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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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Lake Norden Captures Lead Early To Defeat Groton Jr Legion

Groton Jr Legion watched the game slip away early and couldn't recover in a 7-3 loss to Lake Norden on Wednesday. Lake Norden scored on a single by George Jensen in the first inning, a single by Brennan Kessler in the first inning, a single by Rylee Warrington in the first inning, and a sacrifice fly by Dawson Noem in the second inning.

Lake Norden opened up scoring in the first inning. Jensen singled on a 2-2 count, scoring one run.

Lake Norden scored three runs in the fourth inning. Lake Norden offense in the inning was led by Noem and Jensen, who all drove in runs.

Carson Stormo earned the win for Lake Norden. The pitcher lasted four innings, allowing five hits and two runs while striking out one. Warrington threw three innings in relief out of the bullpen.

Ryan G took the loss for Groton Jr Legion. The hurler allowed four hits and four runs over two innings, striking out two and walking one.

Dillon A led Groton Jr Legion with two hits in two at bats. Groton Jr Legion didn't commit a single error in the field. Cade L had the most chances in the field with ten.

Lake Norden collected eight hits. Jensen and Warrington all collected multiple hits for Lake Norden.

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Britton



Spotlight on Groton Area Staff

Name: Vicci Stange

Position: Table Talks Advisor



"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."
Matthew 18:20

In the community of Groton, faith plays a large role in our lives. No matter what you believe, we are all united in belief for a better world through our words and actions. Vicci Stange works with generous donors and kind volunteers to spread faith to the people of Groton through the Table Talks program.

Table Talks is a weekly meeting where students from the Groton Area High School can come together and enjoy a talk from a guest speaker, along with a complimentary lunch provided by the volunteer chefs who work with Mrs. Stange. During this time, students are given a small respite from schoolwork and studying to enjoy the company of their peers and hear from guest speakers about their own faiths and how their beliefs manifest in their lives.

Before she became a stay-at-home parent, Mrs. Stange worked as a Respiratory Therapist at Avera St. Luke's hospital in Aberdeen for fifteen years. When she attended church in Aberdeen, Mrs. Stange observed the members of the Bethlehem Lutheran church hosting a Table Talks program. In this case, the church would bus students from the nearby high school to the church during their lunch periods to enjoy a talk and meal. This program in Aberdeen served as inspiration for the current Table Talks program in Groton. Mrs. Stange found support and encouragement from the people who hosted the Table Talks in Aberdeen, who would give her advice and assistance in establishing the Table Talks program in her town.

Table Talks was started in 2014 and has been going strong ever since. With the recent COVID-19 outbreak, Mrs. Stange and the wonderful volunteers who help with Table Talks have worked to ensure the safety of students when they come to Table Talks through various precautions and safety measures. Before the recent outbreak, Table Talks was hosted at St. John's Lutheran Church, located across the street from the high school. During the 2020-2021 school year, Table Talks was hosted at the Groton Masonic Lodge.

Vicci Stange has continued to host Table Talks with the support of generous donors and the kind volunteers who cook the food served every week. Mrs. Stange wants the readers of the Groton Daily Independent to know that she is sincerely grateful for the support and appreciation the town of Groton has shown for the Table Talks program, along with the appreciation she has for the volunteers who she works alongside.

Editor's Note: This is a continuing series compiled by Benjamin Higgins. Higgins who is working for the Groton Independent through the Project Skills program.

Fordham is on the Junior Advisory Council for Farmers Union Youth

By Toby Kane for South Dakota Farmers Union

This last year, we all learned new ways of staying connected. High school students were hit especially hard, as many missed milestones and school activities. Students were forced to adapt to new ways of learning, communicating and staying social.

This year's South Dakota Farmers Union State Camp brought back some of the old ways of doing things, plus added a few new experiences.

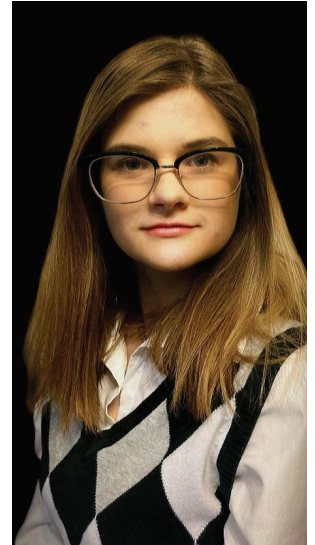
"My first year at state camp was a fun experience. I didn't know anyone when I got there, but I made a lot of friends," says Gettysburg eighth-grade student Bobbi Eide. "The experience definitely couldn't be recreated virtually. I'm glad it was in person."

Cadence Konechne, an eighth-grade student from Kimball, adds, "It was nice to meet new people. I learned a lot about cooperatives and how they actually work. I also learned a lot about diversity and enjoyed meeting the new Junior Advisory Council."

The campers elected the Junior and Senior Advisory Council (JACs) and welcomed them in with a JAC induction ceremony. The ceremony did not take place last year due to COVID, so it's a welcome return to a longstanding tradition for the campers.

"I think it's important to make it a special evening for our new leaders," says Education Director Rachel Haigh-Blume. "It recognizes the work they've put in to earn the title of leader and inspires younger campers to do the same."

The JACs act as mentors and leaders for campers and help with key decisions and planning throughout the year. Meet this year's elected JACs:



Alyssa Fordham

Alyssa Fordham, Groton, S.D. she is the daughter of Michael and Tina Fordham.

Alyssa is looking forward to coming back to camp as a JAC to help plan and implement the team's ideas. She believes the camping program allows campers from all over the state to come together and make great friends in a welcoming environment. Camp has taught her many skills that impact her thinking and life, including the cooperative business model and how it impacts people locally. Alyssa participates in one-act plays, oral interpretation, Groton Leos Club and Destination Imagination.

SD-DOH Confirms Detection of the Delta Coronavirus Variant in South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Health (SD-DOH) can confirm that the B.1.617.2 variant (the 'Delta variant') of COVID-19 has been detected in South Dakota. The findings were verified by an out-of-state laboratory, and while only one case of the variant has been identified in Edmunds County, it is safe to assume other cases across the state may exist.

"We are closely following this development and would like to reiterate, to all South Dakotans, the importance of getting tested and vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus," said Kim Malsam-Rysdon, Secretary of Health. "With easier access to the vaccine and testing, it has never been easier to protect yourself, your family and our communities."

Concerns of the 'Delta' variant appearing in the Great Plains region are that it is more easily spread from person-to-person, reduces the effectiveness of existing treatments, and reduces the protection of the COVID-19 vaccine. It's important to highlight that currently available vaccines have so far proven 100% effective against hospitalization and death from COVID-19.

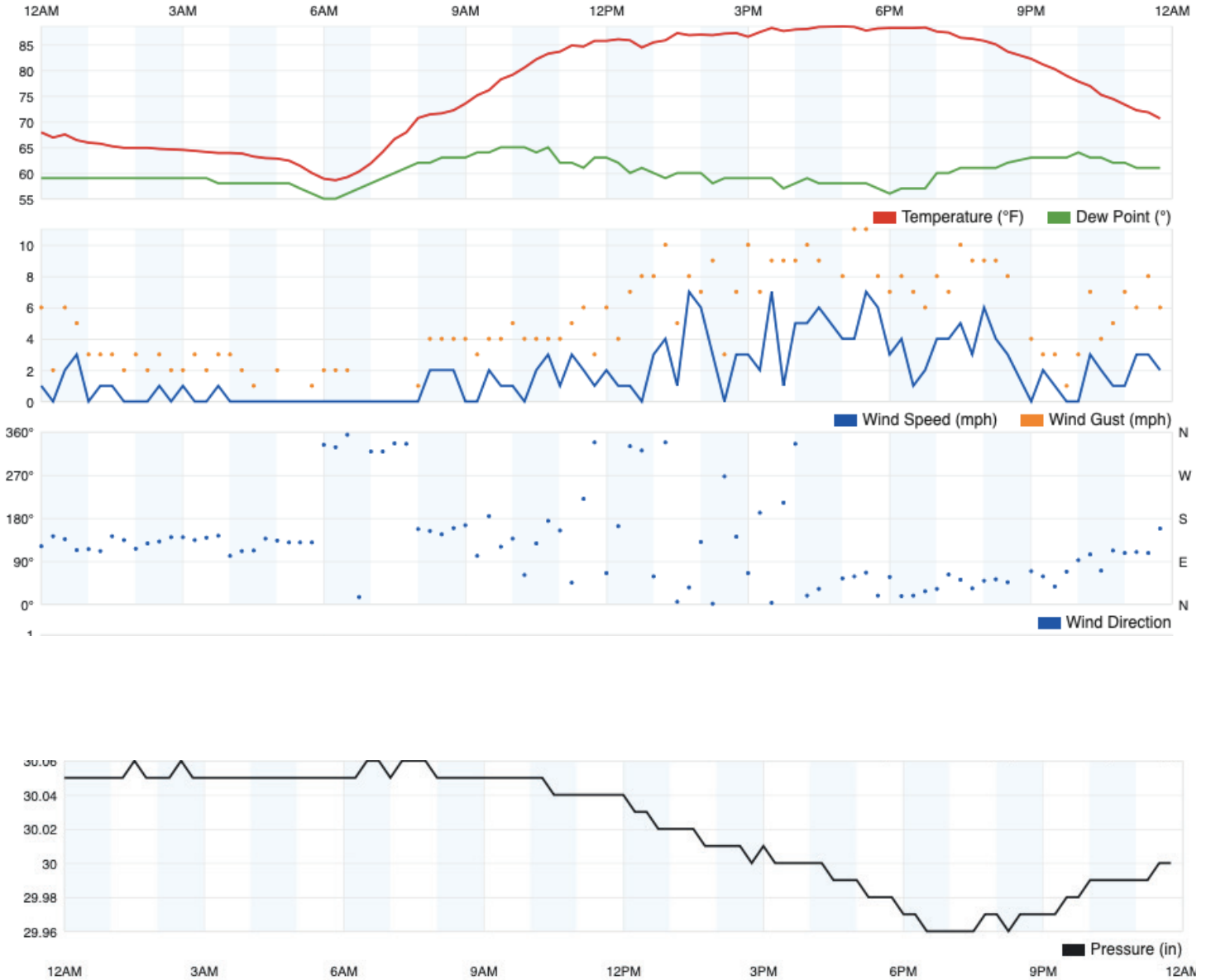
"While COVID-19 case counts remain at an all-time low since the beginning of the pandemic, virus variants remain a threat diminished by increased vaccinations," added Malsam-Rysdon.

The 'Delta' variant was first detected in India in late 2020 and was first detected in the United States in March 2021.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Hot

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Friday



Hot

Friday
Night



Mostly Clear

Saturday



Hot

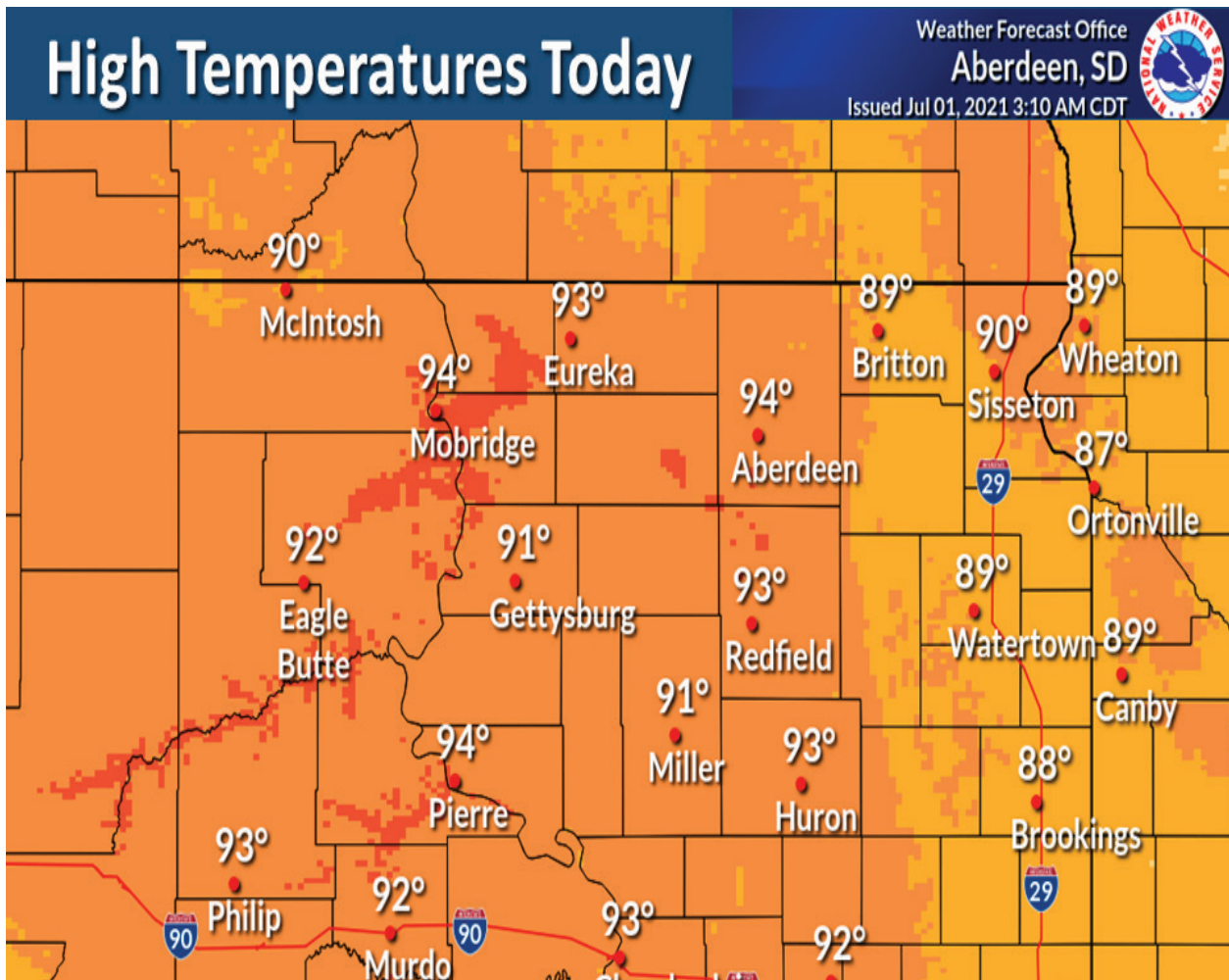
High: 93 °F

Low: 61 °F

High: 96 °F

Low: 67 °F

High: 98 °F



Temperatures continue to slowly warm over the next few days with little chance for moisture. Readings peak this weekend near the century mark, before a pattern change develops for next week that will bring us better chances for moisture.

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 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

June Roundup

Location	Average Temperature	Record	Normal	Precipitation	Record	Normal
Aberdeen	73.5 (5 th Warmest)	79.1 (1933)	67.6	0.78 (5 th Driest)	0.07 (1929)	3.76
Watertown	72.0 (4 th Warmest)	76.8 (1933)	66.1	0.65 (2 nd Driest)	0.33 (1950)	3.85
Sisseton	73.3 (3 rd Warmest)	75.4 (1933)	67.2	1.11 (5 th Driest)	0.55 (1974)	3.50
Pierre	74.6 (4 th Warmest)	77.4 (1988)	67.8	0.53 (4 th Driest)	0.32 (1913)	3.69
Mobridge	74.2 (6 th Warmest)	78.6 (1911)	67.9	0.38 (2 nd Driest)	0.26 (1974)	3.08

Much of the area experienced much above normal temperatures and much below normal precipitation for the month of June. Here is a comparison for major cities in the Aberdeen CWA.

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Today in Weather History

July 1, 1928: A powerful, estimated F4 tornado moved southeast from 6 miles west of Miller, Hand County, destroying farms near the start of the path. All buildings were leveled to the ground, including two homes. A checkbook from one residence was found 10 miles away. Estimated property damaged was set at \$50,000.

July 1, 1955: An estimated F2 tornado moved northeast near Bowdle. Two barns were destroyed. A small girl and a pony were reportedly carried a quarter mile without injury. A tornado was also spotted in Emmons County in North Dakota, causing \$10,000 worth of damage.

July 1, 2005: Torrential rains of three to seven inches fell across far eastern Brown, western and northern Day, and most of Marshall Counties in late June causing widespread flooding. The flood waters slowly receded through July 10th. Many township roads and highways were flooded along with thousands of acres of cropland. Water surrounded several homes resulting in people being rescued. Some of the houses were flooded. Many bridges were damaged, and roads and culverts were washed out. In Day County, 30 roads were washed out, and 15 bridges needed repairs.

July 1, 2006: With continued little or no rainfall along with much above average temperatures, a drought expanded and intensified through July across central and north central South Dakota. Severe (D2) to an extreme (D3) drought early in July worsened to an extreme (D3) to exceptional (D4) across all of the areas by the middle of July and remained there until the end of the month. Rainfall was 1.50 inches to 2.25 inches below average for the month and from 7 to 8 inches below average for the year. Soil moisture was 4 to 5 inches below average, and lakes and river flows were well below normal. Crops and pastures were devastated due to the extreme dryness and burn bans were in effect across all of the areas. Many ranchers had to sell off much of their cattle. Throughout July, periodic high winds, low relative humidity values, along with many lightning storms resulted in several fires across central and north central South Dakota. The fires burned tens of thousands of acres of pastureland and cropland. Hundreds of firefighters worked throughout the month to contain the flames. The governor of South Dakota declared a statewide emergency and the United States Department of Agriculture declared all of the counties drought disasters. Swan Lake, in north-central South Dakota between Lowry and Hoven, had completely dried up from the long period of dryness. The last time this happened to the lake was 30 years prior in 1976. Also, Lake Oahe at Pierre was four feet above its all-time low.

1792 - A tremendous storm (a tornado or hurricane) hit Philadelphia and New York City. Many young people were drowned while out boating on that Sunday. (David Ludlum)

1861: Cherrapunji, Meghalaya, India measured 366 inches of rain during the month of July 1861. From August 1, 1860, to July 31, 1861, Cherrapunji received a record-breaking 1,041.75 inches of precipitation.

1911 - The high of just 79 degrees at Phoenix AZ was their coolest daily maximum of record for the month of July. The normal daily high for July 1st is 105 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1979 - It snowed almost half a foot (5.8 inches) at Stampede Pass WA, a July record. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Lake Charles LA was drenched with a month's worth of rain during the early morning. More than five inches of rain soaked the city, including 2.68 inches in one hour. A thunderstorm in the southern Yakima Valley of Washington State produced high winds which downed trees up to six feet in diameter. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Twenty-six cities in the north central and northeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Lows of 48 degrees at Providence RI, 48 degrees at Roanoke VA, 49 degrees at Stratford CT, and 48 degrees at Wilmington, DE, were records for the month of July. Boston MA equalled their record for July with a low of 50 degrees. Five inches of snow whitened Mount Washington NH. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Showers and thunderstorms associated with the low pressure system which was once Tropical Storm Allison continued to drench parts of Mississippi, Louisiana and eastern Texas. Late night thunderstorms produced 12.58 inches of rain at Biloxi, MS, in six hours, and 10.73 inches at Gulfport MS. Flooding in Mississippi over the first six days of the month caused 55 million dollars damage. (The National Weather

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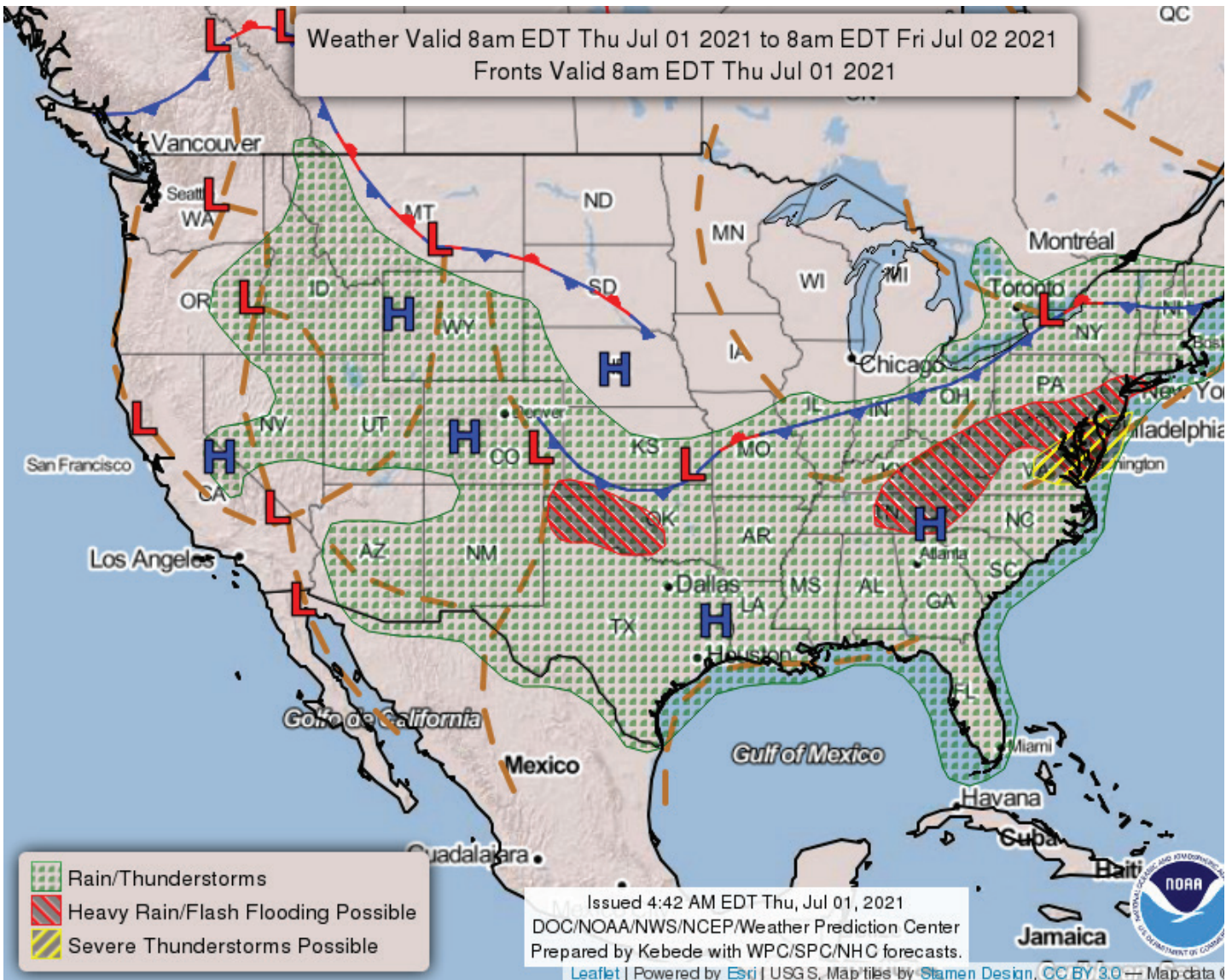
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 84 °F at 6:28 PM
Low Temp: 56 °F at 5:34 AM
Wind: 12 mph at 11:48 AM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 101° in 1911
Record Low: 41° in 1995
Average High: 84°F
Average Low: 59°F
Average Precip in June.: 3.76
Precip to date in June.: 0.81
Average Precip to date: 11.01
Precip Year to Date: 4.75
Sunset Tonight: 9:26 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:50 a.m.



