faster, faster, faster toward her brother lying face-down on his bedroom floor.

Craig Elazer had struggled all his life with anxiety so bad his whole body would shake. But because he was Black, he was seen as unruly, she said, not as a person who needed help. Elazer, 56, had started taking drugs to numb his nerves before he was old enough to drive a car.

Now his sister, Michelle Branch, was speeding toward his apartment in an impoverished, predominantly Black neighborhood in north St. Louis. His family had dreaded the day he would die of an overdose for so long that his mother had paid for his funeral in monthly installments.

It was September, and as the COVID-19 pandemic intensified America's opioid addiction crisis in nearly every corner of the country, many Black neighborhoods like this one suffered most acutely. The portrait of the opioid epidemic has long been painted as a rural white affliction, but the demographics have been shifting for years as deaths surged among Black Americans. The pandemic hastened the trend by further

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flooding the streets with fentanyl, a potent synthetic opioid, in communities with scant resources to deal with addiction.

In the city of St. Louis, deaths among Black people increased last year at three times the rate of white people, skyrocketing more than 33%. Black men in Missouri are now four times more likely than a white person to die of an overdose.

Dr. Kanika Turner, a local physician leading the charge to contain the crisis, describes the soaring death rate as a civil rights issue as pressing and profound as any other. The communities now being hit hardest are those already devastated by the war on drugs that demonized Black drug users, tore families apart and hollowed out neighborhoods by sending Black men to prison instead of treatment, she said. Even today, Black people in the United States are more likely to be in jail for drug crimes and less likely to access treatment.

Last year, George Floyd died in Minneapolis under a police officer's knee. He had fentanyl in his system and some of the officer's defenders tried to blame the drugs for his death. The world exploded in rage.

"That incident on top of the pandemic rocked the boat and shook all of us. It ripped the Band-Aid off a wound that has always been there," said Turner, who grew in the same neighborhoods where Elazer lived, beset by addiction, poverty and one of the highest murder rates in America. "We're undoing history of damage, history of trauma, history of racism."

Pastors are now marching into the city jail to train inmates how to survive once they get outside. They host mobile treatment centers in their parking lots. They make an appeal to their congregations: Do not numb the pain of violence and racism with drugs. Don't let the next funeral be for you.

Branch for decades begged God to deliver her brother from addiction. She would lie awake at night imagining him dead in a ditch or dark alley, with nothing in the world but the clothes on his back.

She was hysterical by the time she arrived at his apartment.

The cousin who found him said he was sorry; Elazer had been alone and dead for hours. They tried to convince her not to go inside, but she wanted to see him.

As Branch looked down at his body, she felt calm come over her.

"Society failed him," she said. "And I had a sense that he'd finally been set free."

When the Rev. Burton Barr drives to the city jail, he passes a corner store with a sign painted on its side: "Drugs ... the new slavery!"

"That's true," Barr said.

He calls himself "the hoodlum preacher" and he goes to the jail twice a week to try to save people from the addiction that consumed his life for 22 years.

He was swept up when heroin inundated Black communities in the 1960s and transitioned to cocaine in the 1980s. The face of addiction then was inner-city Black people like him, and they were criminalized. Barr once tried to tally the number of times he went to jail, and he stopped counting at 30.

"It was not a war on drugs. It was a war on us," said Barr, in recovery since 1991. "It devastated our communities."

Harsh sentencing laws passed in the 1980s were far more brutal on crack cocaine users, who were more likely to be Black, than they were for powder cocaine users, who were more likely to be white. A person convicted of possessing five grams of crack got the same sentence as someone with 100 times more powder. Black men went to prison by the tens of thousands.

Addiction was not widely accepted as a public health crisis — with a focus on treatment instead of incarceration — until recent years, only once it started killing white teens in the suburbs, Barr said.

The timeline of the current opioid epidemic begins in the late 1990s, and unfolds in three waves. The first arrived when pharmaceutical companies campaigned to expand prescribing painkillers and addiction spread through struggling, predominantly-white communities like Appalachia.

The second came when the government cracked down on prescriptions and many turned to heroin; then the third when fentanyl, 50 times more potent than heroin, was laced into opioids sold on the street.

Some researchers believe the nation is entering a fourth wave. The drug supply is so messy and un-

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predictable that people overdosing have multiple drugs in their system: dangerous cocktails of fentanyl, a depressant, and stimulants like cocaine and methamphetamine.

A lot of illicit fentanyl is manufactured in Wuhan, China, where COVID-19 was first unleashed. Lockdowns initially disrupted the supply, said Vanda Felbab-Brown, a Brookings Institute fellow who studies trafficking.

In St. Louis, the drug trade became even more chaotic: People who used to know where their drugs were coming from no longer did. Fentanyl for a time was hard to find, and some turned to less-potent heroin.

But the Chinese laboratories rebounded and resumed shipping the chemicals to Mexico, where cartels process them, Felbab-Brown said. Pandemic border closures presented cartels with added incentive to traffic fentanyl: It is incredibly potent and profitable. The equivalent of a trunkful of heroin or cocaine can be carried across the border in a small suitcase.

Mexican soldiers are finding people at checkpoints ferrying tens of thousands of fentanyl pills. Navy personnel caught two men on a boat on the Sea of Cortez trying to smuggle 100,000. Mexican authorities raided a fentanyl factory in Chalco, a slum on the outskirts of Mexico City, where the drug was processed by the tons, so much they needed a forklift to move it.

In St. Louis, fentanyl flooded back to the streets. The death count exploded early last summer, said Rachel Winograd, a professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis who tracks the state's overdose data. In the first six months of 2020, deaths increased 64% among Black people from the same period the year before, and 40% among white people.

Other cities saw a similar pattern. Doctors in Philadelphia found that in the first few months of the pandemic, overdoses increased more than 50% for Black people while decreasing for whites. In Massachusetts, health officials announced that overdose deaths among Black men soared in 2020 by nearly 70%.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that more than 92,000 Americans died of overdose in the 12 months ending in November, the highest number ever recorded. That data is not broken down by race.

But researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles, analyzed emergency medical calls nationwide and found an overall increase of 42% in overdose deaths in 2020. The largest increase was for Black people, with a spike of more than 50%.

One day last summer in St. Louis, Lynda Brooks went into a bathroom to smoke what she thought was crack. She felt strange, sat down and remembers only darkness. Once she was revived from a fentanyl overdose, she wondered if she'd been in hell.

She was so scared that for days she kept the lights on to try to resist going to sleep.

Brooks, a 55-year-old grandmother, had been addicted to crack for decades. She was often homeless and life out there was hard. She was assaulted, spit on, her husband died. So she took more drugs to escape feeling sad or scared or worthless.

Soon after she overdosed, she went to a community center. She told them if she didn't get help she knew she would die.

Brooks has been in recovery now for seven months, and she prays to remain scared of the drugs. She got a job and an apartment, and proudly keeps her new keys dangling from a shoelace around her neck. Her family told her they are proud of her. She said that feels like heaven.

Pastor Marsha Hawkins-Hourd smiled at Brooks from the sidewalk.

"You make me so happy," called Hawkins-Hourd, who runs the Child and Family Empowerment Center that helped Brooks find treatment and housing. "A lot of people fail. And it hurts when they fail. But you wipe all that away."

She is part of a network of faith leaders and grassroots activists trying to overcome the distrust people have for the systems that typically address addiction but are infested with systemic racism, she said.

She looks at block after block of falling-down buildings in the north side of the city. She sees them as a symbol of her neighbors who were deeply traumatized, then abandoned with limited access to treatment.

At some point, these houses were filled with hope and life, she said. Then society left them to crumble as men were sent to prison and families buckled. Now the windows are broken out, their roofs caving in,

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weeds choking their insides.

"Mass incarceration and the war on drugs are the roots and all of this is the thorns," she said. "It is a set-up for failure, a set-up to continue in the same cycle of poverty and death."

Jerry Simmons sometimes imagines himself lying in one of those vacant houses where he sleeps, dead for days from an overdose before anyone discovers him.

He arrived in a church parking lot before dawn to be first in line for a mobile treatment van scheduled to arrive as part of a new state-funded effort to reach people like him.

"I just want to be a normal person back in society, working, living, loving, playing with my grandkids, making my kids be proud of me," said Simmons, 49, who's been addicted for 30 years, homeless and in and out of prisons.

When he climbed into the van, it had been about eight hours since he last snorted fentanyl, at 1:37 a.m. The crippling withdrawal symptoms would set in soon, he knew: aches down to the bone, diarrhea, shakes, insomnia.

To give himself strength, he wore a T-shirt printed with the face of his friend, killed in a hail of bullets 30 years ago. Simmons grew up near this church on the most murderous mile of road in one of America's most dangerous cities.