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ETERNAL SECURITY

Many place their hope in the stock market or the price of gold or the property they own. Some look to the security of a pension or promise of a retirement account. Others hide money fearing the collapse of the economy. A few store food in containers that they have been told will last for years should a famine occur. Yet in the final analysis all of us know – deep down inside of us – that there is no promise that cannot be broken or possession that cannot be taken from us.

Psalm 71 was written by an old person. It seems as though he is reflecting on a life that has had many ups and downs, problems and pitfalls. But it is a Psalm that proclaims the faithfulness of God – past, present and future. "From my birth I have relied on You...You brought me forth from my mother's womb...I will always have hope and praise You more and more!"

If there is any comfort we can take from God's Word it is this: The record of His deeds in the past gives us the assurance of His grace today and hope for tomorrow. In this Psalm the author gives us a powerful description of the fact that there is no shadow of doubt in his mind that God's great acts in the past are sufficient evidence for us to believe that He will be with us today as well as tomorrow: "I declare Your power to the next generation, Your mighty acts to all who are to come!"

What more can we ask for? Whatever God has done for anyone at any time, He can do for us. He alone is faithful and worthy of worship. He alone endures forever.

Prayer: We rejoice together, Father, knowing that You have been with us and will be with us forever. Help us to trust and obey, not doubt. Thank You! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: You have kept me safe from birth. It was You Who watched over me from the day I was born. My praise is always of You. Psalm 71:5

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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
08/13/2021 Groton Basketball Golf Tournament
08/28/2021 Lions Club Crazy Golf Fest 9am Olive Grove Golf Course
09/11/2021 Lions Club Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
09/12/2021 Sunflower Classic Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
09/18-19 Groton Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
10/08/2021 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
10/09/2021 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm (Saturday before Columbus Day)
10/29/2021 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
10/31/2021 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
11/13/2021 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/25/2021 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/11/2021 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

01-06-08-20-28

(one, six, eight, twenty, twenty-eight)

Estimated jackpot: \$73,000

Lotto America

04-06-14-25-32, Star Ball: 9, ASB: 2

(four, six, fourteen, twenty-five, thirty-two; Star Ball: nine; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$7.61 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$72 million

Powerball

24-29-50-65-66, Powerball: 14, Power Play: 4

(twenty-four, twenty-nine, fifty, sixty-five, sixty-six; Powerball: fourteen; Power Play: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$88 million

Judge who charged 3 marshals with contempt drops out of case

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — A federal judge in South Dakota who charged three members of the U.S. Marshals Service with contempt of court over a COVID-19 vaccination dispute removed himself from the case after assigning an in-state attorney to prosecute the proceedings.

The chain of events began when state and federal prosecutors declined to handle the case. A retired attorney whom U.S. District Judge Charles Kornmann tried to appoint opted out over debate on whether he needed to restart his practice. Kornmann then assigned Thomas Fritz, of Rapid City, and recused himself.

Kornmann stated in an order filed Tuesday that it's likely the other federal judges in South Dakota will decline the case as well. If so, the chief judge for the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals will appoint a replacement judge.

Three supervisory marshals, including the agency's Chief of Staff John Kilgallon, are accused of allowing a deputy marshal to leave the courthouse in Aberdeen with prisoners in tow on May 10, after the marshal refused to tell the judge whether she had been vaccinated against COVID-19.

"The Department of Justice, acting through the Marshals Service, has apparently adopted a public policy to the effect that DOJ policies may trump lawful federal court orders," Kornmann said in Tuesday's filing. "This cannot be permitted. Despite some public confusion, this case has nothing to do with requiring anyone to be fully vaccinated."

3 accused of bilking millions from grain farmers enter pleas

HURON, S.D. (AP) — Three members of a South Dakota family accused of bilking millions from farmers due to risky speculation in the grain business have reached a plea deal with prosecutors.

While they originally faced 22 charges of violating financial reporting requirements for grain buyers and theft, Jared Steffensen, his wife Tami Steffensen and his mother, JoAnn Steffensen, each pleaded guilty to one felony charge on Tuesday in Beadle County, KELO-TV reported.

Dozens of farmers who collectively lost millions when H&I Grain failed to pay them for their grain, were in court when the Steffensens entered their pleas.

Jared and Tami Steffensen, of Arlington, pleaded guilty to theft by deception and could face five years

in the state penitentiary. His mother, JoAnn Steffensen pleaded guilty to a felony of failing to inform state regulators that the company was failing financially.

In July of 2016, Jared Steffensen lost somewhere between \$6 million to \$10 million of H&I Grain's money hedging commodities, according to prosecutors. Even though the Steffensens knew that their business was insolvent, they continued to reassure farmers they were fine, took their grain, and did not notify state regulators as required by law.

H&I declared bankruptcy and some of the farmers did win a judgment against the Steffensens in civil court. Duane Steffensen, who started the company, was facing charges as well, but died in January of 2019.

Devastated condo community looks to Biden visit for comfort

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — As the search for survivors of a Florida condo collapse enters its second week, rescue crews and relatives of those still missing are scheduled to meet with President Joe Biden Thursday, in a visit many are hoping will provide some measure of comfort to a devastated community.

Biden and first lady Jill Biden plan to thank first responders and search and rescue teams. They also plan to meet with the families of victims, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said.

The president's visit comes a week after Champlain Towers South, a 12-story beachfront condominium building in Surfside, suddenly came crashing down, leaving a pancaked rubble.

Search crews going through the ruins found the remains of six people Wednesday, bringing the number of confirmed dead to 18. The number of residents unaccounted for stands at 145.

Miami-Dade Police Director Freddy Ramirez said he hopes Biden's visit will be a morale booster for the entire community.

"We've had several challenges from weather, sorrow, pain. And I think that the president coming will bring some unity here for our community, support, like our governor, our mayor, all of us together," he said.

Psaki said the president and first lady also want to make sure that state and local officials have the resources and support they need under an emergency declaration approved by Biden for Miami-Dade. She emphasized Wednesday that the White House is being careful to coordinate with officials on the ground to ensure that Biden's visit doesn't do anything to "pull away" from the ongoing search and rescue effort.

State Fire Marshal Jimmy Patronis said he hopes to emphasize to Biden that there is a need for mental health resources to treat rescue workers for post-traumatic stress disorder.

"These guys are so blindly focused on the mission of saving lives, and unfortunately they see things they can't unsee," Patronis said.

"We want to make sure that when they ultimately do go home, that we're giving them the strength ... to be able to get back to work without fear of nightmares and challenges."

Since the tragedy, Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican, and Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava, a Democrat, have projected a united and cooperative front as they respond to the crisis.

Previously, they had sometimes sparred over how best to respond to the coronavirus outbreak, with clashes over wearing masks and other measures to control the pandemic. But no signs of partisanship have been evident in Surfside.

DeSantis has spoken appreciatively of the aid coming from Washington, even commending the Biden administration for "stepping up to the plate."

"We really appreciate having the support of the president," DeSantis said at a Friday news conference in Surfside -- although hours before, he had blasted President Joe Biden's border policies during an earlier press conference in the state's Panhandle.

DeSantis, who is up for reelection next year, is said to be exploring a run for the presidency in 2024.

Among the remains found Wednesday were those of a mother and her two daughters, ages 4 and 10, a loss that Cava called "too great to bear."

Miami-Dade police identified the children as 10-year-old Lucia Guara and 4-year-old Emma Guara, and their mother as 42-year-old Anaely Rodriguez. The remains of their father, Marcus Guara, 52, were pulled

from the rubble Saturday and identified Monday.

The cause of the collapse is under investigation. A 2018 engineering report found that the building's ground-floor pool deck was resting on a concrete slab that had "major structural damage" and needed extensive repairs. The report also found "abundant cracking" of concrete columns, beams and walls in the parking garage.

Just two months before the building came down, the president of its board wrote a letter to residents saying that structural problems identified in the 2018 inspection had "gotten significantly worse" and that major repairs would cost at least \$15.5 million. With bids for the work still pending, the building suddenly collapsed last Thursday.

Xi warns China won't be bullied at Communist Party centenary

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping warned Thursday that anyone who tries to bully China "will face broken heads and bloodshed," in a defiant speech hailing the country's rise that elicited loud cheers from a carefully chosen crowd at a celebration of the centenary of the founding of the ruling Communist Party.

In unusually forceful language, Xi appeared to be hitting back at the U.S. and others that have criticized the rising power's trade and technology policies, military expansion and human rights record. In an hour-long speech, he also said the nation must stick to its one-party rule, emphasizing the communists' role in lifting China to global prominence.

The rally — which featured a military flyover and people waving Chinese flags and singing patriotic songs — in some ways recalled the mass events held by Mao Zedong, communist China's founding leader. Xi even wore a gray buttoned-up suit like the ones favored by Mao and spoke from the same balcony atop Tiananmen Gate where the revolutionary leader declared the start of communist rule in 1949. More than 70,000 people attended Thursday, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

Xi, who heads the party and is thought to be considering a third term starting next year, received the biggest applause when he said the party had restored China's dignity after decades of subjugation to Western powers and Japan in the 19th and 20th centuries, and turned it into the world's second largest economy in recent decades.

"The Chinese people will absolutely not allow any foreign force to bully, oppress or enslave us and anyone who attempts to do so will face broken heads and bloodshed in front of the iron Great Wall of the 1.4 billion Chinese people," said Xi, who has eliminated limits on his time in office, prompting speculation that he could rule for life, as Mao did.

The strong language appeared aimed at revving up and playing to a domestic audience. The strongest elements of it — the references to bashing heads and bloodshed — were left out of state media's English translation of the quote.

Xi declared that China had restored order in Hong Kong following anti-government protests in 2019 and reiterated the Communist Party's determination to bring self-governing Taiwan under its control.

Both policies have been widely criticized by Western democracies. They have accused the Communist Party of abusing its power at home, including detaining more than 1 million Uyghurs and other mainly Muslim minorities for political reeducation in the northwest region of Xinjiang, and for imprisoning or intimidating into silence those it sees as potential opponents from Tibet to Hong Kong.

As part of a continuing crackdown on anti-government protests in the city that long enjoyed freedoms not seen on the mainland, police in Hong Kong sealed off Victoria Park on Thursday. In the past, the park was the starting point for annual pro-democracy marches on July 1, the anniversary of the British return of Hong Kong to China in 1997.

Xi also said the party would retain absolute control over the military, which now has the world's second-largest annual budget after the U.S. "We will turn the people's military into a world-class military, with even stronger capabilities and even more reliable means to safeguard the nation's sovereignty, security

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and development interests," he said.

Xi appears to be setting up China for a protracted struggle with the U.S., said Robert Sutter of George Washington University's Elliot School of International Affairs. He said China is pursuing "its very self-centered policy goals at the expense of others and of the prevailing world order."

China and the U.S. are increasingly at odds over the former's claims to almost the entire South China Sea and to unpopulated islands held by Japan, an American ally. The U.S. has also boosted ties and military sales to Taiwan to dissuade China from taking the self-governing democratic island by force. Elsewhere, the Chinese and Indian armies clashed last year over a disputed border high in the mountains.

Taiwan, commenting on the anniversary, accused China of seeking to upend the international order with ambitions of becoming a regional or even global hegemon. "Democracy, freedom, human rights and the rule of the law are Taiwanese society's core values, and the gap with the other side's authoritarian political system is considerable," a government statement said.

The Tiananmen Square event was the climax of weeks of ceremonies and displays praising the role of the Communist Party in bringing vast improvements in quality of life and expanding China's economic, political and military influence. Those accomplishments, coupled with harsh repression of any critics, have helped the party remain in power.

The party's official narrative glosses over past mistakes or current controversies, such as the mass famine of the Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the violent class warfare and xenophobia of the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution and the 1989 military intervention that crushed a democracy movement at Tiananmen Square.

Instead, it focuses on development, stability and efficiency — including its success in controlling COVID-19 — in contrast to what it portrays as political bickering, the bungling of pandemic control and social strife in multiparty democracies.

Looking skyward, the crowd cheered a flyover by military planes, including helicopters forming the number "100" and a squadron of China's J-20 stealth flyers. The final group of jets streaked blue, yellow and red contrails across the sky.

The party faces no serious challenges to its rule, but it's difficult to gauge the public's level of support since few would dare to criticize it because of fear of arrest. Yang Shaoheng, a retired construction employee, said he is proud of the achievements of his motherland under communist rule.

"I think the Communist Party will be able to carry on for a thousand years, ten thousand years," said Yang.

Trump Organization CFO surrenders ahead of expected charges

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

Trump Organization CFO Allen Weisselberg surrendered to authorities early Thursday ahead of expected charges against him and former President Donald Trump's company, according to multiple news outlets.

Weisselberg was seen walking into the the courthouse in lower Manhattan around 6:20 a.m. with his lawyer.

New York prosecutors are expected to announce the first criminal indictment Thursday in a two-year investigation into Trump's business practices, accusing his namesake company and Weisselberg of tax crimes related to fringe benefits for employees.

The charges against the Trump Organization and its chief financial officer, Allen Weisselberg, remained sealed Wednesday night but were to be unveiled ahead of an afternoon arraignment at a state court in Manhattan, according to two people familiar with the matter.

The people were not authorized to speak about an ongoing investigation and did so on condition of anonymity.

There was no indication Trump himself would be charged at this stage of the investigation, jointly pursued by Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. and New York Attorney General Letitia James, both Democrats.

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Trump did not respond to reporters' shouted questions about the New York case as he visited Texas on Wednesday, but earlier in the week, the Republican had blasted the New York prosecutors as "rude, nasty, and totally biased" and said his company's actions were "standard practice throughout the U.S. business community, and in no way a crime."

The planned charges were said to be linked to benefits the company gave to top executives, like the use of apartments, cars and school tuition, the people familiar with the matter told the AP.

Messages seeking comment were left with a spokesperson and lawyers for the Trump Organization. Weisselberg's lawyer, Mary Mulligan, declined to comment. The Manhattan district attorney's office declined to comment.

Vance, who leaves office at the end of the year, has been conducting a wide-ranging investigation into a variety of matters involving Trump and the Trump Organization.

His office has looked into hush-money payments paid to women on Trump's behalf and truthfulness in the company's property valuations and tax assessments, among other matters.

Vance fought a long battle to get Trump's tax records and has been subpoenaing documents and interviewing company executives and other Trump insiders.

James assigned two lawyers from her office to work with Vance's team after her office found evidence of possible criminal wrongdoing while conducting a separate civil investigation of Trump.

Weisselberg, 73, had come under scrutiny, in part, because of questions about his son's use of a Trump apartment at little or no cost.

Barry Weisselberg, who managed a Trump-operated ice rink in Central Park, testified in a 2018 divorce deposition that Trump Parc East apartment was a "corporate apartment, so we didn't have rent."

Barry's ex-wife, Jen Weisselberg, has been cooperating with both inquiries and given investigators reams of tax records and other documents.

The case against Allen Weisselberg — a loyal lieutenant to Trump and his real estate-developer father, Fred — could give prosecutors the means to pressure the executive into cooperating and telling them what he knows about Trump's business dealings.

The Trump Organization is the business entity through which the former president manages his many entrepreneurial affairs, including his investments in office towers, hotels and golf courses, his many marketing deals and his television pursuits. Trump sons, Donald Jr. and Eric, have been in charge of the company's day-to-day operations since he became president.

Although Trump isn't expected to be charged Thursday, allegations against the company bearing his name raise questions about his knowledge of — or involvement in — business that practices prosecutors suspect were illegal.

James Repetti, a tax lawyer and professor at Boston College Law School, said a company like the Trump Organization would generally have a responsibility to withhold taxes not just on salary, but other forms of compensation — like the use of an apartment or automobile.

Such perks wouldn't be considered taxable income if they were required as a condition of employment, Repetti said, such as providing an apartment for the convenience of an employee who is required to be at the office or worksite at odd or frequent hours, or allowing the use of a car for business purposes.

Another prominent New York City real estate figure, the late Leona Helmsley, was convicted of tax fraud in a federal case that arose from her company paying to remodel her home without her reporting that as income.

The Trump Organization case involves possible violations of New York state tax laws.

"The IRS routinely looks for abuse of fringe benefits when auditing closely held businesses," Repetti said. "The temptation for the business is that it claims a tax deduction for the expense, while the recipient does not report it in income."

Pandemic tourism: Thailand launches Phuket 'sandbox' plan

By TASSANEE VEJPONGSA and DAVID RISING Associated Press

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PHUKET, Thailand (AP) — Thailand embarked on an ambitious but risky plan Thursday that it hopes will breathe new life into a tourism industry devastated by the pandemic, opening the popular resort island of Phuket to fully vaccinated foreigners from lower-risk countries.

As the first flight arrived, airport fire trucks blasted their water canons to form an arch over the Etihad jet from Abu Dhabi as it taxied to its gate.

Leaving the airport, Frenchman Bruno Souillard said he had been dreaming for a year of returning to Thailand and jumped at the opportunity.

"I am very, very happy," the 60-year-old tourist said.

The "Phuket sandbox" program comes as coronavirus infections are surging in Thailand, including a significant number of cases of the Delta variant, and many have questioned if it's too early to woo tourists back, and whether they'll come in significant numbers in any case due to the restrictions they'll still face.

But the number of new cases on the island itself is extremely low, in the single digits daily, and more than 70% of its residents are fully vaccinated. The government is gambling that travelers will be willing to put up with coronavirus-related regulations for the opportunity for a beach holiday after being cooped up in their home countries for months.

Before the pandemic, the tourism sector made up some 20% of Thailand's economy, and 95% of Phuket's income.

The resort island off the southern coast saw fewer than a half million visitors in the first five months, and almost no foreigners, compared to more than 3 million during the same period last year including some 2 million foreigners.

In a nod to the importance of the "sandbox" plan, Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha flew to Phuket to be on hand in person for the launch.

He emphasized that the sandbox was just the first step toward his goal announced in June of having Thailand completely reopened within 120 days.

"This reopening is related to not only Phuket but also the whole country," he said.

Last-minute hitches in some of the program details and cautions from authorities that if cases start to rise on the island more restrictions may be needed — or it may have to be shut down entirely — meant some cancelations before it even began. Fewer than 250 international travelers were expected on the first day compared to the initial target of 1,500.

But as the kinks are worked out and people report their first-hand experiences, authorities are hopeful for a steady increase in the numbers. From July 1 to 15, there are currently 1,101 hotel bookings for a total of 13,116 room overnights.

Travelers to other parts of Thailand are subject to a strict 14-day hotel room quarantine, but under the sandbox plan, visitors to Phuket will be allowed to roam the entire island — the country's largest — where they can lounge on the white beaches, jet ski and enjoy evenings eating out in restaurants, although clubs and bars remain closed.

Only visitors from countries considered no higher than "low" or "medium" risk — a list currently including most of Europe and the Mideast, the U.S., Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand — are permitted, and they must fly in directly to Phuket, though plans are in the works to allow carefully controlled transfers through Bangkok's airport.

Following the inaugural flight from Abu Dhabi, passengers were expected to arrive later Thursday from Qatar, Israel and Singapore.

Adult foreign visitors must provide proof of two vaccinations, a negative COVID-19 test no more than 72 hours before departure, and proof of an insurance policy that covers treatment for the virus of at least \$100,000, among other things. Once on the island, they have to follow mask and distancing regulations and take three COVID-19 tests at their own expense — about \$300 total — and show negative results.

After 14 days, visitors can travel elsewhere in Thailand.

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Key voting rights decision expected from Supreme Court

By MARK SHERMAN and JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is wrapping up its first all-virtual term, with decisions expected in a key case on voting rights and another involving information that California requires charities to provide about donors.

The court's last day of work Thursday before its summer break also could include a retirement announcement, although the oldest of the justices, 82-year-old Stephen Breyer, has given no indication he intends to step down this year.

As it has since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, the court is planning to post opinions on its website starting at 10 a.m. EDT.

The courtroom is closed to the public because of the pandemic and the justices heard 58 arguments via telephone over eight months. In another change brought on by COVID-19, the court provided an audio feed that allowed the public to listen to the arguments live.

The two remaining unresolved cases both arose in the West.

In a case from Arizona, the justices are being asked to uphold two state voting restrictions that limit who can return early ballots for another person and bars the counting of votes cast in the wrong polling precincts.

The federal appeals court in San Francisco said both measures disproportionately affect minority voters and violated the Voting Rights Act prohibition on discrimination in voting.

During arguments in February, the justices seemed likely to uphold that ruling and allow the Arizona restrictions to remain in place.

Less clear is whether the court will use the case to raise the bar for proving racial discrimination under the landmark civil rights law that dates from 1965. Such an outcome could make it harder for challenges to voting laws enacted by Republican lawmakers in several states following the 2020 election.

Last week, the Justice Department sued Georgia over its new voting measures, claiming that they violate the Voting Rights Act, among other laws.

The other case, from California, has brought together an unusually broad coalition of liberal and conservative groups in support of two nonprofits that object to the state's requirement that they provide the names of major donors.

The information already is provided to the Internal Revenue Service, and California says the information remains private and helps it prevent fraud in charitable giving. But the nonprofits, including one linked to billionaire Charles Koch, say the risk of disclosure could discourage donors.

A decision for the charities seemed likely based on the arguments in April. The outcome could take on added importance if the justices were to raise questions about disclosure requirements for federal campaign contributions, which so far have been left untouched in high-court rulings that otherwise loosened the reins on money in politics.

The high court has already issued opinions in its other big cases of the term. In recent weeks, it rejected the latest major Republican-led effort to kill the national health care law known as "Obamacare" and sided with a Catholic foster care agency that had a religious objection to working with same-sex couples.

The justices also sided with students in two cases: barring the NCAA from enforcing rules on certain compensation schools can offer athletes and ruling that a school violated the speech rights of a cheerleader who was kicked off the junior varsity squad for a vulgar social media post.

GOP candidate's private equity resume draws scrutiny in Va.

By STEVE PEOPLES and SARAH RANKIN Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Newly retired, Judy Pavlick was among hundreds of seniors who enjoyed the low cost-of-living and friendly atmosphere at Plaza Del Rey, a sprawling mobile home park in Sunnyvale, California. Then the Carlyle Group acquired the property and things began to change.

Pavlick's rent surged by more than 7%. Additional increases followed. She said the unexpected jump

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forced her and her neighbors, many on fixed incomes and unable to relocate, to sometimes choose between food and medicine.

The 2015 acquisition and subsequent sale of Pavlick's mobile home park is a core business practice for private equity firms such as Carlyle, which buy and restructure private companies to build value for their investors, sometimes cutting jobs and services in the process.

But the deal, one of hundreds Carlyle executed in recent years, could become a political liability for Carlyle's former co-CEO, Glenn Youngkin, who is now running as the Republican candidate for governor in Virginia and highlighting his experience "building businesses and creating jobs."

"They don't realize that these are peoples' homes. We're not just numbers on a spreadsheet," said Pavlick, now 74 years old. "They have no conscience."

Beyond mobile home parks, Youngkin helped Carlyle make money for investors by targeting nursing homes, auto parts manufacturers, energy companies and even a business that produces "less-lethal" weapons used by governments that have cracked down on democracy advocates. More than 1,000 jobs were moved offshore in recent years as companies were restructured. Hundreds more were laid off after Carlyle instituted a series of cost-cutting measures at a nationwide nursing home chain; complaints of deteriorating service and neglect followed.

There are no allegations of illegality or wrongdoing, but Youngkin's political aspirations have drawn new scrutiny to his dealings at the Washington-based investment firm, where he generated a net worth estimated at over \$300 million before retiring as co-CEO last summer.

Perhaps not since former Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney, now a Utah senator, has a candidate sought higher office with such strong ties to the world of private equity. Romney, too, sold himself as a successful businessman and job creator, but stories of megadeals that routinely put profits over people undercut his White House ambitions.

Youngkin now faces another wealthy former businessman, former Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe, in November's general election, which has already emerged as the nation's top political contest of 2021.

While McAuliffe's ties to big donors and lobbyists are well-established, Youngkin has only begun to confront difficult questions about his business background. His team declined to address any of Carlyle's specific deals.

"As a young man, Glenn joined a small company and over the next 25 years worked his way up to the top of the company, helping to grow it into a hugely successful enterprise that turned good businesses into great businesses, created tens of thousands of jobs, and funded the retirement pensions of police officers, firefighters, and teachers," said Youngkin spokesman Macaulay Porter. "Under Glenn's leadership, The Carlyle Group employed nearly 2,000 people and managed assets totaling nearly four times the size of Virginia's yearly budget."

Youngkin has made his business experience and status as a political outsider central to his pitch to voters. But more often than not, he discusses his career in broad strokes, without mentioning his lofty position or even the name of his former firm.

He leans on the phrase "building business and creating jobs" when talking about his career, typically without specific description of the types of deals he oversaw.

Asked in a February interview with a former state lawmaker that was streamed on social media how he viewed the role of private equity in the economy, Youngkin responded: "We invest in companies, and we try to take good companies and make them great companies. And we do that by helping them expand, to launch new products, to see new futures, to hire new people."

While creating big profits for the firm's investors, Carlyle's deals sometimes triggered rounds of layoffs, outsourced jobs and complaints from the people directly served by the companies acquired.

The details in some cases may be politically damaging for Youngkin, but the situation is also complicated for his Democratic critics, who have tried to brand Youngkin as too close to former President Donald Trump. McAuliffe himself invested in Carlyle before and after becoming Virginia's governor in 2014.

The former Democratic governor's public disclosures show no current ties, but records reveal that McAuliffe invested at least \$690,000 in Carlyle funds between December 2007 and the end of 2016. The

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actual figure is likely much higher because the disclosures require candidates to acknowledge only a broad range of investment with no upper limit in some cases.

McAuliffe spokesperson Christina Freundlich said McAuliffe has made no investments in Carlyle since 2014, describing him as a passive investor with no role in crafting the deals. She noted that many major institutions were among the investors, including the California Public Employees' Retirement System.

"Glenn Youngkin's record is clear: shipping American jobs overseas and harming seniors and homeowners, all for his own profit," Freundlich said. "Virginians deserve better than an extreme, Trump-endorsed job killer with a track record of always putting his own wealth first."

Carlyle made investments in several companies under Youngkin's leadership that moved at least 1,300 American jobs offshore, according to Department of Labor data.

They include Metaldyne LLC, a North Carolina car parts company that sent 176 jobs to Korea in 2008; the Texas company Commemorative Brands, which produced class rings and sent more than 260 jobs to Mexico between 2005 and 2013; and Ohio-based car part manufacturer Veyance Technologies, which sent nearly 300 jobs to Mexico between 2009 and 2011.

After they were restructured, all three companies were sold for hundreds of millions of dollars more than they were acquired for.

Veyance Technologies was among those companies in a larger fund in which McAuliffe had invested; that means he would have profited from the deal.

A representative for Carlyle declined to comment for this story. The company's leadership has struggled to defend some of their decisions at times.

The firm in 2005 acquired a minority stake in Combined Systems Inc., a "less-lethal" munitions manufacturer that produced tear gas and "super-sock bean bags" subsequently used by governments in Tunisia, Egypt and China to crack down on pro-democracy protesters.

Combined Systems' officials said at the time that they could not control how their products were used. But the U.S. State Department condemned the excessive use of force against protesters in Egypt in particular and launched an investigation into the misuse of tear gas after pictures of CSI-branded tear gas canisters were published on social media.

By all measures, Carlyle is a behemoth in the world of private equity, with 29 offices spread across five continents staffed by more than 1,800 professionals. The firm raised over \$27 billion of new capital in 2020, according to its annual report. Despite what it described as a "difficult environment" because of the pandemic, Carlyle delivered distributable earnings of \$762 million to its investors last year, its highest total in the past five years.

Youngkin joined the firm in 1995 and rose up through the ranks steadily in the subsequent years, becoming head of the industrial sector investment team by 2005. By March 2011, he had become the chief operating officer and within seven years, he was named co-CEO.

Carlyle announced Youngkin's retirement last summer amid speculation that he was interested in running for office. In the announcement, Youngkin said it was the "professional journey of a lifetime and my honor to be part of building Carlyle into the global institution it is today."

Youngkin's annual compensation package in 2019, his last full year at the company, approached \$17 million, according to published reports at the time. That same year, Carlyle sold Sunnyvale's Plaza Del Rey for \$237 million after buying it for \$152 million four years earlier.

Acquiring higher-end mobile home parks, now referred to as manufactured housing, was part of a broader strategy for Carlyle that included large properties in Arizona and Florida. Such investments are an emerging trend among private equity firms that recently recognized investment potential in mobile home parks.

Critics, including Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., have accused the firms of preying upon aging residents with steady income streams and limited options to move when rents and fees go up.

Six years after Carlyle entered Pavlick's life, she is still fighting rent and fee increases, which continued to surge after Carlyle sold her community to another out-of-state investment firm two years ago.

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"This park used to be called the park with the heart," Pavlick said. "They just turned everybody's happy home upside down."

Israel scrambles to curb jump in COVID infections

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel, a world leader in coronavirus vaccinations, reported its highest daily infection rate in three months as it scrambles to contain the spread of the new delta variant.

Authorities are racing to vaccinate children and are considering tighter travel restrictions at the country's main airport.

The Health Ministry on Thursday reported 307 new cases on Wednesday, the highest in nearly three months and a rise from 293 newly-diagnosed cases a day earlier. The health ministry reportedly expects those numbers to jump in coming days, raising concerns that Israel is plunging back toward a crisis.

In recent months, Israel has reopened businesses, schools and event venues, lifting nearly all restrictions after it inoculated some 85% of the adult population. It's now seen as an early-warning system of sorts for other nations.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Tuesday announced a drive to inoculate thousands of children by mid-month.

Though worrying, the trend still shows little uptick when it comes to deaths from the virus. In the past two weeks, the ministry recorded only one. In Israel, 5.1 million people, among its population of 9.3 million, have received the required double dose of vaccinations. Another 400,000 have received at least one dose.

Israel recorded its highest number of vaccinations of children this week and has re-imposed a rule requiring people to wear masks indoors. Bennett for the first time appointed a coronavirus commissioner to manage arrivals at the main gateway into Israel, Ben Gurion International Airport, which he called "a huge national vulnerability."

Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked on Wednesday said officials are prepared to close the airport if the trend worsens.

Israel's Haaretz newspaper reported that officials are considering bringing back the "Green Pass" system that differentiates between vaccinated and non-vaccinated citizens in access to certain venues and activities.

Israel's government last week postponed the planned reopening of the country to vaccinated tourists over concerns about the spread of the delta variant.

Israel was initially set to reopen its borders to vaccinated visitors on Thursday, after having largely closed the country during the pandemic. It had already started allowing groups of vaccinated tourists to enter in May.

But after a rise in infections over the past 10 days, the government pushed that date to Aug. 1.

Gluing back the bits in a post-COVID myriad of human divides

By JOHN LEICESTER and MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The musical notes waft through the apartment window, from the fast-moving fingers of the accordion player serenading restaurant diners below.

For years, the wandering minstrel has been part of the decor in Montmartre, the bohemian Paris neighborhood where Edith Piaf warbled and Pablo Picasso kept a pet mouse in the disheveled studio where he revolutionized art.

The accordionist vanished during the height of the coronavirus pandemic in France, as if swept away. For 15 months, not a peep was heard from the buttons and keys of his squeezebox. Then, in late May, he suddenly reappeared.

And the crazy thing: In a world where so very little is as it used to be, his repertoire is — note-for-note — exactly as it was.

"Incredible," says Nathalie Sartor, hanging out of her Montmartre apartment window on a June evening, humming along to his wheezy medley of tunes. "He has been playing under our window for 10 years, and

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in 10 years, his music hasn't changed one iota."

In a world deconstructed, derailed and upended by the viral storm, the few things that survived completely unscathed are both comforting and painful, reminders of what was but also of what has been lost: millions of lives, livelihoods, certainty.

"It's when things start up again that you realize how hard it was," says Sartor, 57, a teacher.

As a study of how people are trying, as best they can, to get through it all, The Associated Press honed in on Sartor and her family in Montmartre and on a couple in Brazil. Why them? Because their pandemic has been, on the whole, unremarkable — if one can say that of a world-changing cataclysm. It didn't kill them or people they love. But it turned their lives upside down, and still is: They are us all.

The virus, such a minuscule speck of disease, has proved to be both a great leveler and great divider of humanity. Capable of reaching into the cells of all of Earth's 7.8 billion inhabitants, regardless of who or where they are, it also has been the biggest stress-test of unity since World War II. It has both forced collective changes of behavior and torn open myriad old and fresh divisions.

The macro — countries hogging vaccines, leaving billions behind and unvaccinated, vulnerable to variants that pose new threats. The micro — neighbors applauding medical workers but also leaving them "you spread disease" notes. Friends both propped up and ignored each other. They socialized on virtual networks, but became de-socialized during months locked away.

It has been a pandemic of "all in this together" and "each unto his own," an experience by necessity shared that also left many feeling utterly alone.

Sartor's husband, João Luiz Bulcão, a photographer, feels weird talking about what they've been through, even though their experience speaks for billions.

"Others have suffered a lot more, no?" he says. "Everyone has their own reality, their own stories."

Rebuilding the post-pandemic world will be a colossal human effort. People will have to dare to make plans again, take risks again, spend money again, make babies again. Love again, laugh again, be human again. But some of those things will be unattainable for untold millions who'll emerge from the pandemic with even less than they had before.

In the 15 months that the Montmartre accordionist was silent, the pre-pandemic world of cavernous disparities further shattered into what will be a post-pandemic mosaic of even deeper chasms between haves and have-nots.

Multiple worlds — some with rich support networks and opportunities, others largely devoid of them — are emerging from the maelstrom that made billionaires richer and calved new ones, but which also worsened poverty, with an additional 100 million workers eking out existences on little more than \$3 per day.

And in the furrows of inequality — in gaps of wealth, race and gender — the coronavirus planted deadly seeds and reaped its richest harvests. In wealthy countries, vaccinations are bringing down deaths, bringing back life and pulling families from the chrysalis of lockdowns. Many are mourning, pained, emotionally battered and mentally bruised but they're also beginning the rebuild and envisioning futures.

Sartor has literally had to force herself to be sociable again.

"COVID separates people from their friendships. There are friends who live close by that we haven't seen, people from Montmartre, who are within walking distance," she says. "I've told myself that I must not fall into the trap of staying locked inside, the homebody habits of solitary people."

Now fully vaccinated, Bulcão is hoping that France's reopening to tourism will bring back commissions from romantics who hire him for artful photos in Paris, to immortalize their memories made in the City of Light.

But Brazil, where Bulcão was born and grew up, is still deep in the thick of its epidemic.

Just over one third of Brazilians have had first injections; in France, the figure has just passed one half. After losing 111,000 people — a quarter fewer than Brazil per head — to three infection waves, France

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is defrosting after months of restrictions and privations. Just in time for summer, restaurants, museums and borders are open again. France's customary double-cheeked embrace abandoned as a potential kiss of death at the plague's height is also coming back, as vaccinations make cheek-to-cheek intimacy feel safe again.

But as Brazil heads into winter, it is still adding more than 1,500 additional deaths per day to its total of over 515,000 lives lost. A third surge in infections looks likely. Normalcy is a long way off.

With roots in both countries, Bulcão, Sartor and their two daughters measure their good fortune.

"Had we been in Brazil," says Sartor, "surviving would have been difficult."

Gael, for a boy, or Carolina, for a girl. They currently top the list of names that Celso Franco Jr. and his wife Juliana are toying with for the baby they are too scared to conceive. Because making new life simply seems too risky when so many people are still losing theirs beyond the walls of the small apartment that is their life raft in Brazil's storm of deaths and infections.

Juliana Franco, 35, would rather wait until they're vaccinated, even though their turn likely won't come before September. Her father survived a spell in intensive care with COVID-19. Her mother and one of her brothers also fell ill. And both knew people, acquaintances, who died.

Celso Franco Jr.'s job at a bank also gives him a front-row view of the devastation unleashed by the pandemic on Brazilian families with few, if any, welfare protections and businesses largely left to fend for themselves. He sees how clients have depleted their cash reserves, the jobs they've lost and axed, and how they no longer jump at his offers of credit.

"Now I only get calls to refinance debt, postpone investments," he says. "The first time I saw some stores reopen, even for a short while, I was all emotional. This is very hard on business."

The couple have lined their nest in Suzano, a commuter city near Sao Paulo, with trinkets that recall the time before Brazil became a no-go zone for foreign travel, red-listed internationally because of the contagious variant that first ravaged the Amazon city of Manaus. Magnets from Europe decorate the couple's fridge. They have framed photos of a trip they made to Paris in October 2019. They hired Bulcão to freeze-frame the moment when Celso Franco Jr. got down on bended knee and proposed marriage with the Eiffel Tower as a backdrop.

They long to go back to Paris — with Gael, Carolina or whatever name they end up settling on for the baby. But they first have to feel safe enough again to actually make it.

"We want to get pregnant before the end of the year, but we are a bit afraid," she says. "My sense is that the vaccine is not far off, so maybe we should wait until we get our shots."

The vagueries of the pandemic with infection rates that rise and fall with seasons and policies have thrown humans out of sync with each other.

Rarely has the lottery of geography felt so influential, shattering the global pandemic experience. Deaths surging here, receding there. Restrictions loosened or tightened. Even within countries, cities, streets and households, it's been a battle to keep track of what's doable and what's not. Phrases that won't be mourned: "Do we need a mask?" "Kid, you got school today?"

When Bulcão snapped the bubbling Brazilian couple at the Eiffel Tower before the pandemic blew human trajectories to the winds, all those there that day shared those universal goals of love, life and the pursuit of happiness.

And then life just became survival.

Juliana texted Bulcão after the photoshoot, thanking him.

"Today was a very important day in our lives," she wrote. "Sensational."

But Bulcão hasn't been back to the Eiffel Tower since the pandemic began. From being someone who'd jump on a plane at a whim, he was grounded.

"Now, I no longer know what I am going to do in the near future," he says. "That's what worries me: that lack of immediate perspective."

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Time, perhaps, will heal some wounds and bring some clarity.

Anaïs, Bulcão's youngest daughter, says the darkest days of the pandemic in France are already becoming a hazy memory to her. Eligible for vaccination, the 17-year-old is out and about again, impossible to miss on Montmartre's streets in her black-and-white striped soccer jersey, the colors of Botafogo, her father's favorite Rio de Janeiro team.

"Looking back, it seems like the lockdown only lasted a day," Anaïs says.

Her elder sister, Livia, is moving on, too. She was in Australia, traveling, discovering herself, when the coronavirus hit. Repatriated on a government flight, she found herself back at square one, at mum and dad's, sharing a room with Anaïs. From there, the 23-year-old started putting pieces back together again.

Sweeping in from a day at work, and before rushing out again to dine with friends, she announced that she wants to resume her studies.

"It came over me all of a sudden," she says.

Sartor responded with a squeal — "Yeeeeeeah!" — and clenched fists of delight.

"That's great news," Bulcão says.

When France started to ease out of lockdown in May, Livia and her friends went straight back to their Montmartre watering hole, "Le Chinon," picking up where they had left off before the pandemic "as though nothing had changed."

"I can live my life as I might have done had the pandemic not happened, with inconveniences that are tiny compared to other countries," she says. "I am privileged."

Will one dose of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine protect me?

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — Will one dose of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine protect me?

Yes, but not nearly as much as if you had both doses. Experts recommend getting fully vaccinated, especially with the emergence of worrisome coronavirus mutations such as the delta variant first identified in India.

The COVID-19 vaccines rolling out globally were developed to target the original version of the virus detected in late 2019. While they seem to work against newer versions, there's a concern the shots eventually might lose their effectiveness if variants evolve enough.

With the delta variant, a study by British researchers found people were well protected when they got both doses of either the AstraZeneca or Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines. But with only one dose, protection was significantly reduced.

To stem the spread of the delta variant in the United Kingdom, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson recently delayed the lifting of remaining restrictions to get more people the full two doses.

Health officials are also concerned about the dozens of countries that still don't have enough supply secured to distribute second doses within the recommended time frame.

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has said vaccinations with only one dose won't be enough to stop outbreaks fueled by new variants and that people should maintain social distancing and other measures until more of the population is fully vaccinated.

The second dose of a two-dose vaccine is critical because it's what "really gives a boost to the immune system so that the antibody response is very strong," says Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, WHO's chief scientist.

Bedouin lawmaker seeks change through new Israeli government

By AREEJ HAZBOUN and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — In the weeks before his Arab party made history in Israel by joining the ruling coalition, Saeed Alkhurmi says his relatives and neighbors were notified that their homes would be demolished.

It was a stark illustration of the challenge ahead for the United Arab List, a small Islamist party that

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played a key role in forming Israel's fragile new government and now hopes to secure gains for the Arab minority, including the impoverished Bedouin community in the south.

Alkhrumi, 49, hails from the Bedouin heartland in the Negev Desert, where tens of thousands of people live in unrecognized villages that are largely cut off from basic services and where homes and other structures have been built without legal permits, putting them at risk of demolition by Israeli authorities.

In recent years, Israel has sought to relocate the Bedouin to established towns, saying it would allow the state to provide modern services and improve their quality of life. The Bedouin view such efforts as a way of uprooting them from their ancestral lands, disrupting their traditional way of life and confining them to impoverished, crime-ridden communities.

Israeli plans to establish new communities catering to Jews on lands from which the Bedouin are being evicted have led many to fear Israel is replicating its settlement activities in the occupied territories, with the aim of displacing the Bedouin and changing the region's demographics.

Alkhrumi has spent years negotiating with the government to recognize some of the Bedouin villages but says such efforts were repeatedly stymied during Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's 12-year reign, when right-wing parties dominated the state and its bureaucracy.

The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality, a rights group that closely tracks demolitions, says they spiked from 697 in 2013 to 2,586 last year, when the country was coping with the coronavirus pandemic.