"There's death all around here," he said. Three friends have died in the last month, two to gun violence and one to overdose. The drugs, at first, helped him escape.

He sat down across from a recovery coach from Hawkins-Hourd's organization, which partnered with a treatment provider to usher people here.

"In the past 30 days, have you experienced serious depression?" she asked him.

"Yes."

"Have you neglected family because of your use of drugs?"

"Yes."

"Have you lost a job because of drug use?"

"Yes," he said again. Addiction has taken everything from him.

"I'm tired."

He was there to enroll in a treatment program that includes a prescription for the medication buprenorphine, which has been found to greatly reduce the likelihood of overdose death. But researchers have found that white patients are far more likely than Black patients to receive it. Black people instead tend to be steered toward methadone, which is distributed in highly regulated programs that often require standing in line daily before dawn.

"That is the worst form of segregation: one for the white, well-to-do people, one for the rest," said Dr. Percy Menzies, president of Assisted Recovery Centers of America, the company stationing mobile units on street corners and church parking lots. "The tsunami of fentanyl is absolutely frightening, and they have virtually no safety net."

Addiction is treatable with medication and therapy, he said. But he knows they can't expect to show up in white lab coats and ask people to trust them right away.

He started going to Black churches to bring pastors on board.

Minister Lacha Hughes heard him speak at her church on a Saturday, and the next day her niece, Natisha Stansberry, called her hysterical. Most of her life, Stansberry, 30, used drugs to self-medicate her mental distress. She was raped as a child and attempted suicide. In 2016, her 23-year-old brother was murdered. Stansberry wished it would have been her instead.

"I wanted to be the best I could be, but I went down the drain," she said. "I want to get myself together."

She was weeping into the phone that she was scared of dying; two of her friends had overdosed, one was dead and one in the hospital. Hughes ushered Stansberry into Menzies' clinic. Until now, all she ever knew to do for her was pray.

It had felt to her like they'd had no help. In a crisis, many here are even hesitant to call 911 because they fear the police.

Now all over town, people walk around wearing little red backpacks, passed out by activists like Jerome

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Anderson, trying to saturate the streets with the overdose reversal medication Narcan so they can save each other.

He calls at passers-by: "Hey, take some Narcan. Save a life. I'm tired of going to family funerals."

Anderson, in recovery for 26 years, sang at three cousins' funerals in the last six months, all dead from overdose. He works for a grassroots public health group called Williams and Associates and his mission is to keep people alive so that one day they can find their way to recovery.

He carries around a cover letter that lets people know he's not a cop. Sometimes drug dealers let him stand next to them, to hand their customers his kits.

Jamilia Allen has used Narcan to revive her friends, more than once. She's terrified of fentanyl, but she's tried and tried to shake her heroin and crack addiction.

"It's designed to kill us, and that's what it's going to do. It takes your soul. If it don't kill you physically, it's going to kill you emotionally, kill all your dreams," she said. "I really want my life back, but I can't grasp it."

Allen, 31, was once an honor roll student and the captain of her high school cheerleading squad, and back then she judged people desperate for drugs.

She went to Walmart recently and was jealous of a woman buying a shower curtain. She wants a life that simple, and she fantasizes about someone sending her to a place like Malibu, where the rich white people go to kick addiction.

She was for a long time ashamed of her life: prostitution, being raped, beaten, thrown out naked in the snow. But now, she said, she wants people to know.

"I'm not going to let this kill me, and if I can help anyone else," she said, "then that's one less person like me."

All Michelle Branch has left of her brother fits into a little green shopping bag.

The Bible she bought him one time when he got sober and wrote "One Day at a Time" on the title page.

There's the baby book her mother put together, with so much hope when she taped a lock of his hair to the pages. There are report cards chronicling a bright child, loved by teachers but struggling to focus.

By third grade, he could read as well as a sixth-grader. He and his mother, a teacher, would read the newspaper cover to cover. He liked cowboy stories.

But he was anxious and jittery. Had he been diagnosed and treated, Branch believes he would be alive today.

"But they didn't catch hyperactivity or bipolar back then, especially not in little Black kids. We were just unruly, undisciplined, this much removed from being an animal," Branch said, pinching her fingers so there was little space between them.

Branch worked in the school system when the opioid epidemic began, white people were dying and pundits on TV said they needed to be saved from this public health tragedy. She wondered where they'd been when her brother was swirling into addiction.

Their mother raised them alone and they didn't have a lot of money. He told Branch he started drinking when he was 12, and soon progressed to drugs. He lived transiently, sleeping under overpasses, on dirty mattresses in dark alleys.

She can't count the number of times he tried to get sober.

Their mother always worried he would die. She wrote on little slips of paper and left them all over the house: pinned to her bedroom lampshade, taped to the kitchen wall. "God is working this problem out for me," they said.

She got sick with cancer, but lingered for years. Her family believed she was holding on out of fear of what would happen to her son.

She died worried about him.

He was in and out of jail, mostly for petty offenses. But several years ago, an acquaintance alleged he sexually assaulted her while using drugs. His lawyer told them the odds were against him as a Black man accused of assaulting a white woman, Branch said. He pleaded guilty and spent three years in prison.

He was released in May 2020, as the pandemic bore down.

He couldn't find a job. There were no recovery meetings in-person and he'd been so transient all his life he didn't know how to use a smartphone. He was alone most of the time, with his 10-pound dog, Rico.

One night they couldn't reach him. His cousin, Carleton Smith, looked through the mail slot and saw him lying there.

The first responders gathered over his body pointed to a paper plate on his bed with a pile of white powder. "Fentanyl," they said.

When Branch sat down to write his obituary, she decided to tell his truth.

She wrote that he was a gentle soul but addiction destroyed him.

"It would devastate his family, make him homeless, cause him to beg for money on the street, take his freedom, his sparkle and smile," she wrote.

"It would take and take and take until it took his life."

EXPLAINER: What to know as Chauvin sentenced in Floyd death

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Former Minneapolis police Officer Derek Chauvin faces sentencing Friday in the death of George Floyd, with a judge weighing a prison term experts say could be as much as 30 years.

Chauvin, 45, was convicted in April of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter for pressing his knee against Floyd's neck for about 9 1/2 minutes as the Black man said he couldn't breathe. It was an act captured on bystander video, which prompted protests around the world.

Here's what to watch for in a hearing that could run as long as two hours:

WHAT'S POSSIBLE?

Under Minnesota statutes, Chauvin will be sentenced only on the most serious charge of second-degree murder. That's because all of the charges against him stem from one act, with one victim.

The max for that charge is 40 years, but legal experts have said there's no way he'll get that much. Case law dictates the practical maximum Chauvin could face is 30 years — double what the high end of state sentencing guidelines suggest. Anything above that risks being overturned on appeal.

Of course, Judge Peter Cahill could sentence Chauvin to much less. Prosecutors have asked for 30 years, while defense attorney Eric Nelson is seeking probation.

Mark Osler, a professor at University of St. Thomas School of Law, said both sides have staked out extreme positions, and the "gulf is huge between them. I don't think that either side is going to end up getting what they want."

WHAT'S REALISTIC?

Minnesota has sentencing guidelines that were created to establish consistent sentences that don't consider factors such as race or gender. For second-degree unintentional murder, the guideline range for someone with no criminal record goes from 10 years and eight months to up to 15 years. The presumptive sentence is in the middle, at 12 1/2 years.

Cahill last month agreed with prosecutors that aggravating factors in Floyd's death warrant going higher than the guidelines. The judge found that Chauvin abused his position of authority, treated Floyd with particular cruelty, and that the crime was seen by several children. He also wrote that Chauvin knew the restraint of Floyd was dangerous.

"The prolonged use of this technique was particularly egregious in that George Floyd made it clear he was unable to breathe and expressed the view that he was dying as a result of the officers' restraint," Cahill wrote last month.

Osler said Cahill's finding of aggravating factors showed his willingness to go above the guidelines. But he said those guidelines still function like a tether, and the further Cahill moves from the guidelines, the more the tether stretches. He said a 20- or 25-year sentence is more likely than 30.

Joe Friedberg, a Minneapolis defense attorney who has been watching the case, agreed. He cited a U.S. Supreme Court case, *Koon v. United States*, in which the court said a judge could consider that a former

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police officer would likely spend much of his sentence in isolation for his own safety. Cahill might take the harder time into consideration to give Chauvin a little less, Friedberg said.

WHAT'S HAPPENED BEFORE?

Minnesota sentencing data for the five years through 2019 show that of 112 people sentenced for the same conviction as Chauvin, only two got maximum 40-year sentences. Both cases involved children who died due to abuse; both defendants had prior criminal records and struck plea deals.

The longest sentence during that time period for someone with no criminal history like Chauvin was 36 years, in another case involving the death of a child due to abuse. The sentence was appealed but upheld, with an appellate court finding it "was not excessive when a 13-month-old child was beaten to death."

WHAT'S EXPECTED AT THE HEARING?

Attorneys on both sides are expected to make brief arguments. Victims or family members of victims can also make statements about how they've been affected, but none have said publicly that they will.

Chauvin can talk if he wants, but it's not clear if he will. Experts say it could be tricky for Chauvin to talk without implicating himself in a pending federal case accusing him of violating Floyd's civil rights.

While some experts say Chauvin won't talk, Mike Brandt, another defense attorney watching the case, said he thinks Chauvin will speak, and that he can say a few words without getting himself into legal trouble. "If I was him, I think I would want to try and let people know that I'm not a monster."

Community members can submit impact statements online, and they may become part of the public record.

WHAT WILL CAHILL CONSIDER?

Cahill will look at arguments submitted by both sides, as well as victim impact statements, community impact statements, a pre-sentence investigation into Chauvin's past, and any statement Chauvin might make.

When judges hear from defendants, they are typically looking to see if the person takes responsibility for the crime or shows remorse. Friedberg, the defense attorney, said he doubts any statement from Chauvin would affect Cahill's sentence.

"In state court sentencing in Minnesota it just doesn't seem to matter to the judges what anybody says at the time of sentencing," Friedberg said. "When they come out on the bench they will have already decided what the sentence will be."

HOW LONG ACTUALLY BEHIND BARS?

No matter what sentence Chauvin gets, in Minnesota it's presumed that a defendant with good behavior will serve two-thirds in prison and the rest on supervised release, commonly known as parole.

That means if Chauvin is sentenced to 30 years, he would likely serve 20 behind bars, as long as he causes no problems in prison. Once on supervised release, he could be sent back to prison if he violates conditions of his parole.

Since his April conviction, Chauvin has been held at the state's only maximum security prison, in Oak Park Heights. That's unusual — people don't typically go to a prison while waiting for sentencing — but Chauvin is there for security reasons. He has been on "administrative segregation" for his safety and has been in a 10 foot-by-10 foot cell, away from the general population. He has meals brought to his room, and is allowed out for solitary exercise for an average of one hour a day.

It wasn't immediately clear where he would serve his time after he is sentenced. The Department of Corrections will place Chauvin after Cahill's formal sentencing order commits Chauvin to its custody.

Russia says next time it may fire to hit intruding warships

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia is prepared to target intruding warships if they fail to heed warnings, a senior Russian diplomat declared Thursday after a Black Sea incident in which a British destroyer sailed near Crimea in an area that Russia claims as its territorial waters.

Russia said one of its warships fired warning shots and a warplane dropped bombs in the path of British destroyer Defender on Wednesday to drive it away from waters near the Crimean city of Sevastopol.

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Britain denied that account, insisted its ship wasn't fired upon and said it was sailing in Ukrainian waters.

The incident marked the first time since the Cold War that Moscow acknowledged using live ammunition to deter a NATO warship, underlining the rising threat of military collisions amid Russia-West tensions.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Thursday that "the inviolability of the Russian borders is an absolute imperative," adding that it will be protected "by all means, diplomatic, political and military, if needed."

He sarcastically suggested the British navy should rename its destroyer from Defender to Aggressor and warned that "those who try to test our strength are taking high risks." Asked what Russia would do to prevent such intrusions in the future, Ryabkov told reporters it would stand ready to fire on targets if warnings don't work.

"We may appeal to reason and demand to respect international law," Ryabkov said in remarks carried by Russian news agencies. "If it doesn't help, we may drop bombs and not just in the path but right on target, if colleagues don't get it otherwise."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov deplored what he described as a "deliberate and well-prepared provocation" by Britain and seconded the tough warning.

"If unacceptable provocative actions are repeated, if those actions go too far, no options to legitimately protect the borders of the Russian Federation could be excluded," Peskov told reporters.

On Wednesday, the Russian Defense Ministry said a patrol ship fired warning shots after the HMS Defender had ignored a notice against intrusion and sailed 3 kilometers (1.6 nautical miles) into Russia's territorial waters near Sevastopol, the main Russian naval base in Crimea. It said a Russian Su-24 bomber also dropped four bombs ahead of the vessel to persuade the Defender to change course. Minutes later, the Defender left Russian waters, the ministry said.

Britain denied the Defender had been fired on or that bombs were dropped in its path. It insisted the ship was making a routine journey through an internationally recognized travel lane and remained in Ukrainian waters. The U.K., like most of the world, recognizes Crimea as part of Ukraine despite the peninsula's 2014 annexation by Russia.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson would not say whether he had personally approved the Defender's voyage but suggested the Royal Navy was making a point by taking that route.

"The important point is that we don't recognize the Russian annexation of Crimea, this is part of a sovereign Ukrainian territory," Johnson told reporters Thursday during a visit to an army barracks in England. "It was entirely right that we should vindicate the law and pursue freedom of navigation in the way that we did, take the shortest route between two points, and that's what we did."

He denied that U.K.-Russia relations were at a historic low, noting that "I can remember times in my own lifetime when things have been far worse."

On Thursday, British Ambassador Deborah Bronnert visited the Russian Foreign Ministry, which lodged a formal protest.

"It was particularly emphasized that if such provocations are repeated, the British side will bear full responsibility for their possible consequences," the ministry said.

The Russian navy chief, Adm. Nikolai Yevmenov, said Thursday that the British destroyer's move was clearly provocative, noting that it ignored the warnings in a bid to test Russia's resolve.

"They came to see how we act," he told reporters in St. Petersburg. "And they only reacted to the power of weapons. Our navy acted in a competent and safe manner to stop the provocation."

In April, Russia declared a broader area off Crimea closed to foreign naval ships until November, a move that drew strong protests from Ukraine and the West.

U.K. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said in a written statement to Parliament that what he described as a Russian "live fire gunnery exercise" was "out of range" of the Defender's position and posed no danger to her. He added that she was also overflown by Russian warplanes, some of them flying as low as 500 feet and making maneuvers that were "neither safe nor professional."

Wallace admitted that at one point the Defender maneuvered "to avoid a hazard presented by a Russian

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coastguard vessel before re-assuming her intended course.”

A BBC report from HMS Defender did not show bombs being dropped but showed the ship being buzzed by Russian military aircraft and receiving a threat over the radio to change course or be fired upon.

Footage filmed from a Russian warplane and a drone that was released by the Russian Defense Ministry also showed Russian jets flying close to the Defender but didn't feature any bombs dropped or warning shots fired. Another video released Thursday showed a Russian coast guard vessel firing warning shots with the Defender seen at a distance.

Mikhail Khodaryonok, a retired Russian army colonel who works as a military analyst in Moscow, said the Russian warplane apparently dropped bombs miles away from the British ship. He charged that the British denial that Russia had fired warning shots and dropped bombs to chase the Defender away was an attempt to save face.

“They couldn't admit that they were forced to change course, that they were aware of a threat that weapons would be used against them,” Khodaryonok said in a telephone interview. “The former ruler of the seas couldn't allow for a loss of face by admitting that they submitted to the demands of the Russian side to change course.”

US economy grows 6.4% in Q1, and it's likely just the start

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. economy grew at a solid 6.4% rate in the first three months of the year, setting the stage for what economists believe may be the strongest year for the economy in about seven decades.

Growth in the gross domestic product, the country's total output of goods and services, was unchanged from two previous estimates, the Commerce Department said Thursday, an acceleration from the 4.3% pace of the fourth quarter.

Economists believe that economic growth has continued to accelerate in the current quarter, which ends this month, as vaccinations become widespread and Americans eager to get outside are being welcomed by newly re-opened businesses. Surging activity from consumers is being fueled in part by nearly \$3 trillion in financial support that the government has approved since December.

Additional economic data that emerged Thursday also points to a nation that has regained its footing quickly after being thwacked by a global pandemic, though jobless claims remain stubbornly above 400,000.

“This summer will be hot for the U.S. economy,” said Lydia Boussour, lead U.S. economist for Oxford Economics. “As the health situation continues to improve, consumers sitting on piles of savings will give into the urge to splurge on services and experiences they felt deprived of during the pandemic.”

Boussour forecast that GDP growth in the current April-June quarter will surge to an annual rate of 12% and growth for the entire year will come in at 7.5%. That would be the best annual performance since 1951.

Even economists whose forecasts for 2021 growth range from 6% to 7% believe growth this year will be the best since a 7.2% gain in 1984, when the U.S. was emerging from an extended and painful recession.

Economists believe growth this quarter will be enough to push GDP output above the previous peak reached at the end of 2019 before the pandemic struck and cut off the longest economic expansion in U.S. history.