"When Netanyahu came to power he increased the number of demolitions by a factor of 10," Alkhrumi said. "Only a country in a state of war would demolish as many homes as are demolished in the Negev."

He says his own relatives were given demolition orders in the weeks before the new government was approved by parliament and sworn in on June 13. He abstained for "private reasons," he said, but his party provided the crucial margin in the 60-59 vote.

Alkhrumi says the new government is on track to eventually recognize eight villages, which would remove the threat of demolition and give them access to services.

"The extreme right realized these eight villages would be recognized, or maybe even more, that there would be progress and solutions for people, and they didn't want it," he said. "They issued hundreds of demolition orders in two weeks and they launched a media campaign against me."

Now that the UAL has made history by becoming the first Arab party to join a governing coalition, Alkhrumi hopes to continue the negotiations and work with other parties to improve conditions in the south.

"I want the Arab Bedouin of the Negev to choose their way of life," he said. "Those who want to live a traditional, agricultural life as Bedouin should have the opportunity to do so on their own land. What's the problem?"

Regavim, a right-wing group that describes itself as committed to a "Zionist vision," says the Bedouin can't expect the government to provide services to "illegal squatters' camps" established without any central planning.

"The state of Israel wants to give them all of the benefits of living in a modern Western society. The only way to do that is to collect people in some way," said Naomi Kahn, head of the group's international division. "You can't both expect the state to give you all of the services that it provides and refuse to obey any of the rules of the state."

The UAL is also hoping to use its political leverage to assist Israel's non-Bedouin Arab minority, by securing larger budgets for housing, infrastructure and law enforcement, and by resisting or rolling back discriminatory legislation.

The Arab community, including the Bedouin, makes up 20% of Israel's population. They have citizenship, including the right to vote, but face widespread discrimination. They have close familial ties to the Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza, and largely identify with their cause, leading many Israelis to view them with suspicion.

Alkhrumi has no illusions about the challenge his party faces. The coalition includes eight parties from across the political spectrum. Three right-wing parties joined out of desperation to oust Netanyahu and avoid another election after four votes in less than two years.

"It's an experiment," Alkhrumi said. "Can we influence the government to benefit our society and exploit

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the political conditions that exist, or do we keep to ourselves. The easiest thing is to stay back and say I won't get involved. Then we have elections, and maybe the right comes back and we get Netanyahu again."

Jordan tribes, bedrock of monarchy, on edge as economy tanks

By KARIN LAUB and OMAR AKOUR Associated Press

KARAK, Jordan (AP) — Jordan has drawn a curtain of secrecy on the unprecedented public rift within its royal family, but the social tensions laid bare by the palace drama that unfolded in April — particularly the economic despair of its influential tribes — can be seen everywhere.

Years of economic crisis have frayed the historic patronage-for-loyalty bond between the king and the tribes, a bedrock of the Hashemite family's decades-long rule.

That may have been an underlying factor in an alleged plot by the half brother of King Abdullah II to try to take a throne he was once in line to inherit. The prince has been silenced, and his purported co-conspirators are on trial behind closed doors.

But even some government insiders fear that anger percolating under the surface could erupt at any moment, a warning bound to worry the kingdom's Western allies.

"I'm afraid of what is next because of the tragic living situation, that people won't bear it anymore, and (that) people will explode," said Sayel al-Majali, head of the governing council of Karak province, where unemployment has reached 40%.

"I fear losing control of security matters" if problems aren't solved, said al-Majali, a retired army brigadier and a member of one of Karak's most prominent tribes.

Prince Hamzah, stripped of his title of crown prince in favor of Abdullah's eldest son in 2004, allegedly sought to harness such dissatisfaction to take the throne. Hamzah has denied he tried to incite against his half brother.

Yet he also nurtured ties with the tribes over the years. In a self-made video leaked from house arrest, Hamzah played up his connection to ordinary Jordanians, contrasting it with what he described as an aloof ruling system bent on enriching itself.

"I tried to remain connected with people in the hope that they realize that there are members of this family who still love this country, who care for them and will put them above all else," Hamzah said, using a portrait of his still widely beloved father, the late King Hussein, as a backdrop.

Over the years, Hamzah earned a reputation for honest piety, making him a symbol of hope for change, especially among younger members of the tribes, said analyst Labib Kamhawi.

"The issue is not Hamzah visiting these tribes," he said. "The issue is how these tribes received Hamzah."

The prince has not been charged, with the king saying the family will deal with him. But his name appears throughout the indictment against Bassem Awadallah, a former royal court chief, and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, a distant cousin of the king. The pair allegedly worked on social media messages the prince was to post to stir discontent, and also offered to seek foreign help.

Hope is scarce in Jordan's rural areas and provincial towns that are home to the kingdom's original Bedouin tribes. In the neglected provincial capital of Karak, downtown shops and streets were largely deserted during a recent visit. Young men hung around in small groups, smoking and chatting to pass the time. Karak's main attraction is a crusader castle, but the coronavirus pandemic halted tourism.

Even before the pandemic, there weren't enough jobs for a young, rapidly growing labor force. The lives of many young Jordanians are on hold because they cannot follow the traditional path of job, marriage and children.

Karak resident Mustafa Shamayleh amassed academic credentials over the past decade, hoping to find a job. He is now 30, still unemployed and living with his parents, despite his Ph.D. in economics from a top-tier university in India.

"I can't live life," said Shamayleh, who delivers food on a motorbike for pocket money to ease the burden

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on his 70-year-old father. "If I want to marry now, how? I have nothing."

Shamayleh keeps searching for work in his field even though scarce jobs tend to be awarded through personal connections, or "wasta," which he says he does not have.

His father Ali, a retired ambulance driver, recalls when royal patronage provided a safety net. Tribal Jordanians had access to jobs in the security forces and the civil service. They were given preference over the descendants of Palestinian refugees, also a large segment of the population, but one seen as less loyal to the monarchy.

"It's not that the king doesn't want to give them (jobs) now," said Kamhawi, the analyst. "He doesn't have the money. The government doesn't have the money. The country doesn't have the money."

The pandemic made things worse. Officially, unemployment rose to 23.9% in 2020, but it's believed to be higher. More Jordanians are sinking into poverty, with the figure expected to exceed a quarter of the population soon, up from 15.7% three years ago. The economy contracted last year for the first time in three decades, the World Bank said.

Former Information Minister Mohammed Momani said Hamzah tried to exploit the economic pain, accusing him of "evil coordination" with his two alleged co-conspirators. "It's not an attempt to try to help the country," he said. "It's an attempt to try to destabilize the country."

Momani brushed aside suggestions the economic downturn was eroding the historic bond between the king and the tribes. He said the tribes might disagree with some government policies, but that "at the end of the day, they stand by the country and the monarch."

The indictment also suggested the defendants sought foreign aid, a version reinforced by Momani. Bin Zaid allegedly asked officials at an unidentified foreign embassy about their potential support, while the charge sheet played up Awadallah's Saudi ties. Awadallah holds Jordanian, U.S. and Saudi citizenship, has business interests in the Gulf, and has been linked to Saudi Arabia's powerful crown prince. Still, Jordan stopped short of accusing Saudi Arabia, an important financial backer, of involvement in the alleged plot.

In an apparent attempt to limit the damage from the royal scandal, the king appointed a 92-member commission that is to deliver a plan for political reform by October. Momani, a member of the panel, said he expects concrete results because there's a hard deadline and the king presided over the launch to underscore its importance.

Still, calls for opening the political system have largely gone unanswered over the past decade, amid fears that significant electoral reform could boost the Muslim Brotherhood, the kingdom's only organized opposition group.

Atef al-Majali, a tribal leader in Karak, shrugged off the committee as an empty gesture. He said calls for reform have not been heard, adding that the tribes don't just demand a better deal for themselves, but for all Jordanians.

The tribe is still upset over the arrest of two senior members, including Hamzah's chief aide, Yasser al-Majali. At the time, the prince was placed under house arrest and more than a dozen prominent tribal figures and officials were detained.

All detainees were released three weeks later, but the al-Majalis took issue with security forces storming homes, saying it was insulting and that an invitation to the local police station would have sufficed. Yasser al-Majali and other members of Hamzah's staff have not been allowed to return to work, and the prince has not been heard from in public.

Like others, Atef al-Majali expressed frustration with the decision-makers, saying tribal leaders are being ignored despite their traditional influence.

"Our voice is loud, but no one hears us," he said. "We try to be patient, but in the end, patience has limits."

Historic Northwest heat wave may have killed hundreds

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By ANDREW SELSKY and JIM MORRIS Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Hundreds of deaths in Canada, Oregon and Washington may have been caused by the historic heat wave that baked the Pacific Northwest and shattered all-time temperature records in usually temperate cities.

Oregon health officials said late Wednesday more than 60 deaths have been tied to the heat, with the state's largest county, Multnomah, blaming the weather for 45 deaths since the heat wave began Friday.

British Columbia's chief coroner, Lisa Lapointe, said her office received reports of at least 486 "sudden and unexpected deaths" between Friday and 1 p.m. Wednesday. Normally, she said about 165 people would die in the province over a five-day period.

"While it is too early to say with certainty how many of these deaths are heat related, it is believed likely that the significant increase in deaths reported is attributable to the extreme weather," LaPointe said in a statement.

Like Seattle, many homes in Vancouver, British Columbia, don't have air conditioning.

"Vancouver has never experienced heat like this, and sadly dozens of people are dying because of it," Vancouver police Sgt. Steve Addison said in a statement.

Washington state authorities had linked more than 20 deaths to the heat, but that number was likely to rise.

The heat wave was caused by what meteorologists described as a dome of high pressure over the Northwest and worsened by human-caused climate change, which is making such extreme weather events more likely and more intense. Seattle, Portland and many other cities broke all-time heat records, with temperatures in some places reaching above 115 degrees Fahrenheit (46 Celsius).

While the temperatures had cooled considerably in western Washington, Oregon and British Columbia by Wednesday, interior regions were still sweating through triple-digit temperatures as the weather system moved east into the intermountain West and the Plains.

Environment Canada issued heat warnings Wednesday for southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. Heat warnings also were in place for parts of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana.

In Alberta, "a prolonged, dangerous, and historic heat wave will persist through this week," Environment Canada said.

The very high temperatures or humidity conditions posed an elevated risk of heatstroke or heat exhaustion.

In a statement, Oregon's Multnomah County medical examiner blamed 45 heat deaths there on hyperthermia, an abnormally high body temperature caused by a failure of the body to deal with heat. The victims ranged in age from 44 to 97.

The county that includes Portland said that between 2017 and 2019, there were only 12 hyperthermia deaths in all of Oregon.

"This was a true health crisis that has underscored how deadly an extreme heat wave can be, especially to otherwise vulnerable people," Dr. Jennifer Vines, the county's health officer, said in a statement.

The King County medical examiner's office, which covers an area including Seattle, said at least 13 people died due to the heat. The victims were between 61 and 97 years of age.

In eastern Washington, the Spokane Fire Department found two people dead in an apartment building Wednesday who had been suffering symptoms of heat-related stress, TV station KREM reported.

The heat led a power company in Spokane to impose rolling blackouts because of the strain on the electrical grid. Avista Utilities says it's trying to limit outages to one hour per customer.

Renee Swecker, 66, of Clayton, Washington, visited a splashpad fountain in downtown Spokane's Riverfront Park with her grandchildren Wednesday, saying they "are going everywhere where there is water."

"I'm praying for rain every day," Swecker said.

NKorea's Kim vows to boost China ties amid pandemic hardship

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

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SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said Thursday he'll push to further upgrade relations with China, his main ally, as he struggles to navigate his country out of a deepening crisis linked to the pandemic.

Kim made the comments in a message to Chinese President Xi Jinping congratulating him on the 100th founding anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

"The Workers' Party of Korea, by its firm unity with the Chinese Communist Party, would raise (North Korea)-China friendship to a new strategic point as required by the times and as desired by the peoples of the two countries," Kim was quoted as saying.

In an apparent reference to the United States, Kim said that "hostile forces' vicious slander and all-round pressure upon the Chinese Communist Party are no more than a last-ditch attempt and they can never check the ongoing advance of the Chinese people," according to KCNA.

Kim's message came a day after state media said he had told a powerful Politburo meeting that a "crucial" lapse in the anti-virus campaign has caused a "great crisis." He did not elaborate, but there was speculation that Kim may have aimed to raise a call for international assistance, including vaccine shipments.

North Korea maintains some of the world's toughest anti-virus measures, including 1 ½ years of border shutdowns, despite its much questionable claim to be coronavirus free. Such draconian steps have devastated its already struggling economy, and Kim has said before his country faces the "worst-ever" situation. It's unclear when North Korea would reopen its border with China, and so far, there are no reports that it has received any vaccines.

More than 90% of North Korea's trade goes through China, which has long been suspected of refusing to fully implement U.N. sanctions against North Korea imposed over its nuclear weapons programs. Experts say China worries about a collapse and chaos in North Korea because it doesn't want refugees flooding over the long border and a pro-U.S., unified Korea on its doorstep.

On Wednesday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin held out the possibility of sending assistance to North Korea.

"China and the DPRK have a long tradition of helping each other when they encounter difficulties," Wang said, referring to the North by the initials of its official name. "If necessary, China will actively consider providing assistance to the DPRK."

Los Angeles considers stricter limits on homeless camping

By BRIAN MELLELY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Los Angeles city leaders are poised to pass sweeping restrictions Thursday on one of the nation's largest homeless populations, making it illegal to pitch tents on many sidewalks, beneath overpasses and near parks.

The measure before the City Council is billed as a humane approach to get people off streets and restore access to public spaces, and it wouldn't be enforced until someone has turned down an offer of shelter. It would severely limit the number of places where homeless encampments have been allowed to grow and become a common sight across the city.

"There are right ways and wrong ways to disrupt the status quo and improve conditions on the street," Councilmember Mark Ridley-Thomas, coauthor of the measure, said in a statement. "I am governed by a fundamental position: Before the unhoused are restricted from occupying public space, they should be ... offered a suitable alternative for housing."

Among other limits, the ordinance would ban sitting, lying, sleeping or storing personal property on sidewalks that block handicap access, near driveways and within 500 feet (152 meters) of schools, day care centers, libraries or parks.

The measure, which was unexpectedly announced at Tuesday's meeting, would replace a more punitive anti-camping proposal. Police would only get involved if there's a crime, Ridley-Thomas said.

An advocate for the homeless said the measure is loosely written to allow broad interpretation for en-

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forcement and will make most of the city off-limits to people living on the street.

"Draconian is definitely the correct word," said Pete White of the LA Community Action Network. "I think it's impossible to comply."

White said that an ordinance that limited where people could park RVs and sleep in cars overnight left little more than 5% of streets available for parking.

Homelessness has become a crisis of "epic proportions," the measure says. It remains near the top of political agendas across the state.

California is home to more than a quarter of the nation's homeless people, according to federal data. The city of Los Angeles has an estimated homeless population of more than 40,000.

A federal judge directed the city of LA to offer housing to thousands of homeless people on notorious Skid Row by this fall, though an appeals court put that on hold.

Two Republican candidates seeking to replace Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom in a recall election came to LA County this week to announce their plans to address the statewide problem.

While the crisis is widespread across Los Angeles, a dispute about how to solve the problem has become a flashpoint on Venice Beach, where an encampment exploded in size during the coronavirus pandemic and has left residents weary and worried for their safety after several violent incidents.

Sheriff Alex Villanueva, whose deputies patrol unincorporated parts of the county, entered city turf with a homeless outreach team to announce a plan to get people into housing by July 4.

His lofty overture, which has moved some people off the boardwalk but is unlikely to meet his goal by this weekend, was met with resistance from much of LA's political establishment, particularly Councilmember Mike Bonin, whose district includes Venice.

Bonin, who criticized an approach that could lead to housing at the jail Villanueva runs if people don't leave, launched his own plan days later. That effort is being rolled out in several phases into August and promises to move people into temporary shelter and then permanent housing.

Bonin was among councilmembers opposing the measure Tuesday in the 12-3 vote, saying the city doesn't have 20,000 beds needed for the homeless. He also said the plan should show where sleeping and camping would be allowed.

If the measure doesn't receive unanimous approval on Thursday, it will face a second vote later in July before it can take effect.

PG&E seeks \$3.6 billion in rate hikes for wildfire safety

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Pacific Gas & Electric asked regulators Wednesday to grant a \$3.6 billion rate hike to help it pay for hardening its power systems to prevent deadly wildfires.

The nation's largest electric utility requested the hike beginning in 2023, with half of the increase devoted to wildfire safety, spokeswoman Lynsey Paulo told the Sacramento Bee.

The hike would increase the average residential bill by \$36 a month for gas and electric service, although the state's Public Utilities Commission typically only grants a portion of any requested rate increase, the Bee said.

PG&E, which has some 16 million customers in central and Northern California, sought the hike as the state prepares to enter the hot summer months amid warnings that the state is likely to face one of its earliest and most dangerous wildfire seasons yet.

Much of the state already is in a drought and experts are predicting hotter, larger and fiercer blazes both in California and throughout the West.

The Biden administration said Wednesday it is hiring more federal firefighters — and immediately raising their pay as the summer looms.

"The truth is we're playing catch-up" on preparing for extreme heat and wildfires, Biden said, calling federal efforts "under-resourced" compared with the deadly threat posed by climate change and extreme drought.

In Northern California, thousands of people were under evacuation orders because of a fire burning

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about 250 miles (402.34 kilometers) north of San Francisco.

PG&E equipment has been blamed for sparking some of the state's deadliest wildfires in recent years, most notably in 2017 and 2018 when a series of wildfires burned down more than 28,000 buildings and killed more than 100 people.

The devastation prompted PG&E to spend 17 months in bankruptcy court, where it negotiated a \$13.5 billion settlement with some wildfire victims. It also resulted in the company pleading guilty to 84 counts of involuntary manslaughter in Butte County, where the town of Paradise was wiped out by the Camp Fire in 2018.

State investigators also have linked PG&E equipment to a 2019 fire in Sonoma County that forced nearly 200,000 people from their homes and a Shasta County blaze last year that left four people dead. The utility has estimated those disasters could cost shareholders more than \$600 million in damages.

PG&E emerged from bankruptcy last summer but also has run into criticism for shutting off power to thousands in rotating blackouts during some dangerous fire conditions in an effort to prevent power lines from falling or being fouled by tree branches and sparking fires during high winds.

PG&E said it has been spending money to better forecast the weather, quickly detect downed lines and install self-contained power systems to supply electricity when safety blackouts are called.

However, the utility's rate hike request was angrily condemned by The Utility Reform Network, a San Francisco-based consumer group.

"This mind-boggling PG&E increase is a slap in the face to millions of California residents still hurting economically from the pandemic and struggling to get back on their feet," Mark Toney, the group's executive director, said in a statement.

Rumsfeld, a cunning leader who oversaw a ruinous Iraq war

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Calling Donald H. Rumsfeld energetic was like calling the Pacific wide. When others would rest, he would run. While others sat, he stood. But try as he might, at the pinnacle of his career as defense secretary he could not outmaneuver the ruinous politics of the Iraq war.

Regarded by former colleagues as equally smart and combative, patriotic and politically cunning, Rumsfeld had a storied career in government under four presidents and nearly a quarter century in corporate America. After retiring in 2008 he headed the Rumsfeld Foundation to promote public service and to work with charities that provide services and support for military families and wounded veterans.

The two-time defense secretary and one-time presidential candidate died Tuesday. He was 88.

"Rummy," as he was often called, was ambitious, witty, engaging and capable of great personal warmth. But he irritated many with his confrontational style. A man seemingly always in a hurry, he would let loose with a daily flurry of memos to aides — some well down the bureaucratic chain — which he dictated into an audio recorder and were typed up by assistant. They became known as his "snowflakes."

An accomplished wrestler in college, Rumsfeld relished verbal sparring and elevated it to an art form; a biting humor was a favorite weapon.

Still, he built a network of loyalists who admired his work ethic, intelligence and impatience with all who failed to share his sense of urgency.

From his earliest years in Washington he was seen by friend and foe alike as a formidable political force. An associate of President Richard Nixon, Bryce Harlow, who helped persuade Rumsfeld to resign from Congress and join the Nixon Cabinet as director of the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1969, called him "rough and ready, willing to tangle" and "the kind of guy who would walk on a blue flame to get a job done."

Rumsfeld is the only person to serve twice as Pentagon chief. The first time, in 1975-77, he was the youngest ever. The next time, in 2001-06, he was the oldest.

He made a brief run for the 1988 Republican presidential nomination, a spectacular flop that he once described as humbling for a man used to success at the highest levels of the government, including stints

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as White House chief of staff, U.S. ambassador and member of Congress.

For all Rumsfeld's achievements, it was the setbacks in Iraq in the twilight of his career that will likely etch the most vivid features of his legacy.

By the time he arrived at the Pentagon in January 2001 for his second stint as defense secretary, the military that Rumsfeld inherited was in a slow-motion transition from the Cold War era to a period dominated by ethnic conflicts in the Balkans, humanitarian crises in the Horn of Africa and spasms of terrorism. Among the other prominent worries: China's military buildup and the nuclear ambitions of Iran and North Korea.

But nine months into his tenure, on Sept. 11, Rumsfeld found himself literally face-to-face with the threat that would consume the remaining years of his tenure. When a hijacked American Airlines jetliner slammed into the Pentagon, Rumsfeld was in his third-floor office meeting with nine House members. He later recalled that at the instant of impact, the small wood table at which they were working trembled.

Rumsfeld was among the first to reach the smoldering crash site, and he helped carry the wounded in stretchers before returning to his duties inside the building.

The nation suddenly was at war. U.S. forces invaded Afghanistan on Oct. 7, and with Rumsfeld at the Pentagon helm the Taliban regime was toppled within weeks. Frequently presiding at televised briefings on the war, Rumsfeld became something of a TV star, admired for his plain-spokenness.