The data released Thursday was government's third and final look at first-quarter GDP, and arrived along side a separate report from the Commerce Department that showed May orders from U.S. factories for big-ticket manufactured goods rose for the 12th time in the last 13 months.

Orders for durable goods — meant to last at least three years — climbed 2.3% in May, reversing a 0.8% drop in April. That heated activity is taking place despite a backlogged supply chain and a shortage of workers.

Orders for aircraft shot up 27.4% last month after climbing 31.5% in April, the Commerce Department said. Excluding transportation orders — which can bounce wildly from month to month — durable goods orders rose 0.3% last month.

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Factories anticipating a return to normalcy or better are ramping up operations to match demand as jobless claims continue to tick lower.

The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits dropped last week as the job market continues to heal, albeit more slowly than many economists expected at this point in the recovery.

Jobless claims fell just 7,000 from the previous week to 411,000, the Labor Department said Thursday. While that is far from the rush to work that has been anticipated for some time now, weekly claims have fallen steadily this year from about 900,000 in January.

Even if job growth has not met most expectations, Americans are spending money and lots of it as summer kicks off.

Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of economic activity, grew at a sizzling annual rate of 11.4% in first three months of the year, the Commerce Department said Thursday. It's likely that some of that spending is being juiced by a round of \$1,400 individual payments that were included in the \$1.9 trillion support package Congress passed in March.

The first-quarter spending gain reflected increases in goods purchases, led by auto sales, and gains in spending on services, led by food services and travel accommodations, two areas that have benefited from the re-opening of the economy as vaccinations have increased.

Business investment grew at a strong 11.7% rate, better than the previous estimate of 10.8% growth, while government spending increased at a 5.7% rate, slightly below last month's estimate of a 5.8% gain.

The trade deficit grew in the first quarter, subtracting 1.5 percentage points from growth, as a recovering U.S. economy attracted rising imports while U.S. exporters struggled with weaker overseas demand.

'Horrible:' 64 dead in Ethiopian airstrike on Tigray

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (AP) — Ethiopia's military on Thursday said it was responsible for a deadly airstrike on a busy marketplace in the country's Tigray region. Health workers said the attack killed at least 64 people, including children, but the military insisted only combatants were targeted.

A doctor who managed to reach the market in Togoga village after Ethiopian soldiers blocked medical teams from responding to Tuesday's attack described a "horrible" scene of badly wounded people lying on the ground, crying in pain with no medical care.

"It was very traumatizing," he told The Associated Press. "I think most of the patients, they died because we were late there, because care wasn't available."

Most of the patients taken to regional hospitals weren't critical, he said: "The critical patients were already dead." Like others, he spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

A military spokesman, Col. Getnet Adane, told journalists that fighters supporting the Tigray region's former leaders had assembled to celebrate Martyrs' Day when the airstrike occurred.

"The Ethiopian air force uses the latest technology, so it conducted a precision strike that was successful," he said.

But the doctor who reached the scene said "most of the patients we found were mothers, children and elderly fathers. There were few young men."

The airstrike wounded more than 100 people, half of them seriously, a regional health official said. Health workers said Ethiopian forces blocked medical teams from responding and shot at a Red Cross ambulance trying to reach the scene.

Bodies were still being pulled from the rubble and dozens of survivors were still arriving at regional hospitals with shrapnel and blunt trauma wounds two days after the airstrike, said a doctor in the regional capital, Mekele. The International Committee of the Red Cross called the transport of seriously injured to Mekele "a matter of life and death."

Even on Thursday, United Nations spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters that the U.N. still hasn't been able to reach the scene. "Between the fighting and different groups on the ground we need clearance to go and we've just not been able to get it," he said.

The airstrike, one of the worst massacres of the war, came amid some of the fiercest fighting in Tigray

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since the conflict began in November as Ethiopian forces, supported by neighboring Eritrea, pursue Tigray's former leaders.

The Ethiopian military spokesman denied Tigray fighters' claims of gains in recent days, saying Ethiopian forces had been deployed to other locations for Monday's national election.

The United States and the European Union have condemned the airstrike in Togoga that left children, including a 1-year-old baby, screaming in pain.

A "reprehensible act," the U.S. State Department said. "Denying victims urgently needed medical care is heinous and absolutely unacceptable. We urge the Ethiopian authorities to ensure full and unhindered medical access to the victims immediately. We also call for an urgent and independent investigation."

The U.S. also called for an immediate cease-fire in Tigray, where thousands of civilians have been killed and 350,000 people are now facing one of the world's worst famines in years.

"At least 33,000 children in inaccessible parts of Tigray are severely malnourished and face imminent death without immediate help," the latest U.N. humanitarian update said Thursday.

Ethiopia claims that aid is being delivered to most of Tigray's 6 million people, but aid workers have said they have been repeatedly denied access to several parts of the region by soldiers.

With Ethiopia recently declaring Tigray's former ruling party a terrorist group, concerns have been widespread among Tigrayans, aid workers and others that anyone seen as linked to Tigray fighters, including civilians, could be targeted.

Tigrayans were appalled by Ethiopia's assertion that the airstrike was aimed only at combatants.

"It's an insult to the people and adding salt to the wounds, you know?" said Hailu Kebede, a former Togoga resident and official with the Salsay Woyane Tigray opposition party. He described how his brother, who has a shop in the market, ran for his life while his nearby home was destroyed.

"We know the area. I grew up there. There were no combatants," Hailu said. "The destroyed homes are those of my friends and my family."

One of his friends lost a child in the airstrike while another child had her hand amputated, he said.

The real death toll from the airstrike could be even higher because some people likely took the dead home to their nearby villages and buried them without telling regional officials, Hailu said.

Nearly all COVID deaths in US are now among unvaccinated

By CARLA K. JOHNSON and MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writers

Nearly all COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. now are in people who weren't vaccinated, a staggering demonstration of how effective the shots have been and an indication that deaths per day — now down to under 300 — could be practically zero if everyone eligible got the vaccine.

An Associated Press analysis of available government data from May shows that "breakthrough" infections in fully vaccinated people accounted for fewer than 1,200 of more than 853,000 COVID-19 hospitalizations. That's about 0.1%.

And only about 150 of the more than 18,000 COVID-19 deaths in May were in fully vaccinated people. That translates to about 0.8%, or five deaths per day on average.

The AP analyzed figures provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC itself has not estimated what percentage of hospitalizations and deaths are in fully vaccinated people, citing limitations in the data.

Among them: Only about 45 states report breakthrough infections, and some are more aggressive than others in looking for such cases. So the data probably understates such infections, CDC officials said.

Still, the overall trend that emerges from the data echoes what many health care authorities are seeing around the country and what top experts are saying.

Earlier this month, Andy Slavitt, a former adviser to the Biden administration on COVID-19, suggested that 98% to 99% of the Americans dying of the coronavirus are unvaccinated.

And CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said on Tuesday that the vaccine is so effective that "nearly every death, especially among adults, due to COVID-19, is, at this point, entirely preventable." She called

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such deaths “particularly tragic.”

Deaths in the U.S. have plummeted from a peak of more than 3,400 day on average in mid-January, one month into the vaccination drive.

About 63% of all vaccine-eligible Americans — those 12 and older — have received at least one dose, and 53% are fully vaccinated, according to the CDC. While vaccine remains scarce in much of the world, the U.S. supply is so abundant and demand has slumped so dramatically that shots sit unused.

Ross Bagne, a 68-year-old small-business owner in Cheyenne, Wyoming, was eligible for the vaccine in early February but didn’t get it. He died June 4, infected and unvaccinated, after spending more than three weeks in the hospital, his lungs filling with fluid. He was unable to swallow because of a stroke.

“He never went out, so he didn’t think he would catch it,” said his grieving sister, Karen McKnight. She wondered: “Why take the risk of not getting vaccinated?”

The preventable deaths will continue, experts predict, with unvaccinated pockets of the nation experiencing outbreaks in the fall and winter. Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle, said modeling suggests the nation will hit 1,000 deaths per day again next year.

In Arkansas, which has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the nation, with only about 33% of the population fully protected, cases, hospitalizations and deaths are rising.

“It is sad to see someone go to the hospital or die when it can be prevented,” Gov. Asa Hutchinson tweeted as he urged people to get their shots.

In Seattle’s King County, the public health department found only three deaths during a recent 60-day period in people who were fully vaccinated. The rest, some 95% of 62 deaths, had had no vaccine or just one shot.

“Those are all somebody’s parents, grandparents, siblings and friends,” said Dr. Mark Del Beccaro, who helps lead a vaccination outreach program in King County. “It’s still a lot of deaths, and they’re preventable deaths.”

In the St. Louis area, more than 90% of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 have not been vaccinated, said Dr. Alex Garza, a hospital administrator who directs a metropolitan-area task force on the outbreak.

“The majority of them express some regret for not being vaccinated,” Garza said. “That’s a pretty common refrain that we’re hearing from patients with COVID.”

The stories of unvaccinated people dying may convince some people they should get the shots, but young adults — the group least likely to be vaccinated — may be motivated more by a desire to protect their loved ones, said David Michaels, an epidemiologist at George Washington University’s school of public health in the nation’s capital.

Others need paid time off to get the shots and deal with any side effects, Michaels said.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration this month began requiring health care employers, including hospitals and nursing homes, to provide such time off. But Michaels, who headed OSHA under President Barack Obama, said the agency should have gone further and applied the rule to meat and poultry plants and other food operations as well as other places with workers at risk.

Bagne, who lived alone, ran a business helping people incorporate their companies in Wyoming for the tax advantages. He was winding down the business, planning to retire, when he got sick, emailing his sister in April about an illness that had left him dizzy and disoriented.

“Whatever it was. That bug took a LOT out of me,” he wrote.

As his health deteriorated, a neighbor finally persuaded him to go to the hospital.

“Why was the messaging in his state so unclear that he didn’t understand the importance of the vaccine? He was a very bright guy,” his sister said. “I wish he’d gotten the vaccine, and I’m sad he didn’t understand how it could prevent him from getting COVID.”

EXPLAINER: So much buzz, but what is critical race theory?

By BRYAN ANDERSON Associated Press/Report for America

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Former President Donald Trump has railed against it. Republicans in the U.S.

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Senate introduced a resolution condemning any requirement for teachers to be trained in it. And several Republican-controlled states have invoked it in legislation restricting how race can be taught in public schools.

The concept known as critical race theory is the new lightning rod of the GOP. But what exactly is it?

The term seemed to appear in statehouses and at political rallies almost from nowhere. Over the past few months, it has morphed from an obscure academic discussion point on the left into a political rallying cry on the right.

On Wednesday, for instance, critical race theory became a flashpoint during a congressional hearing into the military's approach to addressing racism and extremism, when Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, pushed back forcefully against accusations by Republican lawmakers that the effort is creating division and hurting morale.

Yet, even those who condemn or seek to ban critical race theory in schools often struggle to define what it is. Real-world examples of students being indoctrinated in its principles are difficult to find.

WHAT IS CRITICAL RACE THEORY?

Critical race theory is a way of thinking about America's history through the lens of racism. Scholars developed it during the 1970s and 1980s in response to what they viewed as a lack of racial progress following the civil rights legislation of the 1960s.

It centers on the idea that racism is systemic in the nation's institutions and that they function to maintain the dominance of white people in society.

The architects of the theory argue that the United States was founded on the theft of land and labor and that federal law has preserved the unequal treatment of people on the basis of race. Proponents also believe race is culturally invented, not biological.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, executive director of the African American Policy Forum, a social justice think tank based in New York City, was one of the early proponents. Initially, she says, it was "simply about telling a more complete story of who we are."

IS CRITICAL RACE THEORY BEING TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS?

There is little to no evidence that critical race theory itself is being taught to K-12 public school students, though some ideas central to it, such as lingering consequences of slavery, have been. In Greenwich, Connecticut, some middle school students were given a "white bias" survey that parents viewed as part of the theory.

Republicans in North Carolina point to the Wake County Public School System as an example, saying teachers participated in a professional development session on critical race theory. County education officials canceled a future study session once it was discovered but insist the theory is not part of its classroom curriculum.

"Critical race theory is not something we teach to students," said Lisa Luten, a spokeswoman for the school system. "It's more of a theory in academia about race that adults use to discuss the context of their environment."

WHY ARE REPUBLICANS UPSET?

Many Republicans view the concepts underlying critical race theory as an effort to rewrite American history and persuade white people that they are inherently racist and should feel guilty because of their advantages.

But the theory also has become somewhat of a catchall phrase to describe racial concepts some conservatives find objectionable, such as white privilege, systemic inequality and inherent bias.

WHERE DID REPUBLICAN PUSHBACK BEGIN?

Republicans often cite the 1619 Project as a cause for concern. The New York Times initiative, published in 2019, aimed to tell a fuller story of the country's history by putting slavery at the center of America's founding.

Critical race theory popped into the mainstream last September when then-President Trump took aim at it and the 1619 Project as part of a White House event focused on the nation's history. He called both "a crusade against American history" and "ideological poison that ... will destroy our country."

HOW ARE STATES ADDRESSING IT?

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So far, 25 states have considered legislation or other steps to limit how race and racism can be taught, according to an analysis from Education Week. Eight states, all Republican-led, have banned or limited the teaching of critical race theory or similar concepts through laws or administrative actions. The bans largely address what can be taught inside the classroom. While bills in some states mention critical race theory by name, others do not.

Last week Texas Gov. Greg Abbott signed a bill prohibiting public school teachers from making any of 10 concepts part of their curriculum. That includes the idea that the advent of slavery in what is now the United States marks the true founding of the nation.

At the request of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, that state's education board approved a resolution last week stating that teaching critical race theory and using instructional material related to the 1619 Project violate state standards. U.S. Sen. Rick Scott, R-Florida, and two other GOP senators introduced a resolution last month that "condemns the practice of requiring teachers to receive Critical Race Theory education."

WHAT IS THE RESPONSE TO THE GOP ACTIONS?

Teachers' unions, educators and social studies organizations worry the limits will whitewash American history by downplaying the role past injustices still play today. They also fear a chilling effect on classroom discussions.

Leading critical race theory scholars view the GOP-led measures as hijacking the national conversation about racial inequality that gained momentum after the killing of George Floyd by a white police officer in Minnesota.

Some say the ways Republicans describe it are unrecognizable to them. Cheryl Harris, a UCLA law professor who teaches a course on the topic, said it's a myth that critical race theory teaches hatred of white people and is designed to perpetuate divisions in American society. Instead, she said she believes the proposals have a clear political goal — "to ensure that Republicans can win in 2022."

Boom in Native American oil complicates Biden climate push

By MATTHEW BROWN and FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

NEW TOWN, N.D. (AP) — On oil well pads carved from the wheat fields around Lake Sakakawea, hundreds of pump jacks slowly bob to extract 100 million barrels of crude annually from a reservation shared by three Native American tribes.

About half their 16,000 members live on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation atop one of the biggest U.S. oil discoveries in decades, North Dakota's Bakken shale formation.

The drilling rush has brought the tribes unimagined wealth -- more than \$1.5 billion and counting -- and they hope it will last another 20 to 25 years. The boom also propelled an almost tenfold spike in oil production from Native American lands since 2009, federal data shows, complicating efforts by President Joe Biden to curb carbon emissions.

Burning of oil from tribal lands overseen by the U.S. government now produces greenhouse gases equivalent to about 12 million vehicles a year, according to an Associated Press analysis. But Biden exempted Native American lands from a suspension of new oil and gas leases on government-managed land in deference to tribes' sovereign status.

A judge in Louisiana temporarily blocked the suspension June 15, but the administration continues to develop plans that could extend the ban or make leases more costly.

With tribal lands now producing more than 3% of U.S. oil and huge reserves untapped, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland — the first Native American to lead a U.S. cabinet-level agency — faces competing pressures to help a small number of tribes develop their fossil fuels while also addressing climate change that affects all Native communities.

"We're one of the few tribes that have elected to develop our energy resources. That's our right," tribal Chairman Mark Fox told AP at the opening of a Fort Berthold museum and cultural center built with oil revenue. "We can develop those resources and do it responsibly so our children and grandchildren for the next 100 years have somewhere to live."

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Smallpox nearly wiped out the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara tribes in the mid-1800s. They lost most of their territory to broken treaties — and a century later, their best remaining lands along the Missouri River were flooded when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers created Lake Sakakawea. With dozens of villages uprooted, many people moved to a replacement community above the lake — New Town.

Today, leaders of the three tribes view oil as their salvation and want to keep drilling before it's depleted and the world moves past fossil fuels.

And they want the Biden administration to speed up drilling permits and fend off efforts to shut down a pipeline carrying most reservation oil to refineries.

PIPELINE FIGHT

Yet tribes left out of the drilling boom have become outspoken against fossil fuels as climate change worsens. One is the Standing Rock Sioux about 100 miles (160 kilometers) to the south.

Home to the Dakota and Lakota nations, Standing Rock gained prominence during a months-long stand-off between law enforcement and protesters, including tribal officials, who tried to shut down the Dakota Access Pipeline that carries Fort Berthold crude.

A judge revoked the pipeline's government permit because of inadequate environmental analysis and allowed crude to flow during a new review. But Standing Rock wants the administration to halt the oil for good, fearing a pipeline break could contaminate its drinking water.