Within months of that success, President George W. Bush's attention shifted to Iraq, which played no role in the Sept. 11 attacks. Rumsfeld and others in the administration asserted that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was armed with nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, and that the U.S. could not afford the risk of Saddam one day providing some of those arms to al-Qaida or other terrorist groups.

The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq was launched in March 2003 with a go-ahead from Congress but no authorization by the U.N. Security Council. Baghdad fell quickly, but U.S. and allied forces soon became consumed with a violent insurgency. Critics faulted Rumsfeld for dismissing the public assessment of the Army's top general, Eric Shinseki, that several hundred thousand allied troops would be needed to stabilize Iraq.

Square-jawed with an acid tongue, Rumsfeld grew combative in defense of the war effort and became the lightning rod for Democrats' criticism. Years afterward, the degree of blame that should be shared among the White House, Rumsfeld and the U.S. military for the disasters in Iraq remained in debate.

In his 2009 biography of Rumsfeld, author Bradley Graham wrote that it was "both incorrect and unfair to heap singular blame" on Rumsfeld for Iraq.

"But much of what befell Rumsfeld resulted from his own behavior," Graham wrote in "By His Own Rules." "He is apt to be remembered as much for how he did things as for what he did. And here, too, he was an internal contradiction. Capable of genuine charm, kindness and grace, he all too frequently came across as brusque and domineering, often alienating others and making enemies where he needed friends."

Bush on Wednesday hailed Rumsfeld's "steady service as a wartime secretary of defense — a duty he carried out with strength, skill, and honor."

Survivors of the Iraq war were more critical. Rasha Al Aqeedi, now a U.S.-based analyst from the Iraqi city of Mosul, said: "The legacy he left behind ... the Iraq war, has been such a stain on Americans' foreign policy. It shaped how an entire generation views any intervention" by the United States.

In his 2011 memoir, "Known and Unknown," Rumsfeld offered no hint of regret about Iraq, but acknowledged that its future remained in doubt.

"While the road not traveled always looks smoother, the cold reality of a Hussein regime in Baghdad most likely would mean a Middle East far more perilous than it is today," he wrote. He sounded unconvinced that the failure to find WMD in Iraq poked a hole in the justification for invading.

"Our failure to confront Iraq would have sent a message to other nations that neither America nor any other nation was willing to stand in the way of their support for terrorism and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction," he wrote.

Rumsfeld twice offered his resignation to Bush in 2004 amid disclosures that U.S. troops had abused

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In high school he met his future wife, Joyce Pierson. He entered Princeton on a partial scholarship and joined the campus Navy ROTC program to cover his other expenses. In June 1954, Rumsfeld graduated and was commissioned an ensign in the Navy. Six months later he married Joyce.

He launched his Washington career in 1957 by signing up as an assistant to Rep. Dave Dennison, R-Ohio. Soon he was serving as a congressman himself, first elected to represent Illinois in 1962. He served four terms.

One of his early acts as a member of the Nixon White House was to hire a young Dick Cheney, starting a lifelong friendship.

Rumsfeld was working as the U.S. ambassador to NATO in Brussels, Belgium, when he was recalled to Washington to lead President Gerald Ford's transition team after Nixon resigned in August 1974. He became the new president's chief of staff and then, in November 1975, his defense secretary.

After leaving the Pentagon in 1977, Rumsfeld embarked on a successful business career in the private sector, including as chief executive officer, president and then chairman of G.D. Searle & Co., a major prescription drug manufacturer.

He still dabbled in government service, including serving as a special envoy to the Middle East for President Ronald Reagan in 1983-84. It was in that capacity that he famously met in Baghdad in December 1983 with Saddam, whose nation at the time was at war with Iran.

"None of us in the Reagan administration bore any illusions about Saddam," Rumsfeld wrote in his memoir. "Like most despots, his career was forged in conflict and hardened by bloodshed. He had used chemical toxins in the war he initiated with Iran three years earlier. But given the reality of the Middle East, then as now, America often had to deal with rulers who were deemed 'less bad' than the others."

Two decades later, Rumsfeld was again dealing with Saddam — this time overseeing an invasion that toppled the tyrant and led, ironically, to Rumsfeld's own downfall.

He is survived by his wife, Joyce, three children and grandchildren.

As it turns 100, China's ruling party grooms new faithful

By EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA Associated Press

JINGGANGSHAN, China (AP) — Basks straight, heads high, three dozen Communist Party members in red neckties who hope for leadership posts belt out a poem by revolutionary leader Mao Zedong at a historic mountainside battle site in central China.

"We stay upright even as we're surrounded by countless enemy forces!" declare the men and women,

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who are on a two-week course at the China Executive Leadership Academy. "Together, we will defeat the enemy!"

As the party celebrates the 100th anniversary of its 1921 founding, training centers such as the one in Jinggangshan play a key role in efforts by President Xi Jinping's government to extend its control over a changing society.

Drawn from among its 95 million members, ambitious people at state companies and government offices are schooled in an idealized version of the party's early revolutionary fervor before Mao's guerrillas fought their way to national power in 1949.

Zhou Xiaojing, who works at a political training center for the Chinese central bank in the central city of Zhengzhou, described Jinggangshan as "a spiritual shock and a kind of baptism."

"When I came here, I felt that my belief as a member of the Communist Party has become firmer," said Zhou, 49 and a party member since 2009. "Their education of party spirit, theory and ability are thirst-quenching."

Trainees say they want to serve the public, but people who are picked for higher party posts also receive benefits including more influence and quicker promotions at state companies, universities and government ministries.

Party schools are meant to "promote the faithful" and ensure they "ask no questions about the top leadership" and party ideology, said Willy Lam, a politics specialist at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Xi, who took power as the Communist Party's general secretary in 2012, launched a campaign in February to increase teaching of party history.

That official history skips over a 1959-61 famine caused by Mao's policies that killed as many as 50 million people, the millions killed in the ultra-radical violence of the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution launched by Mao and the deadly 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy protests under then-supreme leader Deng Xiaoping.

It is silent on power struggles among party leaders and complaints of rampant corruption and other abuses.

Xi hopes "the party can preserve the myth that it has always been correct and brilliant in promoting China's position in the world," Lam said.

The campus in Jinggangshan, an early site where Mao's army developed, is one of three nationwide for the Leadership Academy, which caters to high-ranking professionals and party officials. The China Daily newspaper said in 2016 that the party has a total of 2,900 training centers nationwide at different levels of government, ranging from county to provincial.

The 44-acre (18-hectare) campus in the mountains of Jiangxi province has dormitories and an auditorium, library and cafeteria.

Participants in the two-week "Jinggangshan Spirit" course spend 6 1/2 hours a day in class starting at 8:30 a.m., with occasional evening events.

Students took a field trip to Huangyangjie, where Mao's guerrillas fought off enemy forces on Aug. 30, 1928. According to party history, the Communists were outnumbered but repelled the attack.

Mao heard about the victory on his way to Jinggangshan and celebrated by writing the poem recited by the students.

"This spirit of sacrifice and dedication for the party and the people is very remarkable and profound," said another trainee, Wei Yanju, deputy chairwoman of the Women's Federation in the eastern province of Shandong.

"I hope everyone can come to understand China and see how superior and great China is," she said.

Party members are required to take at least 32 sessions of training per year. Some leadership posts require 56 sessions.

"Party officials know that being sent to certain select classes at a party school may indicate a bright future for them in the party," said Charlotte Lee, author of the book "Training the Party: Party Adaptation and Elite Training in Reform-era China."

"They have to demonstrate loyalty and certain skills in return," said Lee, who teaches at Berkeley City

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College.

Yao Yuzhen, an instructor at the school whose grandfather was a Red Army soldier, conceded that while promotions are not guaranteed, students will make "better progress" after the course.

"That's for sure," she said with a chuckle.

Foreign reporters were invited on a tour of the Jinggangshan campus ahead of the party's anniversary festivities.

Photos of Xi were shown at the front of a lecture hall as an instructor introduced Xi's speeches and highlighted the importance of party spirit and history.

"General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out clearly in his speech that the 100 years of our party is the 100 years when we were committed to fulfilling the original mission," said Prof. Chen Shenghua, head of the academy's party history education research center.

Studying party history is the "obligation of every party member, cadre, mass and youth," he said.

The "primary political task" for party members is to "study and implement Xi Jinping's thoughts on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era," according to the training plan for party members.

A plan for higher-level members requires that Xi Jinping Thought be the main focus of teachings, and that theoretical and party spirit account for at least 70% of class hours.

The Jinggangshan curriculum focuses on the party's early days in 1927-35 and Mao's battles with the Nationalist government.

Lectures jump over the following decades to modern successes in fighting poverty and the coronavirus.

"Under the leadership of the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core, we mobilized the whole country," said the instructor, Liu Qiufu, "and we won the war against the epidemic."

Rumsfeld, a cunning leader who oversaw a ruinous Iraq war

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Calling Donald H. Rumsfeld energetic was like calling the Pacific wide. When others would rest, he would run. While others sat, he stood. But try as he might, at the pinnacle of his career as defense secretary he could not outmaneuver the ruinous politics of the Iraq war.

Regarded by former colleagues as equally smart and combative, patriotic and politically cunning, Rumsfeld had a storied career in government under four presidents and nearly a quarter century in corporate America. After retiring in 2008 he headed the Rumsfeld Foundation to promote public service and to work with charities that provide services and support for military families and wounded veterans.

The two-time defense secretary and one-time presidential candidate died Tuesday. He was 88.

"Rummy," as he was often called, was ambitious, witty, engaging and capable of great personal warmth. But he irritated many with his confrontational style. A man seemingly always in a hurry, he would let loose with a daily flurry of memos to aides — some well down the bureaucratic chain — which he dictated into an audio recorder and were typed up by assistant. They became known as his "snowflakes."

An accomplished wrestler in college, Rumsfeld relished verbal sparring and elevated it to an art form; a biting humor was a favorite weapon.

Still, he built a network of loyalists who admired his work ethic, intelligence and impatience with all who failed to share his sense of urgency.

From his earliest years in Washington he was seen by friend and foe alike as a formidable political force. An associate of President Richard Nixon, Bryce Harlow, who helped persuade Rumsfeld to resign from Congress and join the Nixon Cabinet as director of the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1969, called him "rough and ready, willing to tangle" and "the kind of guy who would walk on a blue flame to get a job done."

Rumsfeld is the only person to serve twice as Pentagon chief. The first time, in 1975-77, he was the youngest ever. The next time, in 2001-06, he was the oldest.

He made a brief run for the 1988 Republican presidential nomination, a spectacular flop that he once described as humbling for a man used to success at the highest levels of the government, including stints as White House chief of staff, U.S. ambassador and member of Congress.

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For all Rumsfeld's achievements, it was the setbacks in Iraq in the twilight of his career that will likely etch the most vivid features of his legacy.

By the time he arrived at the Pentagon in January 2001 for his second stint as defense secretary, the military that Rumsfeld inherited was in a slow-motion transition from the Cold War era to a period dominated by ethnic conflicts in the Balkans, humanitarian crises in the Horn of Africa and spasms of terrorism. Among the other prominent worries: China's military buildup and the nuclear ambitions of Iran and North Korea.

But nine months into his tenure, on Sept. 11, Rumsfeld found himself literally face-to-face with the threat that would consume the remaining years of his tenure. When a hijacked American Airlines jetliner slammed into the Pentagon, Rumsfeld was in his third-floor office meeting with nine House members. He later recalled that at the instant of impact, the small wood table at which they were working trembled.

Rumsfeld was among the first to reach the smoldering crash site, and he helped carry the wounded in stretchers before returning to his duties inside the building.

The nation suddenly was at war. U.S. forces invaded Afghanistan on Oct. 7, and with Rumsfeld at the Pentagon helm the Taliban regime was toppled within weeks. Frequently presiding at televised briefings on the war, Rumsfeld became something of a TV star, admired for his plain-spokenness.

Within months of that success, President George W. Bush's attention shifted to Iraq, which played no role in the Sept. 11 attacks. Rumsfeld and others in the administration asserted that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was armed with nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, and that the U.S. could not afford the risk of Saddam one day providing some of those arms to al-Qaida or other terrorist groups.

The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq was launched in March 2003 with a go-ahead from Congress but no authorization by the U.N. Security Council. Baghdad fell quickly, but U.S. and allied forces soon became consumed with a violent insurgency. Critics faulted Rumsfeld for dismissing the public assessment of the Army's top general, Eric Shinseki, that several hundred thousand allied troops would be needed to stabilize Iraq.

Square-jawed with an acid tongue, Rumsfeld grew combative in defense of the war effort and became the lightning rod for Democrats' criticism. Years afterward, the degree of blame that should be shared among the White House, Rumsfeld and the U.S. military for the disasters in Iraq remained in debate.

In his 2009 biography of Rumsfeld, author Bradley Graham wrote that it was "both incorrect and unfair to heap singular blame" on Rumsfeld for Iraq.

"But much of what befell Rumsfeld resulted from his own behavior," Graham wrote in "By His Own Rules." "He is apt to be remembered as much for how he did things as for what he did. And here, too, he was an internal contradiction. Capable of genuine charm, kindness and grace, he all too frequently came across as brusque and domineering, often alienating others and making enemies where he needed friends."

Bush on Wednesday hailed Rumsfeld's "steady service as a wartime secretary of defense — a duty he carried out with strength, skill, and honor."

Survivors of the Iraq war were more critical. Rasha Al Aqeedi, now a U.S.-based analyst from the Iraqi city of Mosul, said: "The legacy he left behind ... the Iraq war, has been such a stain on Americans' foreign policy. It shaped how an entire generation views any intervention" by the United States.

In his 2011 memoir, "Known and Unknown," Rumsfeld offered no hint of regret about Iraq, but acknowledged that its future remained in doubt.

"While the road not traveled always looks smoother, the cold reality of a Hussein regime in Baghdad most likely would mean a Middle East far more perilous than it is today," he wrote. He sounded unconvinced that the failure to find WMD in Iraq poked a hole in the justification for invading.

"Our failure to confront Iraq would have sent a message to other nations that neither America nor any other nation was willing to stand in the way of their support for terrorism and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction," he wrote.

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EXPLAINER: Why Bill Cosby's conviction was overturned

By MARYCLAIRE DALE and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Bill Cosby's sexual assault conviction was thrown out Wednesday by Pennsylvania's highest court in a ruling that swiftly freed the actor from prison more than three years after he was found guilty of drugging and molesting Temple University employee Andrea Constand at his suburban Philadelphia mansion.

Cosby, 83, was the first celebrity tried and convicted in the #MeToo era, and his conviction was seen

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as a turning point in the movement to hold powerful men accountable for sexual misconduct.

Here's a look at the case against Cosby and the court's decision:

WHY DID THE COURT TOSS HIS CONVICTION?

The split court found that Cosby was unfairly prosecuted because the previous district attorney had promised the comedian once known as "America's Dad" that he wouldn't be charged over Constand's accusations. Cosby was charged by another prosecutor who claimed he wasn't bound by that agreement.

The court said that's not the case. The justices found that Cosby relied on that promise when he agreed to testify without invoking his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination in a lawsuit brought against him by Constand.

The court concluded that prosecutor who later brought the charges was obligated to stick to the non-prosecution agreement, so the conviction cannot stand. The justices wrote that "denying the defendant the benefit of that decision is an affront to fundamental fairness, particularly when it results in a criminal prosecution that was foregone for more than a decade."

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THE NONPROSECUTION AGREEMENT?

The promise not to prosecute Cosby was made in 2005 by Bruce Castor, who was then the top prosecutor for Montgomery County. Castor was also on the legal team that defended former President Donald Trump during his historic second impeachment trial over the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol by his supporters.

During a court hearing weeks after Cosby's 2015 arrest, Castor testified that he promised Cosby he wouldn't be prosecuted in the hopes that it would persuade the actor to testify in a civil case brought by Constand and allow her to win damages. Castor acknowledged the only place the matter was put in writing was in the 2005 press release announcing his decision not to prosecute, but said his decision was meant to shield Cosby from prosecution "for all time."

His successor noted, during the appeal arguments, that Castor went on to say in the press release that he could revisit the decision in the future.

Castor had said that Constand's case would be difficult to prove in court because she waited a year to come forward and stayed in contact with Cosby.

The first jurors who heard the case may have agreed with him, as they could not reach a verdict in 2017. But a second jury empaneled after the #MeToo movement exploded found him guilty at his 2018 retrial. Constand settled her civil case against Cosby for more than \$3 million.

Castor's successor, District Attorney Kevin Steele, charged Cosby in 2015 after a federal judge, acting on a request from The Associated Press, unsealed documents from her 2005 lawsuit against Cosby, revealing his damaging testimony about sexual encounters with Constand and others. Castor has said Cosby "would've had to have been nuts to say those things if there was any chance he could've been prosecuted."

HOW RARE IS THIS?

Extremely rare.

Wesley Oliver, a Pennsylvania law professor who has followed Cosby's case closely over the years, said he has never heard of a high court in Pennsylvania or anywhere else grappling with a prosecutor's informal promise not to prosecute.

"It breaks new ground entirely," said Oliver, who teaches at Duquesne University School of Law in Pittsburgh. "It sets precedent not just for Pennsylvania but probably other states."

He said the ruling should drive home to prosecutors the risks of suggesting at news conferences, in press releases or verbally in private that they will not prosecute.

"They should at least add three words — 'at this time,'" he said. "If you add that qualifier, which wasn't done in Cosby's case, you should be good to go," Oliver said.

CAN COSBY BE TRIED AGAIN?

It's highly unlikely. The decision on Wednesday bars Cosby from being tried again over Constand's complaint, finding it to be the "only remedy that comports with society's reasonable expectations of its elected prosecutors and our criminal justice system."

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And the accusations raised by dozens of other women, including the five who testified at his 2018 trial, often go back decades and are most likely too remote to prosecute.

Cosby turns 84 next month. However, his lawyer said he remains in good health, except for vision problems that render him legally blind.

The trial judge deemed him a sexually violent predator who could still pose a danger to women given his wealth, power and fame, and ordered that he be on a lifetime sex offender registry and check in monthly with authorities. However, the decision negates that finding.

NCAA clears way for athlete compensation as state laws loom

By SCHUYLER DIXON AP Sports Writer

DALLAS (AP) — The NCAA Board of Directors approved one of the biggest changes in the history of college athletics Wednesday, clearing the way for nearly a half-million athletes to start earning money based on their fame and celebrity without fear of endangering their eligibility or putting their school in jeopardy of violating amateurism rules that have stood for decades.

The decision, expected for months as state after state passed laws intended to render NCAA rules moot on the topic, came on the eve of the market opening Thursday for athletes in a dozen states, including giants like Texas and Florida.

"This is an important day for college athletes since they all are now able to take advantage of name, image and likeness opportunities," NCAA President Mark Emmert said.

The move effectively suspends NCAA restrictions on payments to athletes for things such as sponsorship deals, online endorsements and personal appearances. It applies to all three divisions or some 460,000 athletes.

The NCAA will also allow athletes to enter into agreements with agents, though all athletes are expected to keep their school informed of any and all NIL arrangements. The NCAA said schools are responsible "for determining whether those activities are consistent with state law."

Anticipating the change, many schools already have plans in place, with some weaving NIL education into for-credit coursework.

Within hours after the NCAA announcement, a handful announced policies or updated plans on the topic, including Pitt and Indiana, which said Hoosier athletes "can be contacted directly in a variety of ways to arrange or discuss potential NIL agreements." Stanford said much of its "NIL support" would be available for all students, not just Cardinal athletes.

Compliance officers at the NCAA's more than 1,100 schools will be busy.

Athletes must report NIL arrangements to their schools and there are limits on what they can do. Florida and Texas, for example, bar athletes from endorsing gambling and many schools have specific guidance about using – or not using — their logos or uniforms during NIL work. Kentucky warned its athletes that NIL compensation could affect need-based financial aid.

NCAA rules go back to its founding in 1906, though enforcement of infractions didn't pick up steam until the 1950s. The idea of money flowing to athletes has generally been opposed by the organization with exceptions and opposition both growing in recent years as athletes and former athletes have started to win in court. The NCAA's historic model of amateurism is changing.

The NCAA had hoped to have broader NIL rules in place months ago, but that process bogged down, as did efforts on Capitol Hill to have Congress pass a law addressing the issue. Emmert said the NCAA will continue to push for a federal law to "provide clarity on a national level."

The NCAA was forced to seek a temporary solution rather than have athletes in some states eligible for compensation while others were not. More than 10 states have laws set to go into effect Thursday that would have undercut or simply declared inert existing NCAA rules regarding NIL earnings.

Without NCAA action, athletes in some states could be making money without putting their college eligibility in jeopardy while their counterparts in other states could be in danger of breaking NCAA rules.

The NCAA's stopgap measure comes less than two weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against

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the association in a case involving education-related benefits. That 9-0 ruling is expected to impact issues related to compensation for athletes.

While the NCAA has been fighting court battles and debating rules for compensation for years, the sudden pivot is jarring, if not perfectly clear on how it will affect recruiting and competitive balance.

For now, the NCAA has largely left the issue in the hands of more than 1,100 member schools.

"The current environment — both legal and legislative — prevents us from providing a more permanent solution and the level of detail student-athletes deserve," Emmert said.

In a letter to member schools last week, Emmert stressed the high court still puts authority to govern college sports in the hands of the association. However, he warned schools that "existing and new rules are subject to antitrust analysis and we should expect continued litigation., particularly in the area of 'play for pay.'"

The NCAA said the temporary policy addresses "play for pay" and the continued ban on improper inducements tied to choosing a school.

"The new policy preserves the fact college sports are not pay-for-play," said Division II Presidents Council chair Sandra Jordan, chancellor at the University of South Carolina-Aiken. "It also reinforces key principles of fairness and integrity across the NCAA and maintains rules prohibiting improper recruiting inducements."

Hundreds of deaths could be linked to Northwest heat wave

By ANDREW SELSKY and JIM MORRIS Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — The grim toll of the historic heat wave in the Pacific Northwest became more apparent as authorities in Canada, Oregon and Washington state said Wednesday they were investigating hundreds of deaths likely caused by scorching temperatures that shattered all-time records in the normally temperate region.

British Columbia's chief coroner, Lisa Lapointe, said her office received reports of at least 486 "sudden and unexpected deaths" between Friday and Wednesday. Normally, she said about 165 people would die in the Canadian province over a five-day period.

"While it is too early to say with certainty how many of these deaths are heat related, it is believed likely that the significant increase in deaths reported is attributable to the extreme weather," LaPointe said in a statement.

Many homes in Vancouver, much like Seattle, don't have air conditioning, leaving people ill-prepared for soaring temperatures.

"Vancouver has never experienced heat like this, and sadly dozens of people are dying because of it," Vancouver police Sgt. Steve Addison said in a statement.

Oregon health officials said more than 60 deaths have been tied to the heat, with the state's largest county, Multnomah, blaming the weather for 45 deaths since temperatures spiked Friday. At least 20 deaths in Washington state have been linked to the heat, a number that was expected to rise.

The heat wave was caused by what meteorologists described as a dome of high pressure over the Northwest and worsened by human-caused climate change, which is making such extreme weather events more likely and more intense. Seattle, Portland and many other cities broke all-time heat records, with temperatures in some places reaching above 115 degrees Fahrenheit (46 Celsius).

While the temperatures had cooled considerably in western Washington, Oregon and British Columbia by Wednesday, interior regions were still sweating through triple-digit temperatures as the weather system moved east into the intermountain West and the Plains.

Amid the dangerous heat and drought gripping the American West, crews were closely monitoring wildfires that can explode in the extreme weather.

Heat warnings were in place for parts of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana as well as Saskatchewan and southern Alberta, where "a prolonged, dangerous, and historic heat wave will persist through

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this week," Environment Canada said.

"The temperatures recorded this week are unprecedented — lives have been lost and the risk of wildfires is at a dangerously high level," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.

In Oregon, the Multnomah County medical examiner blamed 45 heat deaths on hyperthermia, an abnormally high body temperature caused by a failure of the body to deal with heat. The victims ranged in age from 44 to 97.

The county that includes Portland said that between 2017 and 2019, there were only 12 hyperthermia deaths in all of Oregon.

"This was a true health crisis that has underscored how deadly an extreme heat wave can be, especially to otherwise vulnerable people," Dr. Jennifer Vines, the county's health officer, said in a statement.

The King County medical examiner's office, which covers an area including Seattle, said on Wednesday that a total of 13 people had died from heat-related causes. In neighboring Snohomish County, three men — ages 51, 75 and 77 — died after experiencing heatstroke in their homes, the medical examiner's office told the Daily Herald in Everett, Washington, on Tuesday. Four deaths have also been linked to heat in Kitsap County, west of Seattle.

In western Washington, the Spokane Fire Department found two people dead in an apartment building Wednesday who had been suffering symptoms of heat-related stress, TV station KREM reported.

The heat led a power company in Spokane to impose rolling blackouts because of the strain on the electrical grid. Avista Utilities says it's trying to limit outages to one hour per customer.

Heather Rosentrater, an Avista vice president for energy delivery, said the outages were a distribution problem and did not stem from a lack of electricity in the system.

Renee Swecker, 66, of Clayton, Washington, visited a splashpad fountain in downtown Spokane's Riverfront Park with her grandchildren Wednesday, saying they "are going everywhere where there is water."

"I'm praying for rain every day," Swecker said.

Latest victims in condo tower collapse include 2 children

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — As more human remains emerged Wednesday from the rubble of the collapsed Florida condo tower, the dead this time included the first children, ages 4 and 10, a loss that the Miami-Dade mayor called "too great to bear."

Mayor Daniella Levine Cava made the announcement nearly a week after the Florida building came crashing down. After some preliminary remarks at a media briefing, she took a deep breath to gather herself and stared down at her notes. She spoke haltingly and said the disclosure came with "great sorrow, real pain."

"So any loss of life, especially given the unexpected, unprecedented nature of this event, is a tragedy," she said. But the loss of children was an even heavier burden.

Miami-Dade police later identified the children as 10-year-old Lucia Guara and 4-year-old Emma Guara. The remains of their father, Marcus Guara, 52, were pulled from the rubble Saturday and identified Monday. The girls and their mother, Anaely Rodriguez, 42, were recovered Wednesday.

Search crews going through the ruins found the remains of a total of six people Wednesday, bringing the number of confirmed dead to 18. It was the highest one-day toll since the building collapsed last Thursday into a heap of broken concrete. The number of residents unaccounted for stands at 145.

Earlier in the day, crews searching for survivors built a ramp that should allow the use of heavier equipment, potentially accelerating the removal of concrete that "could lead to incredibly good news events," the state fire marshal said.

Since the sudden collapse of the 12-story Champlain Towers South last week in Surfside, rescuers have been working to peel back layers of concrete on the pancaked building without disturbing the unstable pile of debris.

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Miami-Dade Assistant Fire Chief Raide Jadallah told family members of those missing that the ramp allowed rescuers to use a crane on sections that were not previously accessible. He said that improves the chances of finding new pockets of space in the urgent search for survivors.

"We hope to start seeing some significant improvement in regards to the possibility of (finding) any voids that we cannot see," Jadallah said.

In an interview with Miami television station WSVN, state Fire Marshal Jimmy Patronis described the ramp as "a Herculean effort" that would allow crews "to leverage massive equipment to remove mass pieces of concrete," which could lead to good results.

Patronis told The Associated Press that the ramp will permit heavy equipment to get closer to areas where debris needs to be cleared. The new equipment includes a so-called nibbler, a massive machine that has a scissors-like tool at the end of a long arm to cut through concrete and rebar.

Officials have been concerned an underground parking garage could collapse under the weight of heavy equipment, so they decided to build the makeshift limestone ramp, Patronis said. He said dogs are used to check for survivors in the area where the machine works, and then the nibbler is sent in.

"So you can really make some serious rapid headway just because of the sheer hydraulic forces this thing can exert versus a human being with hand tools," Patronis said.

The cause of the collapse is under investigation. A 2018 engineering report found that the building's ground-floor pool deck was resting on a concrete slab that had "major structural damage" and needed extensive repairs. The report also found "abundant cracking" of concrete columns, beams and walls in the parking garage.

Just two months before the building came down, the president of its board wrote a letter to residents saying that structural problems identified in the 2018 inspection had "gotten significantly worse" and that major repairs would cost at least \$15.5 million. With bids for the work still pending, the building suddenly collapsed last Thursday.

Rescuers still faced enormous obstacles as they spent a seventh day searching for survivors. The pancake collapse of the building has frustrated efforts to reach anyone who may have survived in a pocket of space.

Officials were also worried about the possibility of severe weather interfering with search efforts. Crews have already had to deal with intermittent bad weather that caused temporary delays in the work, and they are now keeping an eye on a potential tropical storm in the Atlantic Ocean.

Gov. Ron DeSantis said some of the resources in Surfside might have to be removed in case the storms hit any part of Florida. "Tis the season and you've got to be ready," he said.

The possibility of severe weather prompted state officials to ask the federal government for an additional search and rescue team. Kevin Guthrie of the Florida Division of Emergency Management said the new team would be on hand if severe weather hits, allowing crews that have been working at the site for days to rotate out.

Authorities said it's still a search-and-rescue operation, but no one has been found alive since hours after the collapse on Thursday.

President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden planned to travel to Surfside on Thursday.

"They want to thank the heroic first responders, search-and-rescue teams and everyone who's been working tirelessly around the clock, and meet with the families" waiting for word of their loved ones, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday.

Miami-Dade Police Director Freddy Ramirez said he hopes Biden's visit will be a morale booster for the devastated community.

"We've had several challenges from weather, sorrow, pain. And I think that the president coming will bring some unity here for our community, support, like our governor, our mayor, all of us together."

AP sources: Trump company, executive indicted in tax probe

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

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Donald Trump's company and his longtime finance chief have been indicted on charges stemming from a New York investigation into the former president's business dealings, two people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press.

The charges against the Trump Organization and the company's chief financial officer, Allen Weisselberg, remained sealed Wednesday night, but were expected to involve alleged tax violations related to benefits the company gave to top executives, possibly including use of apartments, cars and school tuition, people familiar with the case said.

The people were not authorized to speak about an ongoing investigation and did so on condition of anonymity. The Wall Street Journal was first to report that charges were expected Thursday.

The company and Weisselberg were expected to make their first court appearance Thursday.

The charges against Weisselberg and the Trump Organization would be the first criminal cases to arise from the two-year probe led by Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr., a Democrat who leaves office at the end of the year.

Prosecutors have been scrutinizing Trump's tax records, subpoenaing documents and interviewing witnesses, including Trump insiders and company executives.

A grand jury was recently empaneled to weigh evidence and New York Attorney General Letitia James said she was assigning two of her lawyers to work with Vance on the criminal probe while she continues a civil investigation of Trump.

Messages seeking comment were left with a spokesperson and lawyers for the Trump Organization. Weisselberg's lawyer, Mary Mulligan, declined to comment. The Manhattan district attorney's office declined to comment.

Trump's spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment, but Jason Miller, a longtime former senior adviser to the Republican, spun the looming charges as "politically terrible for the Democrats."

"They told their crazies and their supplicants in the mainstream media this was about President Trump. Instead, their Witch Hunt is persecuting an innocent 80 year-old man for maybe taking free parking!" Miller tweeted, apparently referring to Weisselberg, who is 73.

Trump, who's been critical of President Joe Biden's immigration policies, was in Texas visiting the U.S.-Mexico border on Wednesday. He did not respond to shouted questions about the charges as he participated in a briefing with state officials.

Trump had blasted the investigation in a statement Monday, deriding Vance's office as "rude, nasty, and totally biased" in their treatment of Trump company lawyers, representatives, and long-term employees.

Trump, in the statement, said the company's actions were "things that are standard practice throughout the U.S. business community, and in no way a crime" and that Vance's probe was an investigation was "in search of a crime."

Trump Organization lawyers met virtually with Manhattan prosecutors last week in a last-ditch attempt to dissuade them from charging the company. Prosecutors gave the lawyers a Monday deadline to make the case that criminal charges shouldn't be filed.

Ron Fischetti, a lawyer for the Trump Organization, told the AP this week that there was no indication Trump himself was included in the first batch of charges.

"There is no indictment coming down this week against the former president," Fischetti said. "I can't say he's out of the woods yet completely."

Weisselberg, a loyal lieutenant to Trump and his real estate-developer father, Fred, came under scrutiny, in part, because of questions about his son's use of a Trump apartment at little or no cost.

Barry Weisselberg managed a Trump-operated ice rink in Central Park.

Barry's ex-wife, Jen Weisselberg, has been cooperating with the investigation and turned over reams of tax records and other documents to investigators.

"We have been working with prosecutors for many months now as part of this tax and financial investigation and have provided a large volume of evidence that allowed them to bring these charges," Jen

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Weisselberg's lawyer, Duncan Levin, said Wednesday. "We are gratified to hear that the DA's office is moving forward with a criminal case."

Allen Weisselberg has worked for the Trump Organization since 1973. The case against him could give prosecutors the means to pressure the executive into cooperating and telling them what he knows about Trump's business dealings.

Prosecutors subpoenaed another long-time Trump finance executive, senior vice president and controller Jeffrey McConney, to testify in front of the grand jury in the spring. Under New York law, grand jury witnesses are granted immunity and can not be charged for conduct they testify about.

Prosecutors probing untaxed benefits to Trump executives have also been looking at Matthew Calamari, a former Trump bodyguard turned chief operating officer, and his son, the company's corporate director of security. However, a lawyer for the Calamaris said Wednesday that he didn't expect them to be charged.

"Although the DA's investigation obviously is ongoing, I do not expect charges to be filed against either of my clients at this time," said the lawyer, Nicholas Gravante.

UNC trustees OK tenure for journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones

By TOM FOREMAN Jr. Associated Press

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. (AP) — Trustees at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill approved tenure Wednesday for Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones, capping weeks of tension that began when a board member halted the process over questions about her teaching credentials.

The board voted 9-4 to accept the tenure application at a special meeting that included a closed-door session that had sparked a protest by supporters of Hannah-Jones. At one point, a student said, she was manhandled by a campus police officer trying to get her out of the ballroom where the meeting was held.

"Today we took another important step in creating an even better university," trustee Gene Davis said after the vote was announced. "We welcome Nikole Hannah-Jones back to Chapel Hill."

Davis said that in granting tenure to Hannah-Jones the board was reaffirming its commitment to the university's highest values of "academic freedom, open scholarly inquiry, commitment to diversity of all types, including viewpoint diversity, and promotion of constructive disagreement and civil public discourse."

The university had announced in April that Hannah-Jones — who won a Pulitzer Prize for her work on The New York Times Magazine's 1619 Project focusing on America's history of slavery — would be joining the journalism school's faculty. It said she would take up the Knight Chair in Race and Investigative Journalism in July with a five-year contract.

But Hannah-Jones' attorneys announced last week that she would not report for work without tenure, prompting a call by Student Body President Lamar Richards, who's also a trustee, for the board to convene a special meeting no later than Wednesday.

Hannah-Jones said in a statement Wednesday evening that she was honored and grateful for the widespread support she received in her fight for tenure. She said the tenure issue is about more than just her.

"This fight is about ensuring the journalistic and academic freedom of Black writers, researchers, teachers, and students," said Hannah-Jones, who didn't attend the meeting. "We must ensure that our work is protected and able to proceed free from the risk of repercussions, and we are not there yet."

In a statement posted to the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund website, Hannah-Jones didn't immediately commit to coming to UNC.

"These last weeks have been very challenging and difficult and I need to take some time to process all that has occurred and determine what is the best way forward," she said.

After the vote, trustee Ralph W. Meekins Sr., issued a statement welcoming Hannah-Jones to the faculty.

"I strongly believe that she has the right to express her ideas, and that it is critical to do so here at this great university" Meekins said. "I believe that we have an incredible opportunity for our students to learn from Nikole Hannah-Jones as a journalist and a scholar."

Before Wednesday, the school had little to say about why tenure was not offered, but Walter Hussman, an Arkansas newspaper publisher and a prominent donor whose name is on the journalism school, revealed

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he had emailed university leaders challenging her work as “highly contentious and highly controversial” before the process was halted.

“The University has now voted to grant tenure to Ms. Nikole Hannah-Jones. I look forward to meeting her and discussing journalism,” Hussman said in a text message. “Our plan is to continue to support the UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media in advocating for the core values.”

Earlier in the year, Hannah-Jones’ tenure application was halted because she did not come from a “traditional academic-type background,” and trustee Charles Duckett, who vets the lifetime appointments wanted more time to consider her qualifications, university leaders had said. Duckett voted Wednesday for approval of her tenure application.

Some conservatives have complained about The 1619 Project, which focused on the country’s history of slavery.

The earlier decision by trustees to halt Hannah-Jones’ tenure submission sparked a torrent of criticism within the community. It also laid bare a depth of frustration over what critics decried as the school’s failure to answer longstanding concerns about the treatment of Black faculty, staff and students.

Several hundred UNC students had gathered near the chancellor’s office last Friday to demand that trustees reconsider tenure for Hannah-Jones. Protesters supporting her filed into the room at the start of Wednesday’s session. But when the board went into closed session, most of them left, save for a small group that was forced out, including the student who said she was pushed by a UNC Campus Police officer.

After the session reopened shortly after 6 p.m., the protesters returned to an increased police presence. After the trustees adjourned the meeting, the protesters began shouting at Davis and UNC Chancellor Kevin Guskiewicz to bring about promised changes for Black students which they said haven’t occurred yet. The students submitted a list of more than 50 demands, including decreased police presence and acknowledgement of Black contributions to the university.

Susan King, the UNC journalism school dean, said she was deeply appreciative to the board for approving Hannah-Jones’ tenure.

“Hannah-Jones will make our school better with her presence,” she said in a statement. “She will deepen the University’s commitment to intellectual integrity and to access for all.”

House to probe Capitol riot — over Republican opposition

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sharply split along party lines, the House launched a new investigation of the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection on Wednesday, approving a special committee to probe the violent attack as police officers who were injured fighting Donald Trump’s supporters watched from the gallery above.

The vote to form the panel was 222-190, with all but two Republicans objecting that majority Democrats would be in charge. The action came after Senate Republicans blocked creation of an independent commission that would have been evenly split between the two parties.

Ahead of the vote, Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told lawmakers in the chamber, “We will be judged by future generations as to how we value our democracy.” She said she preferred that an independent panel lead the inquiry but Congress could wait no longer to begin a deeper look at the insurrection that was the worst attack on the Capitol in more than 200 years.

As the vote was called, Pelosi stood in the House gallery with several police officers who fought the rioters and with the family of an officer who died, hugging several of them. One of the officers, Michael Fanone of Washington’s Metropolitan Police, said he was angry at Republicans for voting against an investigation after he almost lost his life to protect them.

“I try not to take these things personally, but it’s very personal for me,” Fanone said.

Tensions in Congress have only worsened since the January day that Trump’s supporters laid siege, hunted for lawmakers and temporarily halted the certification of President Joe Biden’s victory. A brief sense of shared outrage has given way to partisan sniping and attempts among some Republicans to downplay the events. Most Republicans have made clear they want to move on from the insurrection — and former

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President Trump's role — though many of them had fled the violent mob themselves.

Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, who lost her position in GOP leadership because of her criticism of Trump, was one of only two Republicans to vote for the panel. She declared, "Our nation, and the families of the brave law enforcement officers who were injured defending us or died following the attack, deserve answers."

Most Republicans disagreed, though few came to the House floor to make statements defending their votes. Rep. Michael Burgess of Texas said he opposed what he called "one party investigating the other," and Ohio Rep. Brad Wenstrup rejected the new probe as "incomplete and insufficient" because it would not look into other incidents including the 2017 shooting at a baseball field that badly wounded GOP Rep. Steve Scalise of Louisiana.

Some Republicans opted to spend the day instead with Trump himself. More than two dozen GOP House members, including Jim Banks of Indiana, the chair of the Republican Study Committee; Ronny Jackson of Texas, the former White House physician; Madison Cawthorn of North Carolina and Lauren Boebert of Colorado joined the former president at an event at the end of the border wall in Pharr, Texas, to assail the Biden administration's border policies.

During the debate at the Capitol, Democrats expressed frustration with Republicans who have complained that the investigation would be partisan after their party blocked the bipartisan panel.

"I think for some on the other side, nothing that gets to the truth will ever be good enough, because they do not want the truth," said Rules Committee Chairman Jim McGovern, who led the debate ahead of the vote.

The panel will be led by Democrats, with Pelosi appointing a chairperson and at least eight of the 13 members. The resolution gives her a possible say in the appointment of the other five members as well, directing that they will be named "after consultation" with House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy.

GOP leaders have declined to say whether Republicans will even participate. In a memo to all House Republicans late Tuesday, No. 2 House Republican Scalise urged his members to vote against the resolution, saying the committee "is likely to pursue a partisan agenda."

McCarthy is facing pressure to take the investigation seriously from the police officers who responded to the attack. Dozens of officers suffered injuries that day as Trump's supporters fought past them and broke into the building.

In addition to Fanone, spectators included Metropolitan Police Officer Daniel Hodges and Capitol Police Officer Harry Dunn. Fanone has described being dragged down the Capitol steps by rioters who shocked him with a stun gun and beat him. Hodges was crushed between two doors, and his bloody face and anguished screams were caught on video. Dunn has said that rioters yelled racial slurs and fought him in what resembled hand to hand combat as he held them back.

Also in the gallery were Gladys Sicknick and Sandra Garza, the mother and partner of Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, who collapsed and later died after engaging with the protesters. He was sprayed with chemical irritants, but a medical examiner determined he died of natural causes.

At a meeting with McCarthy last week, Fanone said he asked McCarthy for a commitment not to put "the wrong people" on the panel, a reference to those in the GOP who have played down the violence and defended the insurrectionists.

Fanone said then that McCarthy told him he would take his request seriously. But the officer lashed out at the GOP leader after Wednesday's vote, saying he was trying to advance his political career "on the backs of hundreds of law enforcement officers that responded to defend the Capitol, himself included, from an insurrection."

Trump was twice impeached by the House and twice acquitted by the Senate, the second time for telling his supporters just before the insurrection to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat to Biden.

Many Republicans have expressed concerns about a partisan probe, since majority Democrats are likely to investigate Trump's role in the siege and the groups that participated in it. Almost three dozen House Republicans voted last month for the legislation to create an independent commission, and seven

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Republicans in the Senate have also supported moving forward on that bill. But that was short of the 10 Senate Republicans who would be necessary to pass it.

Many Republicans have made clear that they want to move on from the Jan. 6 attack. And some have gone further, including Rep. Andrew Clyde of Georgia, who suggested that video of the rioters looked like a "tourist visit." Rep. Paul Gosar of Arizona insisted that a Trump supporter named Ashli Babbitt, who was shot and killed that day while trying to break into the House chamber, was "executed." Others have defended rioters charged with federal crimes.

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

Revised vote count shows Adams ahead in NYC mayoral primary

By KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Revised vote counts in New York City's Democratic mayoral primary show Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams maintaining a thin lead, a day after a first attempt to report the results of a ranked choice voting analysis went disastrously wrong.

The mayor's race, part of the first city election to use ranked choice voting, was thrown into disarray Tuesday after the city's Board of Elections posted incorrect preliminary vote counts and then withdrew them hours later.