Meantime, attention surrounding the skirmish provided the Sioux with foundation backing to develop a wind farm in Porcupine Hills, an area of scrub oak and buffalo grass with cattle ranches.

The pipeline fight stirs bitter memories in Fawn Wasin Zi, a teacher who chairs the Standing Rock renewable power authority. She grew up hearing her father and grandmother tell about a government dam that created Lake Oahe — how they had to leave their home then watch government agents burn it, only to be denied housing, electricity and other promised compensation.

Wasin Zi, whose ancestors followed legendary Lakota leader Sitting Bull, wants to ensure the tribe doesn't fall victim yet again to a changing world, where fossil fuels warm the planet and bring drought and wildfire.

"We have to find a way to use the technology that's available right now, whether it's geothermal or solar or wind," she said.

Only a dozen of the 326 tribal reservations produce significant oil, according to a drilling analysis provided to AP by S&P Global Platts.

Biden's nominee to oversee them as assistant secretary for Indian affairs, Bryan Newland, recently told a U.S. Senate committee the administration recognizes the importance of oil and gas to some reservations and pledged to let tribes determine resource development.

Interior officials denied interview requests about tribal energy plans, but said tribes were consulted in April after Biden ordered the department to "engage with tribal authorities" on developing renewables and fossil fuels.

Joseph McNeill Jr, manager of Standing Rock's energy authority, said a conference call with Interior yielded no pledges to further the tribe's wind project. Fort Berthold officials said they've had no offers of discussions with the administration.

ONE TRIBE'S BUILDING BOOM

Fort Berthold still reels from ills oil brought — worse crime and drugs, tanker truck traffic, road fatalities, spills of oil and wastewater. Tribal members lament that stars are lost in the glare of flaring waste gas from wells.

Yet oil brought positive changes, too. As the tribes' coffers fattened, dozens of projects got underway. The reservation now boasts new schools, senior centers, parks, civic centers, health and drug rehab facilities. Oil money is building a \$26 million greenhouse complex heated by electricity from gas otherwise wasted.

The \$30 million cultural center in New Town pieces together the tribes' fractured past through displays and artifacts. A sound studio captures stories from elders who lived through dam construction and flooding along the Missouri. And one exhibit traces the oil boom after fracking allowed companies to tap reserves once too difficult to drill.

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"Our little town, New Town, changed overnight," said MHA Nation Interpretive Center Director Delphine Baker. "We never had traffic lights growing up. It's like I moved to a different town."

HOPING FOR "MORNING LIGHT"

Lower on the Missouri, Standing Rock grapples with high energy costs. There's no oil worth extracting, no gas or coal. The biggest employer beside tribal government is a casino, where revenue plummeted during the pandemic.

"There's nothing here. No jobs. Nothing," said Donald Whitelighting, Jr., who lives in Cannon Ball, near the Dakota Access Pipeline protest.

Whitelighting, who cares for his mother in a modest home, said he pays up to \$500 a month for electricity in winter. Utility costs, among North Dakota's highest, severely strain a reservation officials say has 40% poverty and 75% unemployment.

The tribe hopes its wind project, Anpetu Wi, meaning "morning light," will help. Officials predict its 235 megawatts — enough for roughly 94,000 homes — would double their annual revenue and fund benefits like those Fort Berthold derives from oil — housing, health care, more jobs.

Standing Rock's power authority can directly negotiate aspects of the project. Yet it needs Interior approval because the U.S. holds tribal lands in trust.

"AN OIL FIELD TO PROTECT"

Outside North Dakota, tribes with oil — the Osage in Oklahoma, the Navajo in the Southwest and Native corporations in Alaska — also are pushing the Biden administration to cede power over energy development, including letting tribes conduct environmental reviews.

A Navajo company's operations in the Aneth field in southern Utah bring about \$28 million to \$35 million annually. Active since the 1950s, the field likely has another 30 years of life, said James McClure, chief executive of the Navajo Nation Oil and Gas Co..

The company has considered expanding into federal land in New Mexico and Colorado. Biden's attempts to suspend new leases could slow those plans, and it's considering helium production as an option.

In northern Oklahoma, the Osage have been drilling oil for more than a century.

Cognizant of global warming and shifting energy markets, they are pondering renewables, too. For now, they want the Biden administration to speed up drilling permits.

"We are looking at what is going to be best for us," said Everett Waller, chairman of the tribe's energy regulator. "I wasn't given a wind turbine. I was given an oil field to protect."

120,000-year-old fossils in Israel link to human family tree

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bones found in an Israeli quarry are from a branch of the human evolutionary tree and are 120,000 to 140,000 years old, scientists reported Thursday.

A team of anthropologists spent years analyzing the fragments of a skull, lower jaw bone and tooth that were uncovered in Neshar Ramla in 2010, comparing them to hundreds of fossils around the world from different eras.

The researchers determined that the fossils likely came from a hominin group closely related to Neanderthals and sharing many of their features, such as the shape of the lower jaw. The scientists also believe that there are enough similarities to link this group to other populations found in prior cave excavations in Israel dating to around 400,000 years ago.

"The teeth have some unique features that enable us to draw a line between these populations," said Tel Aviv University dental anthropologist Rachel Sarig, a co-author of the paper published Thursday in the journal *Science*.

This group probably inhabited the region from around 400,000 to 100,000 years ago, said Tel Aviv University physical anthropologist Israel Hershkovitz, another co-author. He said the remains found at Neshar Ramla are likely from "some of the last survivors of a once very dominant group in the Middle East."

Prior research has shown that homo sapiens — modern humans — also lived in the region at the same time.

Many scientists believe that the arrival of homo sapiens in Europe presaged the decline of Neanderthals there, but the story may have been different in the Levant region — the crossroads between North Africa and Eurasia.

The new findings add to research showing that homo sapiens and Neanderthal-like groups overlapped in the Middle East over a significant amount of time, probably tens of thousands of years.

There were likely cultural and genetic exchanges between the groups, the paper authors suggest. "The Neanderthal story can no longer be told as a European story only. It's a much more complicated story," said Hershkovitz.

Sheela Athreya, a Texas A&M University paleoanthropologist who was not involved in the study, said the new research "gives us a lot to think about in terms of the history of population groups in this region, and how they may have interacted with populations in other regions, in Europe and North Africa."

The Nesher Ramla fossils "look like something on a lineage heading toward Neanderthal," said Eric Delson, a paleoanthropologist at Lehman College in New York who was not involved in the study. He characterized the findings as "fossils of what appears to be an intermediate variety — this group may be predecessors to Neanderthals in this area."

Alabama teenager donates his hair for children with cancer

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

Kieran Moïse's afro was a splendid 19 inches, a huge part of his personality. But after six years of growth, the 17-year-old Alabamian knew that he and his hair would soon be parted: He was bound for the U.S. Air Force Academy.

So in memory of a friend who died from cancer, he cut it off and donated it to the nonprofit Children With Hair Loss, which provides human hair replacements to children and teenagers facing medically related hair loss due to cancer treatments, alopecia and burns.

"I knew I didn't want it to just get cut off and thrown on the floor, so I wanted to give back," he said. "I knew I wanted to send a message."

He did — and many responded. Moïse printed out flyers and spread the word on social media for an event held by the nonprofit at a brewery in Huntsville, Alabama. There, family, friends and even some of his elementary and middle school teachers took turns cutting his hair in braids. His story was widely shared online.

"It's good to see good news and see ... that people are still doing good things, because all it does is inspire others," he said.

"That's really what I want to come out of this: I want other people to (say), 'Hey, if he's doing this, so can I.'"

Moïse also launched a fundraiser through St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, which had helped his late classmate, Josh Quist. He died when they were in middle school. "That's when I started hating cancer," Moïse said.

Initially, Moïse hoped he could raise \$19,000, or \$1,000 per inch of hair. "Kieran's Curls for Cancer" has exceeded expectations and has already raised nearly \$35,000 for St. Jude.

Small gestures of kindness, Moïse said, can spread. "When you smile, that usually makes someone else smile, and then that one smile can brighten someone else's day," he said.

"I know I've had rough days where someone just does something nice for me or I see them do something nice to someone else, and I remember that the whole day."

Lawyer: Death of John McAfee surprised the US mogul's family

By ARITZ PARRA Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Authorities in Spain say a judge has ordered an autopsy for John McAfee, the gun-loving antivirus pioneer, cryptocurrency promoter and occasional politician who died in a prison cell pending

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extradition to the United States for allegedly evading millions in unpaid taxes.

A court spokeswoman for the Catalonia region said Thursday that a forensic team would need to perform toxicology tests on McAfee's body to determine the cause of death and that results could take "days or weeks."

Authorities say everything at the scene indicated that the 75-year-old tycoon killed himself.

The judicial investigation is being handled by a court in Martorell, a town northwest of Barcelona with jurisdiction over the prison where McAfee died. The spokeswoman wasn't authorized to be identified by name in media reports.

McAfee's Spanish lawyer, Javier Villalba, said the entrepreneur's death had come as a surprise to his wife and other relatives, adding he would seek to get "to the bottom" of his client's death.

"This has been like pouring cold water on the family and on his defense team," Villalba told The Associated Press on Thursday. "Nobody expected it, he had not said goodbye."

Although Villalba said he had no evidence of any foul play but blamed the death on "the cruelty of the system" for keeping a 75-year-old behind bars for economic, not violent, crimes after judges refused to release him on bail.

"We had managed to nullify seven of the 10 counts he was accused of and even so he was still that dangerous person who could be fleeing Spain if he was released?" the lawyer said. "He was a world eminece, where could he hide?"

Spain's National Court on Monday ruled that McAfee should be extradited to the U.S. to face charges for evading more than \$4 million in taxes in the fiscal years 2016 to 2018. The judge dropped seven of the 10 counts in the initial indictment.

Villalba said McAfee had learned about the ruling on Tuesday and that his death on Wednesday didn't come in the heat of the moment. He also said McAfee and the legal team had been preparing an appeal to avoid being extradited.

A penitentiary source told the AP that McAfee was sharing a cell in the Brians 2 jail where he had been put in preventive detention since he was arrested in October last year on a U.S. warrant, but that at the moment of his death he had been alone.

Prosecutors in Tennessee accused McAfee of failing to report income from promoting cryptocurrencies while he did consulting work, earnings made in speaking engagements and for selling the rights to his life story for a documentary. The criminal charges carried a prison sentence of up to 30 years.

The British-born entrepreneur led an eccentric life after selling his stake in the antivirus software company named after him in the early 1990s. He twice made long-shot runs for the U.S. presidency.

McAfee often professed his love for drugs and guns in public remarks. And some of his actions landed him in legal trouble beyond Tennessee, from Central America to the Caribbean. In 2012, he was sought for questioning in connection with the murder of his neighbor in Belize, but was never charged with a crime.

Palace: Japan emperor 'worried' about Olympics amid pandemic

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's Emperor Naruhito is "extremely worried" that the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics could accelerate the spread of the coronavirus, the head of the Imperial Palace said Thursday with the games opening in one month.

The games will bring thousands of foreign athletes, officials, sponsors and journalists to Japan during a pandemic, despite caution raised by experts about the risk of infections and the public's persistent calls for cancellation or further postponement.

Yasuhiko Nishimura, grand steward of the Imperial Household Agency, told a news conference that the Emperor has voiced concerns.

"His majesty is extremely worried about the current situation of the COVID-19 infections," Nishimura said. "While there are voices of unease among the public, I believe (the emperor) is concerned that holding the Olympics and Paralympics ... may lead to the expansion of the infections."

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The delayed games open July 23, and the Paralympics begin a month later.

Nishimura also urged the organizers to "take every possible anti-virus measures so as not to cause the spread of the infections at the Olympics and Paralympics, where the emperor serves the Honorary Patron."

The emperor is the symbol of the state with no political power. But like his father, Naruhito has gained broad popularity and his words are highly respected.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is determined to hold the Olympics despite concerns from the public and public health experts.

Adding to their concern, officials in Izumisano, a western Japan town hosting the nine-member Ugandan Olympic team for training, said a second member of the team tested positive for the virus. The first, reportedly a coach, was detected upon arrival Saturday in Tokyo. The rest of the team have been isolating at an Osaka hotel.

Suga eased a third state of emergency in Tokyo that had been in place since late April and switched to less-stringent measures focusing on shorter bar and restaurant hours. But experts said Wednesday that infections are already bouncing back in the Tokyo region and could accelerate in coming weeks.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato, downplaying the impact of emperor's concern, said he believed the grand steward expressed "his personal views."

Naruhito, 61, also expressed his concern about the pandemic in his speech at an academic award ceremony Monday: "In order to overcome this challenge, it is important for all of us, in and outside of Japan, to bring our hearts together and cooperate."

Under the plan before a one-year postponement, Naruhito was scheduled to declare the start of the Olympics at the opening ceremony, but details, including his presence at the games, are yet to be finalized, palace officials said.

Rembrandt's huge 'Night Watch' gets bigger thanks to AI

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

AMSTERDAM (AP) — One of Rembrandt van Rijn's biggest paintings just got a bit bigger.

A marriage of art and artificial intelligence has enabled Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum to recreate parts of the iconic "Night Watch" painting that were snipped off 70 years after Rembrandt finished it.

The printed strips now hang flush to the edges of the 1642 painting in the museum's Honor Gallery. Their addition restores to the work the off-center focal point that that rebellious Golden Age master Rembrandt originally intended.

"It can breathe now," museum director Taco Dibbits told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The crowded painting's two main characters, Captain Frans Banninck Cocq and Lieutenant Willem van Ruytenburch, are central in the chopped down painting. With the new digital additions — particularly a strip on the left of the painting that features two men and makes clear that a boy is looking over a balustrade — the main figures effectively are shifted to the right.

"It really gives the painting a different dynamic," Dibbits said. "And what it taught us is that Rembrandt never does what you expect."

The museum always knew the original, uncut, painting was bigger, in part thanks to a far smaller copy painted at the same time that is attributed to Gerrit Lundens.

Researchers and restorers who have painstakingly pored over the work for nearly two years using a battery of high tech scanners, X-rays and digital photography combined the vast amount of data they generated with the Lundens copy to recreate and print the missing strips.

"We made an incredibly detailed photo of the Night Watch and through artificial intelligence or what they call a neural network, we taught the computer what color Rembrandt used in the Night Watch, which colors, what his brush strokes looked like," Dibbits said.

The machine learning also enabled the museum to remove distortions in perspective that are present in the Lundens copy because the artist was sitting at one corner while he painted Rembrandt's painting.

The reason the 1642 group portrait of an Amsterdam civil militia was trimmed is simple: It was moved

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from the militia's club house to the town hall and there it didn't fit on a wall between two doors. A bit of very analog cropping with a pair of scissors ensued and the painting took on the dimensions that have now been known for centuries. The fate of the pieces of canvas that were trimmed off remains a mystery.

The digital recreation that will be on show in coming months come as part of research and restoration project called "Operation Night Watch" that began just under two years ago, before the global pandemic emptied museums for months.

Under relaxations of the Dutch COVID-19 lockdown, the museum can welcome more visitors from this weekend, but still only about half of its normal capacity.

During the restoration project, the painting was encased in a specially designed glass room and studied in unprecedented detail from canvas to the final layer of varnish.

Among that mound of data, researchers created the most detailed photograph ever made of the painting by combining 528 digital exposures.

The 1642 painting last underwent significant restoration more than 40 years ago after it was slashed by a knife-wielding man and is starting to show blanching in parts of the canvas.

Dibbits said the new printed additions are not intended to trick visitors into thinking the painting is bigger, but to give them a clear idea of what it was supposed to look like.

"Rembrandt would have definitely done it more beautifully, but this comes very close," he said.

Hong Kong's last pro-democracy paper sells out final edition

By ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — The final edition of Hong Kong's last remaining pro-democracy paper sold out in hours Thursday, as readers scooped up all 1 million copies of the Apple Daily, whose closure was yet another sign of China's tightening grip on the semi-autonomous city.

Across the densely populated metropolis, people lined up early in the morning to buy the paper, which in recent years has become an increasingly outspoken critic of Chinese and Hong Kong authorities' efforts to limit the freedoms found here but not in mainland China. The paper was gone from newsstands by 8:30 a.m.

The newspaper said it was forced to cease operations after police froze \$2.3 million of its assets, searched its office and arrested five top editors and executives last week, accusing them of foreign collusion to endanger national security.

"This is our last day, and last edition, does this reflect the reality that Hong Kong has started to lose its press freedom and freedom of speech?" an Apple Daily graphic designer, Dickson Ng, asked in comments to The Associated Press. "Why does it have to end up like this?"

The paper printed 1 million copies for its last edition — up from the usual 80,000. On the front page was splashed an image of an employee in the office waving at supporters surrounding the building, with the headline "Hong Kongers bid a painful farewell in the rain, 'We support Apple Daily.'"

While pro-democracy media outlets still exist online, it was the only print newspaper of its kind left in the city.

The pressure on the paper reflects a broader crackdown on Hong Kong's civil liberties, ramped up after massive antigovernment protests in 2019 unsettled authorities. In response, they imposed a sweeping national security law — used in the arrests of the newspaper employees — and revamped Hong Kong's election laws to keep opposition voices out of the legislature.