Corrected numbers released Wednesday showed Adams, a former police captain and state senator, leading former sanitation commissioner Kathryn Garcia by 14,755 votes. Civil rights lawyer Maya Wiley was practically tied with Garcia, falling just 347 votes behind in the ranked choice analysis. It essentially allows some candidates to pick up votes from voters whose first choices get eliminated for lack of support.

The corrected results still don't paint a complete picture of the race. Nearly 125,000 absentee ballots have yet to be counted.

With Adams' thin lead, Garcia or Wiley could catch up when absentee ballots are added to the mix starting on July 6. Final results in the primary could be weeks away.

Adams' advantage narrowed substantially from an unofficial election-night count that involved only voters' first choices. Still, his campaign called the lead "significant."

"We are confident we will be the final choice of New Yorkers when every vote is tallied," the campaign added.

Garcia said she, too, remained "confident in our path to victory" but wasn't taking it for granted. Wiley, meanwhile, called the race "still wide open."

"Following yesterday's embarrassing debacle, the Board of Elections must count every vote in an open way so that New Yorkers can have confidence that their votes are being counted accurately," she tweeted.

The Board of Elections apologized for Tuesday's mistake, which involved the accidental inclusion of 135,000 test ballot images in the vote totals. Wednesday's revised results included about 17,000 more votes than the election-night total, but the board said that was because a small percentage of precincts weren't yet counted on election night.

The board insisted the new counts were accurate and said it was now doing more checks and reviews before releasing more data.

"We will do so with a heightened sense that we must regain the trust of New Yorkers," board President Frederic Umame and Secretary Miguelina Camilo said in a statement.

Still, critics said the mishap proved that the board was not equipped to handle the new ranked choice system.

Mayor Bill de Blasio called for "a complete structural rebuild" of the board, which operates independently of his office. The City Council's Black, Latino and Asian Caucus — whose leaders favor putting a repeal of ranked choice voting on the November ballot — noted that its members had warned that the city wasn't

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ready for the new system.

"The concerns they raised continue to be borne out by the facts," the group said in a statement.

Before the new counts were released Wednesday, Adams filed a lawsuit seeking to preserve the ballots and voting machines to ensure an accurate count.

The board declined to comment on the suit.

Garcia's campaign said it would pursue the necessary legal steps to ensure that ranked choice votes "are fully and accurately counted." The Wiley campaign had no immediate comment.

Lawsuits seeking court oversight of election tallies are not uncommon, especially in close races.

New York City adopted ranked choice voting for primaries and special elections in a 2019 referendum and used the system in citywide races for the first time in the June 22 primary.

Under the system, voters could rank up to five candidates in order of preference.

Since no candidate was the first choice of more than 50% of voters, a computer on Tuesday tabulated ballots in a series of rounds that worked like instant run-offs.

In each round, the candidate in last place is eliminated. Votes cast for that person are then redistributed to the surviving candidates, based on whoever voters put next on their ranking list. That process repeats until only two candidates are left.

Adams' lead shrank significantly in Wednesday's figures because he didn't do nearly as well as Garcia among voters whose first choices were Wiley or 2020 presidential candidate Andrew Yang, the other top candidates.

Garcia and Yang campaigned together, and she was the top alternative pick among his supporters. A little more than half of Wiley's backers went to Garcia as an alternate choice, while only 20% supported Adams.

In all, more than 117,000 voters didn't rank either Adams or Garcia anywhere on their ballots. That's 14% of the votes counted so far.

Versions of the ranked choice system have been used in U.S. cities including San Francisco and Minneapolis for years and in statewide races in Maine.

Susan Lerner, executive director of Common Cause New York, which promoted adoption of the ranked choice system, noted that Tuesday's discrepancy was due to human error, not a defect inherent in ranked choice voting itself.

Rob Richie, the president and CEO of FairVote, a nonprofit that advocates for ranked choice voting, said he did not believe Tuesday's flub would have a lasting impact on New Yorkers' faith in the ranked choice system.

"This certainly, fundamentally, is not anything about ranked choice voting, and it certainly is about the historic challenges that the Board of Elections has faced," Richie said.

The winner of New York City's mayoral primary will be the heavy favorite in the general election against Curtis Sliwa, the Republican founder of the Guardian Angels.

Bill Cosby freed from prison, his sex conviction overturned

By MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Pennsylvania's highest court threw out Bill Cosby's sexual assault conviction and released him from prison Wednesday in a stunning reversal of fortune for the comedian once known as "America's Dad," ruling that the prosecutor who brought the case was bound by his predecessor's agreement not to charge Cosby.

Cosby, 83, flashed the V-for-victory sign to a helicopter overhead as he trudged into his suburban Philadelphia home after serving nearly three years of a three- to 10-year sentence for drugging and violating Temple University sports administrator Andrea Constand in 2004.

The former "Cosby Show" star — the first celebrity tried and convicted in the #MeToo era — had no comment as he arrived, and just smiled and nodded later at a news conference outside, where his lawyer Jennifer Bonjean said: "We are thrilled to have Mr. Cosby home."

"He served three years of an unjust sentence and he did it with dignity and principle," she added.

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In a statement, Constand and her lawyers called the ruling disappointing, and they, like many other advocates, expressed fear that it could discourage sexual assault victims from coming forward. "We urge all victims to have their voices heard," they added.

Cosby was arrested in 2015, when a district attorney armed with newly unsealed evidence — the comic's damaging deposition in a lawsuit brought by Constand — filed charges against him just days before the 12-year statute of limitations was about to run out.

But the Pennsylvania Supreme Court said Wednesday that District Attorney Kevin Steele, who made the decision to arrest Cosby, was obligated to stand by his predecessor's promise not to charge Cosby, though there was no evidence that agreement was ever put in writing.

Justice David Wecht, writing for a split court, said Cosby had relied on the previous district attorney's decision not to charge him when the comedian gave his potentially incriminating testimony in Constand's civil case.

The court called Cosby's subsequent arrest "an affront to fundamental fairness, particularly when it results in a criminal prosecution that was forgone for more than a decade." It said justice and "fair play and decency" require that the district attorney's office stand by the decision of the previous DA.

The justices said that overturning the conviction and barring any further prosecution "is the only remedy that comports with society's reasonable expectations of its elected prosecutors and our criminal justice system."

Cosby was promptly set free from the state prison in suburban Montgomery County and driven home.

"What we saw today was justice, justice for all Americans," said a Cosby spokesperson, Andrew Wyatt. "Mr. Cosby's conviction being overturned is for the world and all Americans who are being treated unfairly by the judicial system and some bad officers."

Bonjean said Cosby was "extremely happy to be home" and "looks forward to reuniting with his wife and children." Several supporters outside yelled, "Hey, hey, hey!" — the catchphrase of Cosby's animated Fat Albert character — which brought a smile from him.

He later tweeted an old photo of himself with his fist raised and eyes closed, with the caption: "I have never changed my stance nor my story. I have always maintained my innocence. Thank you to all my fans, supporters and friends who stood by me through this ordeal. Special thanks to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court for upholding the rules of law."

In a statement, Steele, the district attorney, said Cosby went free "on a procedural issue that is irrelevant to the facts of the crime." He commended Constand for coming forward and added: "My hope is that this decision will not dampen the reporting of sexual assaults by victims."

"I am furious to hear this news," actor Amber Tamblyn, a founder of Time's Up, an advocacy group for sex-crime victims, said on Twitter. "I personally know women who this man drugged and raped while unconscious. Shame on the court and this decision."

But "Cosby Show" co-star Phylicia Rashad tweeted: "FINALLY!!!! A terrible wrong is being righted — a miscarriage of justice is corrected!"

Four Supreme Court justices formed the majority that ruled in Cosby's favor, while three others dissented in whole or in part.

Peter Goldberger, a suburban Philadelphia lawyer with an expertise in criminal appeals, said prosecutors could ask the Pennsylvania Supreme Court for reargument or reconsideration, but it would be a very long shot.

"I can't imagine that with such a lengthy opinion, with a thoughtful concurring opinion and a thoughtful dissenting opinion, that you could honestly say they made a simple mistake that would change their minds if they point it out to them," Goldberger said.

Even though Cosby was charged only with the assault on Constand, the judge at his trial allowed five other accusers to testify that they, too, were similarly victimized by Cosby in the 1980s. Prosecutors called them as witnesses to establish what they said was a pattern of behavior on Cosby's part.

Cosby's lawyers had argued on appeal that the use of the five additional accusers was improper. But

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the Pennsylvania high court did not weigh in on the question, saying it was moot, given the finding that Cosby should not have been prosecuted in the first place.

In sentencing Cosby, the trial judge had declared him a sexually violent predator who could not be safely allowed out in public and needed to report to authorities for the rest of his life.

In May, Cosby was denied parole after refusing to participate in sex offender programs behind bars. He said he would resist the treatment programs and refuse to acknowledge wrongdoing even if it meant serving the full 10 years.

The groundbreaking Black actor grew up in public housing in Philadelphia and made a fortune estimated at \$400 million during his 50 years in the entertainment industry that included the TV shows "I Spy," "The Cosby Show" and "Fat Albert," along with comedy albums and a multitude of television commercials.

The suburban Philadelphia prosecutor who originally looked into Constand's allegations, Montgomery County District Attorney Bruce Castor, considered the case flawed because Constand waited a year to come forward and stayed in contact with Cosby afterward. Castor declined to prosecute and instead encouraged Constand to sue for damages.

Questioned under oath as part of that lawsuit, Cosby said he used to offer quaaludes to women he wanted to have sex with. He eventually settled with Constand for \$3.4 million.

Portions of the deposition later became public at the request of The Associated Press and spelled Cosby's downfall, opening the floodgates on accusations from other women and destroying the comic's good-guy reputation and career. More than 60 women came forward to say Cosby violated them.

The AP does not typically identify sexual assault victims without their permission, which Constand has granted.

Cosby, in the deposition, acknowledged giving quaaludes to a 19-year-old woman before having sex with her at a Las Vegas hotel in 1976. Cosby called the encounter consensual.

On Wednesday, the woman, Therese Serignese, now 64, said the court ruling "takes my breath away."

"I just think it's a miscarriage of justice. This is about procedure. It's not about the truth of the women," she said. Serignese said she took solace in the fact Cosby served nearly three years behind bars: "That's as good as it gets in America" for sex crime victims.

Canadian Indigenous group says more graves found at new site

CRANBROOK, British Columbia (AP) — A Canadian Indigenous group said Wednesday a search using ground-penetrating radar has found 182 human remains in unmarked graves at a site near a former Catholic Church-run residential school that housed Indigenous children taken from their families.

The latest discovery of graves near Cranbrook, British Columbia follows reports of similar findings at two other such church-run schools, one of more than 600 unmarked graves and another of 215 bodies. Cranbrook is 524 miles (843 kilometers) east of Vancouver.

The Lower Kootenay Band said in a news release that it began using the technology last year to search the site close to the former St. Eugene's Mission School, which was operated by the Catholic Church from 1912 until the early 1970s. It said the search found the remains in unmarked graves, some about 3 feet (a meter) deep.

It's believed the remains are those of people from the bands of the Ktunaxa nation, which includes the Lower Kootenay Band, and other neighboring First Nation communities.

Chief Jason Louie of the Lower Kootenay Band called the discovery "deeply personal" since he had relatives attend the school.

"Let's call this for what it is," Louie told CBC radio in an interview. "It's a mass murder of Indigenous people."

"The Nazis were held accountable for their war crimes. I see no difference in locating the priests and nuns and the brothers who are responsible for this mass murder to be held accountable for their part in this attempt of genocide of an Indigenous people."

From the 19th century until the 1970s, more than 150,000 Indigenous children were forced to attend

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state-funded Christian boarding schools in an effort to assimilate them into Canadian society. Thousands of children died there of disease and other causes, with many never returned to their families.

Nearly three-quarters of the 130 residential schools were run by Roman Catholic missionary congregations, with others operated by the Presbyterian, Anglican and the United Church of Canada, which today is the largest Protestant denomination in the country.

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

Last week the Cowessess First Nation, located about 85 miles (135 kilometers) east of the Saskatchewan capital of Regina, said investigators found "at least 600" unmarked graves at the site of a former Marieval Indian Residential School.

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.

Prior to news of the most recent finding, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he has asked that the national flag on the Peace Tower remain at half-mast for Canada Day on Thursday to honor the Indigenous children who died in residential schools.

On Tuesday, it was announced that a group of Indigenous leaders will visit the Vatican later this year to press for a papal apology for the Roman Catholic Church's role in residential schools.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops said Indigenous leaders will visit the Vatican from Dec. 17-20 to meet with Pope Francis and "foster meaningful encounters of dialogue and healing."

After the graves were found in Kamloops, the pope 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 the Canadian government.

The leader of one of Canada's largest Indigenous groups says there are no guarantees an Indigenous delegation travelling to the Vatican will lead to Pope Francis apologizing in Canada.

Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde confirmed that assembly representatives will join Metis and Inuit leaders making the trip to the Vatican in late December.

"There are no guarantees of any kind of apology" from the pope, said Bellegarde.

"The Anglican Church has apologized," he told a virtual news conference. "The Presbyterian Church has apologized. United Church has apologized."

"This is really part of truth and part of the healing and reconciliation process for survivors to hear the apology from the highest position within the Roman Catholic Church, which is the pope."

Louie said he wants more concrete action than apologies.

"I'm really done with the government and churches saying they are sorry," he said. "Justice delayed is justice denied."

A papal apology was one of 94 recommendations from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but the Canadian bishops conference said in 2018 that the pope could not personally apologize for the residential schools.

Since the discovery of unmarked graves at the sites of former residential schools, there have been several fires at churches across Canada. There has also been some vandalism targeting churches and statues in cities.

Four small Catholic churches on Indigenous lands in rural southern British Columbia have been destroyed by suspicious fires and a vacant former Anglican church in northwestern B.C. was recently damaged in what RCMP said could be arson.

On Wednesday, Alberta's premier condemned what he called "arson attacks at Christian churches" after a historic parish was destroyed in a fire.

"Today in Morinville, l'église de Saint-Jean-Baptiste was destroyed in what appears to have been a criminal act of arson," Kenney said in a statement.

RCMP said officers were called to the suspicious blaze at the church in Morinville, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) north of Edmonton, in the early hours of Wednesday.

Trudeau and an Indigenous leader said arson and vandalism targeting churches is not the way to get

justice following the discovery of the unmarked graves.

"The destruction of places of worship is unacceptable and it must stop," Trudeau said. "We must work together to right past wrongs."

Bellegarde said burning churches is not the way to proceed.

"I can understand the frustration, the anger, the hurt and the pain, there's no question," he said. "But to burn things down is not our way."

Stories of survival keep hope alive as rescuers race clock

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

For 17 days, Reshma Begum survived under heaps of rubble after an eight-story garment factory collapsed in Bangladesh eight years ago. A few years earlier, Darlene Etienne held on for 15 days before rescuers in Haiti found her, thirsty and near death, in a house crumpled by an earthquake.

Stories of endurance and survival under the direst circumstances continue to kindle hopes that rescuers may find more people alive within the tons of debris that was once the 12-story Champlain Towers South condo tower near Miami.

The search stretched into a seventh day Wednesday, with more than 900 workers from 50 federal, state and local agencies working on the effort. At least 18 people are confirmed dead and more than 140 still unaccounted for.

"No one is giving up hope here," Surfside Mayor Charles Burkett proclaimed.

He cited the case of Begum, who subsisted on dried food and a scant supply of water while trapped in the ruins of the fallen factory. Rescuers had already abandoned hope of finding more survivors when they heard banging noises — the 19-year-old seamstress was clanging sticks against the fallen structure. Questions later arose whether the incident was a hoax, but the government insisted there truly was a "miracle."

No one has been pulled out alive from Champlain Towers South since shortly after the collapse. Finding survivors is especially critical in the early days of a disaster, experts say.

"After that the survivability drops off pretty quickly — but it doesn't go to zero," said Dr. Hernando Garzon, an emergency room physician in Sacramento, California, who has been deployed to disasters around the globe as part of humanitarian missions and search-and-rescue operations. "It's too early to call it a body-recovery phase at this point."

Garzon, who rushed to Haiti in 2010 to aid rescue efforts, recalled the cheers when Etienne, a Port-au-Prince teenager, emerged from the mangled house after being trapped for 16 days by shattered concrete and twisted metal. She was dehydrated, and her left leg was broken, but she was alive. Rescuers said she would not have lasted much longer had they not heard her faint cries for help.

Over the years there have been a number of similar, seemingly impossible rescues:

Evans Monsignac said he survived by sipping sewage while awaiting to be rescued from a collapsed flea market nearly a month after the 2010 Haiti earthquake.

Park Sung-hyun, a 19-year-old salesclerk in South Korea, credited luck — and rainwater seeping through the ruins — for allowing her to survive 16 days in a collapsed shopping mall in 1995.

Pedrito Dy was rescued after 14 days in 1990 from the basement of a quake-devastated Hyatt Hotel in the Philippines resort of Baguio, surviving on drips of rain, he said, and his own urine.

And Jesus Antonio Castillo was among the last of the "miracle babies" — more than a dozen of them — rescued from a Mexico City hospital nine days after a 1985 earthquake. Bulldozers were being sent to clear the rubble when he was discovered.

"There's hope. I really believe miracles do happen," said Martin Langesfeld, whose sister Nicole is believed to be among the missing in Florida. "Things like this have happened around the world."

Many factors determine how long people can live through extremely fraught conditions, such as the availability of water, the severity of injuries and the degree to which their movement is impaired.

Experts say the key to finding survivors will depend on so-called voids within the rubble — sizeable

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pockets of space that allow for life. A rightly positioned column, for example, even if collapsed, could have created a kind of structural tent where someone could await rescue.

However, the pancake collapse of the Champlain Towers South left layer upon layer of dense and intertwined debris that structural engineers say could frustrate efforts to reach anyone in such a pocket of space.

Long-term survivors have endured entrapment in considerably smaller buildings, or were trapped in structures that contained sizeable voids.

Many were young, and most had access to water or some other form of sustenance — so the downpours that have sometimes hampered the search in Surfside might be a blessing to someone trapped inside the wreckage.

South Florida's warm climate could also help, as they're not exposed to overnight cold.

"There are those who have survived despite all the odds, and I have no doubt that part of it is just that will to survive" that even science cannot explain, said Dr. David Shatz, a trauma surgeon who for 12 years was assistant medical director of the Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Department.

Now a professor of medicine at the University of California, Davis, Shatz has been closely monitoring the rescue effort from afar. For years he worked shoulder-to-shoulder with some of the rescuers now toiling at the fallen condo tower.

He also recalled being part of the bucket brigade at the federal building in Oklahoma City, which was brought down by a truck filled with explosives. And he was at the World Trade Center digging through concrete, glass and metal after the 9/11 terror attacks.

With every bit of debris he cleared away, he hoped that underneath would be a person to rescue. But for all its efforts, his team never found anyone alive.

Still, the search must go on, he said. If nothing else, to recover bodies and bring closure to grieving families — and just maybe, for that singular, miraculous rescue.

"I wish it could all be the 150 or so people still missing," Shatz said. "Even if there's just one, that would be wonderful."

Actor Allison Mack gets 3 years in NXIVM sex-slave case

By TOM HAYS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — TV actor Allison Mack, who played a key role in the scandal-ridden, cult-like group NXIVM, was sentenced to three years in prison Wednesday on charges she manipulated women into becoming sex slaves for the group's spiritual leader.

Mack — best known for her role as a young Superman's close friend on the series "Smallville" — had previously pleaded guilty to the charges and began cooperating against NXIVM leader Keith Raniere. Prosecutors credited her with helping them mount evidence showing how Raniere created a secret society of brainwashed women who were branded with his initials.

At her sentencing in Brooklyn federal court, Mack renounced the self-improvement guru.

"I made choices I will forever regret," she said, also telling the judge she was filled with "remorse and guilt."

"I am sorry to those of you that I brought into NXIVM," she wrote in a letter filed with the court last week. "I am sorry I ever exposed you to the nefarious and emotionally abusive schemes of a twisted man."

She reiterated her apologies to the victims in court on Wednesday: "From the deepest part of my heart and soul, I am sorry."

Mack wept at times while reading her statement to the court. U.S. District Judge Nicholas Garaufis told her he believed her apology was sincere, but said she deserved a serious sentence for using her celebrity to groom victims as "a willing and proactive ally" and "essential accomplice to Raniere's monstrous crimes."

Under advisory sentencing guidelines, Mack had faced between 14 and 17 1/2 years behind bars, but her defense team argued in court papers that probation or a sentence to home confinement was more appropriate. Prosecutors had agreed that any prison term should be below the guidelines range because

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of her cooperation.

"The NXIVM saga and the story of Ms. Mack's descent have been a tragedy for all involved. But that need not, and should not, be the end of the story for Allison Mack," her lawyers wrote in court papers.

A victim, Jessica Joan, rejected Mack's apologies, telling the judge the actor deserved no mercy.

"She can blame Keith all she wants but she is a monster cut from the same cloth," Joan said in court on Wednesday. "Allison Mack is a predator and an evil human being."

Mack, 38, was once part of the inner circle of Raniere, whose group attracted millionaires and actors among its adherents. Prosecutors said she became a "master" for "slaves" she ordered "to perform labor, take nude photographs, and in some cases, to engage in sex acts with Raniere."

As authorities closed in on Raniere, he fled to Mexico with Mack and others to try to reconstitute the group there. He was arrested and sent to the United States in March 2018; Mack was arrested a few days later.

"Ms. Mack now understands that this was the best thing that could have happened to her at that time," the defense papers said.

Mack provided information to prosecutors about how Raniere, now 60, encouraged "the use of demeaning and derogatory language, including racial slurs, to humiliate 'slaves,'" the government papers said. More importantly, she provided a recording of a conversation she had with Raniere about the branding, they added.