The result is that dissenting voices have been almost completely silenced in the city long known as an oasis of freedoms on mainland China's doorstep. The increasing restrictions have come despite China's promise to protect Hong Kong's civil liberties for 50 years after the city's 1997 handover from Britain.

The closure of Apple Daily raises the specter that other media outlets — though none as outspoken — will become even more cautious, such as the more than 100-year-old English-language South China Morning Post. The paper, while identified with the political and business mainstream, has thus far continued to report on controversial issues in Hong Kong and on mainland China, even after its owner, internet business

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titan Jack Ma, dropped from sight last year after publicly criticizing Chinese government policies.

Apple Daily's closure marks a "dark day for press freedom in Hong Kong," said Thomas Kellogg, executive director of the Georgetown Center for Asian Law.

"Without Apple Daily, Hong Kong is less free than it was a week ago. Apple Daily was an important voice, and it seems unlikely that any other media outlet will be able to fill its shoes, given growing restrictions on free speech and freedom of the press," he said.

Taiwan's Cabinet agency responsible for China issues also lamented the paper's closure as a heavy blow to media freedom in Hong Kong. The island is a self-governing democracy that split from mainland China in 1949 but that Beijing continues to claim as its territory.

"This shows the international community that the Chinese Communist Party, in its exercise of totalitarian political power, will stop at nothing to use extreme means to wipe out dissenting opinions," Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council said in an emailed statement. "Humankind's quest for freedom, democracy and other universal values will not be lost to history, but history will remember the ugly face of the power behind the suppression of freedom."

Beijing has dismissed such criticism as interference in its internal affairs, and Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian on Thursday lashed out at foreign officials who have criticized the legal actions against Apple Daily.

"Press freedom is not an excuse of impunity and whoever disrupts Hong Kong has no extrajudicial privileges," Zhao told reporters at a daily briefing.

On Wednesday night, over 100 people stood outside Apple Daily's office building in the rain to show their support, taking photographs and shouting words of encouragement.

Inside the building, associate publisher Chan Pui-man told staff who gathered around the newsroom to big applause: "You've done a great job, everyone!" Chan was one of the five arrested last week.

In the early hours of Thursday, residents in the city's Mong Kok neighborhood in the working-class Kowloon district began lining up hours before the paper hit the stands.

Apple Daily's Hong Kong website contained only a notice on Thursday that read: "We are sad to inform you that Apple Daily and Next Magazine's web and app content will no longer be accessible at 23:59, 23 June 2021, HKT."

"We would like to thank all of our readers, subscribers, advertisers, and Hongkonger(s) for your loyal support," the notice read.

A similar message was posted on its news app.

In the wake of the announcement of the paper's closure, British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said authorities were using the national security law to curtail freedom and punish dissent, calling the paper's closure "a chilling demonstration of their campaign to silence all opposition voices."

German Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Adebahr said the closure was "another sign that pluralism, freedom of opinion and freedom of the press in Hong Kong are subject to erosion."

Last week's arrests of the Apple Daily employees represented the first time the national security law had been used against journalists for something they published.

US, Germany confront rising antisemitism, Holocaust denial

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

BERLIN (AP) — The United States and Germany launched a new initiative Thursday to stem an alarming rise in antisemitism and Holocaust denial around the world.

The two governments announced the start of a U.S.-Germany Holocaust Dialogue that seeks to reverse the trend that gained traction during the coronavirus pandemic amid a surge in political populism across Europe and the U.S. The dialogue creates a way to develop educational and messaging tools to teach youth and others about the crimes of Nazis and their collaborators.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and several Holocaust survivors were present for the launch at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. All cited

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links between Holocaust denial, revisionism and ignorance to growing antisemitism as well as to broader discrimination against minorities.

"Holocaust denial and other forms of antisemitism often go hand in hand with homophobia, xenophobia, racism, other hatred," said Blinken, who is the step-son of a Holocaust survivor. "It's also a rallying cry for those who seek to tear down our democracies, which we've seen in both our countries, (and) often a precursor to violence."

Maas echoed Blinken's comments, underscoring the importance of Germany — "the country of the perpetrators," he said — taking in a leading role in the project.

"In recent years, we have seen antisemitism and racism eating into our society," Maas said. "Just think of the Yellow Star badge as seen at demonstrations against COVID measures, of the torrent of antisemitic conspiracy theories on the Internet, of the attacks on synagogues and on Jewish people living in our countries, of the rioters in front of the Bundestag or the rampaging mob in the U.S. capital."

With advancing age severely reducing the number of Holocaust survivors and dimming first-hand memories of the atrocities, Blinken and Maas said the new dialogue would produce innovative ways to educate younger generations about the Holocaust and the troubling buildup that led to the mass extermination of Jews and others in Nazi Germany and elsewhere.

"The Shoah was not a sharp fall, but a gradual descent into darkness," Blinken said.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, June 25, the 176th day of 2021. There are 189 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 25, 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that recitation of a state-sponsored prayer in New York State public schools was unconstitutional.

On this date:

In 1788, Virginia ratified the U.S. Constitution.

In 1876, Lt. Col. Colonel George A. Custer and his 7th Cavalry were wiped out by Sioux and Cheyenne Indians in the Battle of the Little Bighorn in Montana.

In 1942, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower was designated Commanding General of the European Theater of Operations during World War II. Some 1,000 British Royal Air Force bombers raided Bremen, Germany.

In 1947, "The Diary of a Young Girl," the personal journal of Anne Frank, a German-born Jewish girl hiding with her family from the Nazis in Amsterdam during World War II, was first published.

In 1950, war broke out in Korea as forces from the communist North invaded the South.

In 1973, former White House Counsel John W. Dean began testifying before the Senate Watergate Committee, implicating top administration officials, including President Richard Nixon as well as himself, in the Watergate scandal and cover-up.

In 1981, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that male-only draft registration was constitutional.

In 1990, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its first "right-to-die" decision, ruled that family members could be barred from ending the lives of persistently comatose relatives who had not made their wishes known conclusively.

In 1996, a truck bomb killed 19 Americans and injured hundreds at a U.S. military housing complex in Saudi Arabia.

In 2003, the Recording Industry Association of America threatened to sue hundreds of individual computer users who were illegally sharing music files online.

In 2009, death claimed Michael Jackson, the "King of Pop," in Los Angeles at age 50 and actor Farrah Fawcett in Santa Monica, California, at age 62.

In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld nationwide tax subsidies under President Barack Obama's health care overhaul in a 6-3 ruling that preserved health insurance for millions of Americans.

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Ten years ago: A suicide car bomber blasted a small clinic in eastern Afghanistan, causing the building to collapse and killing some three dozen people.

Five years ago: Pope Francis visited Armenia, where he recognized the Ottoman-era slaughter of Armenians as a genocide, prompting a harsh rebuttal from Turkey.

One year ago: Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said the state would "pause" its aggressive reopening as it dealt with a surge in coronavirus cases and hospitalizations. A government watchdog found that nearly 1.1 million relief payments totaling some \$1.4 billion in the government's coronavirus aid program went to dead people. Two U.S. warships, the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and the USS San Jacinto, notched their 161st consecutive day at sea, breaking the previous Navy record, as ships were ordered to avoid port visits because of the coronavirus. Restaurant chain Chuck E. Cheese filed for bankruptcy protection. Disney said it would recast its "Splash Mountain" theme park ride to remove its ties to "Song of the South," a 1946 movie that many viewed as racist. The Grammy-winning country group The Dixie Chicks dropped the word Dixie from its name. Census Bureau figures showed that for the first time, nonwhites and Hispanics were a majority of people under age 16 in 2019.

Today's Birthdays: Actor June Lockhart is 96. Civil rights activist James Meredith is 88. R&B singer Eddie Floyd is 84. Actor Barbara Montgomery is 82. Actor Mary Beth Peil (peel) is 81. Basketball Hall of Famer Willis Reed is 79. Singer Carly Simon is 76. Rock musician Ian McDonald (Foreigner; King Crimson) is 75. Actor-comedian Jimmie Walker is 74. Actor-director Michael Lembeck is 73. Rock singer Tim Finn is 69. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor is 67. Rock musician David Paich (Toto) is 67. Actor Michael Sabatino is 66. Actor-writer-director Ricky Gervais (jer-VAYZ') is 60. Actor John Benjamin Hickey is 58. Actor Erica Gimpel is 57. Basketball Hall of Famer Dikembe Mutombo (dih-KEHM'-bay moo-TAHM'-boh) is 55. Rapper-producer Richie Rich is 54. Actor Angela Kinsey is 50. Rock musician Mike Kroeger (KROO'-gur) (Nickelback) is 49. Rock musician Mario Calire is 47. Actor Linda Cardellini is 46. Actor Busy Philipps is 42. Jazz musician Joey Alexander is 18.