The branding should involve "a vulnerable position type of a thing" with "hands probably above the head being held, almost like being tied down, like sacrificial, whatever," Raniere told her. The women, he added, "should say, 'Please brand me. It would be an honor.' Or something like that."

Raniere was sentenced last year to 120 years in prison for his conviction on sex-trafficking charges. A 41-year-old heir to the Seagram's fortune, Clare Bronfman, was sentenced to nearly seven years in prison in September for her role as Raniere's unwavering benefactor.

Mack was allowed to remain out on bail in home confinement until surrendering to prison on Sept. 29. She left the courthouse on Wednesday without speaking to reporters.

'He went through hell': Relocated widower among the missing

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — On a recent morning before communal prayers at a synagogue, Harry Rosenberg told a friend that his new beachfront condo in Florida offered a much-needed change of scenery after an awful year in which he lost his wife to cancer and both parents to COVID-19 in New York.

The home in Surfside was to be a gathering spot for visiting children and grandchildren, and his daughter and son-in-law were doing just that when they traveled to the condo last week from New Jersey to join him for the Sabbath.

Hours later, the building collapsed, and all three family members are missing in the rubble.

Their cascading tragedies — cancer, COVID-19 and now the flattening of the building — are reminders of the excruciating toll the collapse has taken on families after what was already a grief-filled year.

Elsewhere in the building, a woman also sought a fresh start in Florida after falling ill and recovering from COVID-19. Another man was visiting Florida to attend the funeral of an old friend who died after being infected, and a Colombian family was in Miami to get the vaccine.

"He told me, 'It is the next chapter of my life.' He went through hell. His parents passed away. His wife passed away," said Steve Eisenberg, who saw the 52-year-old asset manager last week at the synagogue.

Rosenberg "came to Florida to breathe a little bit," said Rabbi Sholom D. Lipskar, founder of the Shul of Bal Harbour, the synagogue he joined.

When the building tumbled to the ground, Rosenberg's daughter, Malky Weisz, 27, and her husband, Benny Weisz, 32, had just arrived for their visit on the second floor of Champlain Towers South. As of Wednesday morning, the death toll stood at 16. More than 140 people are still unaccounted for.

Described as a family man and observant Jew, Rosenberg raised funds and launched a young adult

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center for mental healing in Israel. The new project, called Mercaz Shalom, is at the Mayanei Hayeshua Hospital in Bnei Brak, Israel.

Before his wife died last summer of a brain tumor, he spent three years taking care of her, a close friend said.

"He put his life on hold," said Maurice Wachsmann, a friend of Rosenberg's for more than 30 years.

Months after her death came more heartache. His father died of COVID-19 in January, and weeks later his mother died of the same.

"It was extremely difficult," Wachsmann said. "He did everything for his parents. Family first, before everything."

Rosenberg decided to move to Florida, first renting smaller apartments and finally buying last month the larger condo in Surfside, north of Miami Beach.

Last week, Rosenberg traveled to New York for the baby-naming ceremony of his second grandchild and rushed back to Miami to prepare for his daughter and son-in-law's visit. She works as an auditor at a branch of the Roth & Co accounting firm in Farmington, New Jersey. Her Austrian-born husband works in finance.

In his short time in Florida, he was already known by people in the community. Fellow members of the synagogue and his family are now anxiously awaiting any news from the scene.

On Wednesday, a lawsuit was filed on behalf of Rosenberg and his family. The lawsuit includes an emergency motion asking a judge to order that observers be granted access to the site on behalf of all families to document evidence that might indicate why the building collapsed.

Meanwhile, in the pile of rubble, family and friends have only been able to spot one remnant of his life at Surfside from afar: a white couch.

Most European troops exit Afghanistan quietly after 20 years

By GEIR MOULSON and KATHY GANNON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Most European troops have already pulled out of Afghanistan, quietly withdrawing months before the U.S.-led mission was officially expected to end — part of an anticlimactic close to the "forever war" that risks leaving the country on the brink of civil war.

Germany and Italy declared their missions in Afghanistan over on Wednesday and Poland's last troops returned home, bringing their deployments to a low-key end nearly 20 years after the first Western soldiers were deployed there.

Announcements from several countries analyzed by The Associated Press show that a majority of European troops has now left with little ceremony — a stark contrast to the dramatic and public show of force and unity when NATO allies lined up to back the U.S. invasion to rid the country of al-Qaida after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

In the ensuing decades, the war went from one mission to another. Former U.S. President George W. Bush's administration shied away from nation-building and the United Nations advocated a light footprint. But with the passing years, NATO and U.S. troops took on greater roles developing Afghanistan's National Security and Defense Forces and training police. At the war's peak, the U.S. and NATO military numbers surpassed 150,000.

NATO agreed in April to withdraw its roughly 7,000 non-American forces from Afghanistan to match U.S. President Joe Biden's decision to pull all American troops from the country, starting May 1.

Biden set a Sept. 11 deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. But more recently, American officials have said that pullout would most likely be completed by July 4 — and many allies have moved to wrap up their own presence by then as well.

NATO declined to give an update Wednesday on how many nations still have troops in its Resolute Support mission. But an analysis of 19 governments' announcements shows that more than 4,800 of the non-American forces have left.

The U.S. has refused to give troop figures, but when Biden announced the final pullout, between 2,500

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and 3,500 troops were deployed. As of February, a total of some 832,000 American troops had served in Afghanistan, while about 25,100 Defense Department civilians had also served there.

The U.S. has also refused to give a clear date for a final withdrawal.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Wednesday only that the U.S. withdrawal remains "on the timeline that the president announced ... which is to get our troops out of Afghanistan, while having a remaining diplomatic presence on the ground, by September."

Germany announced the end of its nearly 20-year deployment in a statement and a series of tweets from the defense minister late Tuesday, shortly after the last plane carrying its troops had left Afghan airspace.

Three transport aircraft landed at the Wunstorf air base in northern Germany on Wednesday afternoon. The troops, wearing masks, lined up on the tarmac for a brief ceremony, but the military dispensed with a bigger reception because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"We have worked long and hard to stand here today," said Brig. Gen. Ansgar Meyer, the last commander of the German contingent. "As your commander, I can say for you: 'Mission accomplished.' You have fulfilled your task."

But the top American general in Afghanistan gave a sobering assessment Tuesday, warning about the recent rapid loss of districts to the Taliban and cautioning the country could descend into civil war.

The German pullout came amid a spate of withdrawals by European nations. Poland's last departing troops were greeted Wednesday by Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak. Some 33,000 Polish troops have served in Afghanistan over the past 20 years.

The last Italian troops from Italy's base in Herat arrived at the military airport in Pisa late Tuesday. Italy officially declared its mission in Afghanistan over in a statement Wednesday, with Defense Minister Lorenzo Guerini paying tribute to the 53 Italians who died and 723 who were injured over the past two decades.

Going forward, Guerini said Italy's commitment to Afghanistan would remain, "beginning with the strengthening of development cooperation and support for Afghan institutions."

Georgia's last troops returned home Monday, while Romania brought home its remaining 140 troops Saturday, when Norway also pulled out. Troops from Denmark, Estonia and the Netherlands also returned home last week. Spain withdrew its last troops on May 13, Sweden on May 25, and Belgium on June 14. The small contingents deployed by Portugal, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Finland, Albania, North Macedonia and Luxembourg have left as well.

The pullout is nearing its end as security in Afghanistan worsens. Since May 1, when the withdrawal began, the Taliban have overrun district after district, including along major transportation routes. Many have fallen after Afghan soldiers surrendered, often convinced to leave their posts by elders. But elsewhere there have been bitter military battles, with Afghan troops sometimes losing when their positions could not be resupplied.

The U.S. military commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Austen S. Miller, meanwhile, expressed concern about the resurrection of militias, which were deployed to help the beleaguered national security forces but have a brutal reputation for widespread killing.

"A civil war is certainly a path that can be visualized if this continues on the trajectory it's on right now, that should be of concern to the world," he said.

At a ceremony last week to mark the official end of the Dutch deployment, Dutch Defense Minister Ank Bijleveld-Schouten underscored the uncertain outlook.

"We see reports of the rise of the Taliban, growing violence, also in areas where we were stationed," she said. "A lot has been achieved but we must be realistic: The results are not irreversible."

Putin says US and UK were behind Black Sea 'provocation'

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that an incident involving a British destroyer in the Black Sea couldn't have triggered a global conflict even if Russia had sunk the warship because the West knows it can't win such a war.

The tough statement appeared to indicate his resolve to raise the stakes should a similar incident hap-

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pen again.

Speaking in a marathon call-in show, Putin also revealed that he received the domestically produced Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine and urged Russians to get vaccinated as the country battles a devastating surge of cases and deaths amid widespread hesitancy to get the shot.

Putin was asked about the June 23 incident in the Black Sea, in which Russia said one of its warships fired warning shots and a warplane dropped bombs in the path of Britain's HMS Defender to force it from an area near Crimea that Moscow claims as its territorial waters. He said a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft had joined what he described as a "provocation" to test Russia's response.

Britain, which like most other nations didn't recognize Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, insisted the Defender wasn't fired upon and said it was sailing in Ukrainian waters. "HMS Defender was conducting innocent passage through Ukrainian territorial waters in accordance with international law," Britain's Defense Ministry said Wednesday.

Asked if the events could have triggered a global war, Putin responded that the West wouldn't risk a full-scale conflict.

"Even if we had sunk that ship, it would be hard to imagine that it would put the world on the brink of World War III because those who do it know that they can't emerge as winners in that war, and it's very important," Putin said. The statement followed Russian officials' warning that if a Western warship enters the waters again, the military could fire on it.

Putin charged that the U.S. reconnaissance aircraft that took off from the Greek island of Crete was operating in concert with the British ship on an apparent mission to monitor the Russian military's response to the British destroyer.

"It was clearly a provocation, a complex one involving not only the British but also the Americans," he said, adding that Moscow was aware of the U.S. intentions and responded accordingly to avoid revealing sensitive data.

Asked about Putin's claim, Navy Capt. Wendy Snyder, the chief of public affairs for the U.S. European Command, said that "yes, we did have aircraft in operations," but reaffirmed the Pentagon's earlier dismissal of the Russian description of the incident as false.

"We are operating in and watching everything in the Black Sea region, as we always do," Snyder said.

The Russian leader specifically lamented that the incident closely followed his summit with U.S. President Joe Biden in Geneva this month.

"The world is undergoing a radical change," he said. "Our U.S. partners realize that, and that's why the Geneva meeting took place. But on the other hand, they are trying to secure their monopolist stance, resulting in threats and destructive action such as drills, provocations and sanctions."

Even though the West doesn't recognize Crimea as part of Russia, Putin said the naval incident took the controversy to a new level.

"They don't recognize something — OK, they can keep refusing to recognize it," he said. "But why conduct such provocations?"

Putin insisted Russia would firmly defend its interests.

"We are fighting for ourselves and our future on our own territory," he said. "It's not us who traveled thousands of kilometers (miles) to come to them; it's them who have come to our borders and violated our territorial waters."

Dmitri Trenin, the director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, warned that last week's Black Sea incident presages a new, riskier level of confrontation.

"Fresh attempts to expose Russian 'red line' deterrence as hollow -- whether on the ground, in the air, or at sea -- would push Moscow to defend what it cannot give up without losing its self-respect," Trenin said in a commentary. "This would almost inevitably lead to clashes and casualties, which would carry the risk of further escalation. Should this happen, Russia-NATO confrontation would deteriorate literally to the point of brinkmanship, a truly bleak scenario."

Putin on Wednesday also reaffirmed his claim of a close kinship between the Russian and Ukrainian people, but accused Kyiv of hostility toward Russia and voiced doubt about the value of a meeting with

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, calling him a Western pawn.

"Why meet Zelenskyy if he has put his country under full foreign control and key issues for Ukraine are decided not in Kyiv but in Washington, and, to a certain extent, Paris and Berlin?" Putin asked.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba retorted by tweeting that Putin wishes Ukraine's issues were decided in Moscow. "This is our country and it's only up to us to decide our fate," he added.

Earlier this year, Russia bolstered its forces near Ukraine and warned that Moscow could intervene if Kyiv used force to reclaim areas in the east controlled by Russia-backed separatists since a conflict there erupted in 2014. Moscow later pulled back some troops, but Ukrainian authorities said the bulk of them remain close to the border.

Putin spent most of the four-hour "Direct Line" show discussing domestic issues — typical for the tightly choreographed annual rite that helps him polish his image as a strong leader caring for people's needs. It didn't feature any questions about Russia's beleaguered opposition and Putin's most prominent political foe, Alexei Navalny, who is in prison.

He voiced hope the country could avoid a nationwide coronavirus lockdown amid a surge of new infections. Reported deaths in Russia hit a daily record Wednesday, with authorities reporting 669, but Putin said decisions by regional officials to make vaccinations mandatory for some workers should help.

Russia has been registering over 20,000 new coronavirus cases and about 600 deaths every day since June 24. On Wednesday, 21,042 new infections were recorded.

Russian officials blame the June surge on Russians' lax attitude toward taking precautions, more infectious variants, and a low rate of vaccinations, which experts attribute to widespread hesitancy to get the shot and limited vaccine production. Although Russia was among the first countries to deploy a vaccine, just over 15% of the population has received at least one shot.

Amid this hesitancy, Putin revealed he received the Sputnik V vaccine. Putin got his first shot in late March out of the public eye and has remained tight-lipped about which vaccine he chose.

On other issues, Putin said Russia has no intention of banning Western social media platforms but emphasized that the government merely wants them to abide by the law, promptly remove inappropriate content and open offices in Russia.

"We tell them: 'You're spreading child pornography, or instructions on (how to commit) suicide, or how to create Molotov cocktails. ... You must take it down,' and they simply don't listen, don't want to listen to what we tell them," Putin said. "But this is wrong."

As the Titanic decays, expedition will monitor deterioration

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

The Titanic is disappearing. The iconic ocean liner that was sunk by an iceberg is now slowly succumbing to metal-eating bacteria: holes pervade the wreckage, the crow's nest is already gone and the railing of the ship's iconic bow could collapse at any time.

Racing against the inevitable, an undersea exploration company's expedition to the site of the wreckage could start this week, beginning what's expected to be an annual chronicling of the ship's deterioration. With the help of wealthy tourists, experts hope to learn more about the vessel as well as the underwater ecosystem that shipwrecks spawn.

"The ocean is taking this thing, and we need to document it before it all disappears or becomes unrecognizable," Stockton Rush, president of OceanGate Expeditions, said Friday from a ship headed to the North Atlantic wreck site.

The 109-year-old ocean liner is being battered by deep-sea currents and bacteria that consumes hundreds of pounds of iron a day. Some have predicted the ship could vanish in a matter of decades as holes yawn in the hull and sections disintegrate.

Since the ship's 1985 discovery, the 100-foot (30-meter) forward mast has collapsed. The crow's nest from which a lookout shouted, "Iceberg, right ahead!" disappeared. And the poop deck, where passengers crowded as the ship sank, folded under itself.

The gymnasium near the grand staircase has fallen in. And a 2019 expedition discovered that the cap-

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tain's haunting bathtub, which became visible after the outer wall of the captain's cabin fell away, is gone. "At some point you would expect the railing on the bow, which is very iconic, to have collapsed," Rush said.

The company has outfitted its carbon fiber-and-titanium submersible with high-definition cameras and multi-beam sonar equipment, Rush said. Charting the decomposition can help scientists predict the fate of other deep-sea wrecks, including those that sank during the world wars.

OceanGate also plans to document the site's sea life, such as crabs and corals. Hundreds of species have only been seen at the wreck, Rush said.

Another focus will be the debris field and its artifacts. David Concannon, an OceanGate adviser who's been involved in various Titanic expeditions, said he once followed a trail "of light debris and small personal effects like shoes and luggage" for 2 kilometers (1.2 miles).

The expedition includes archaeologists and marine biologists. But OceanGate is also bringing roughly 40 people who paid to come along. They'll take turns operating sonar equipment and performing other tasks in the five-person submersible.

They're funding the expedition by spending anywhere from \$100,000 to \$150,000 apiece.

"Somebody paid \$28 million to go with Blue Origin to space, not even the moon," said Renata Rojas, 53, of Hoboken, New Jersey. "This is cheap in comparison."

Obsessed with the Titanic since she was a kid, Rojas said she started studying oceanography in hopes of one day discovering the wreck. But it was found the same year, prompting her to pursue a career in banking instead.

"I kind of need to see it with my own eyes to know that it's really real," she said.

Bill Sauder, a Titanic historian who previously managed research for the company that owns the ship's salvage rights, said he doubts the expedition will discover "anything that's front-page news." But he said it will improve the world's understanding of the wreck's layout and debris field. For instance, he'd like confirmation regarding where he believes the ship's dog kennels are.

OceanGate will not take anything from the site, making this expedition far less controversial than the now-scuttled plans by another firm to retrieve the Titanic's radio.

RMS Titanic, the company that owns the wreck's salvage rights, wanted to exhibit the radio equipment because it had broadcast the Titanic's distress calls. But the proposal sparked a court battle last year with the U.S. government. It said the expedition would break federal law and a pact with Britain to leave the wreck undisturbed because it's a grave site.

All but about 700 of the roughly 2,200 passengers and crew died after the ship struck an iceberg in 1912.

The court battle ended after the firm indefinitely delayed its plans because of complications brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. But it's possible that not everyone will approve of this next mission.

In 2003, Ed Kamuda, then the president of the Titanic Historical Society, told The Associated Press that human activity, including tourism and expeditions, needs to be limited. He said the site should be a simple maritime memorial and left alone.

"Let nature take back what is hers," he said. "It's only a matter of time before it's a brown stain and a collection of pig iron on the ocean floor."

Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts suffer huge declines in membership

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

America's most iconic youth organizations – the Boy Scouts of America and the Girl Scouts of the USA – have been jolted by unprecedented one-year drops in membership, due partly to the pandemic, and partly to social trends that have been shrinking their ranks for decades.

While both organizations insist they'll survive, the dramatic declines raise questions about how effectively they'll be able to carry out their time-honored missions -- teaching skills and teamwork, providing outdoor adventure, encouraging community service.

Membership for the BSA's flagship Cub Scouts and Scouts BSA programs dropped from 1.97 million in

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2019 to 1.12 million in 2020, a 43% plunge, according to figures provided to The Associated Press. Court records show membership has fallen further since then, to about 762,000.

The Girl Scouts say their youth membership fell by nearly 30%, from about 1.4 million in 2019- 2020 to just over 1 million this year.

Both groups, like several other U.S. youth organizations, have experienced declining membership for many years. The Girl Scouts reported youth membership of about 2.8 million in 2003. The BSA had more than 4 million boys participating in the 1970s.

Reasons for the drop include competition from sports leagues, a perception by some families that they are old-fashioned, and busy family schedules. The pandemic brought a particular challenge.

In Lawrence, New Jersey, 8-year-old Joey Yaros stopped attending meetings while most in-person gatherings were shut down, and might not go back, even though his father and three brothers all earned the elite Eagle Scout rank. Joey was already struggling with virtual school classes, and the family didn't pressure him to also participate in virtual Cub Scout activities.

"If there are den meetings in the fall, we'll see if he gets back in the swing of it," said his father, high school history teacher Jay Yaros. "There are a lot of interesting things for kids to do these days, and scouting doesn't seem to be keeping up."

The Boy Scouts' problems are compounded by their decision to seek bankruptcy protection in February 2020 to cope with thousands of lawsuits filed by men who allege they were molested as youngsters by scout leaders. The case is proceeding slowly in federal bankruptcy court as lawyers negotiate creation of a trust fund for victims that will likely entail hundreds of millions of dollars in contributions from the BSA and its 252 local councils.

To provide those funds, some councils may have to sell cherished camp properties, the BSA's president and CEO, Roger Mosby, told the AP.

"We understand that this is a difficult and often emotional decision, but in some instances may be a necessary step as we work toward our shared imperatives of equitably compensating survivors and continuing Scouting's mission." Mosby said in a written reply to AP's queries.

The pandemic, the membership drop and rising costs of liability insurance have strained BSA finances. A disclosure statement in the bankruptcy case says its gross revenues dropped from \$394 million in 2019 to \$187 million last year.

In response, the Boy Scouts' annual youth membership fee will rise from \$66 to \$72 on August 1. The BSA also says some councils may merge to consolidate resources.

The Girl Scouts have bureaucratic complications of their own. There is ongoing litigation pitting the national headquarters against two of the 111 local councils— based in Fairbanks, Alaska, and Nashville, Tennessee — which refuse to implement a nationwide technology platform.

Despite the varied challenges, Mosby and other Boy Scout officials, as well as the Girl Scouts' leadership, say there's reason for optimism. They say their summer camps are full, special events are sold out, and they're expecting many thousands of families — some new to scouting, some who left during the pandemic — to sign up now that activities are occurring in-person rather than virtually.

"We knew some girls would take a pause," said Girl Scouts spokeswoman Kelly Parisi. "But as the pandemic goes in the rear-view mirror, we've seen a substantial rebound... We feel really good going into the fall recruitment."

Membership in the Boy Scouts' Longhorn Council, which serves parts of Central and North Texas, dropped by 44% from 2019 to 2020, said its chief executive, Wendy Shaw. But she is buoyed by surging interest this year from families considering their first foray into scouting; the council has scheduled 12 special events for them.

Manny Ramos, chief executive of the BSA's Seattle-area council, said pandemic-related restrictions on group activities were rigorous in his area -- a factor in recruiting only 500 scouts last fall instead of the normal 3,000 or more. To maintain interest, his staff held numerous outdoor activities, including winter camping, and now anticipates a large influx of families who skipped scouting last year.

Bryan Koch of Madison, Wisconsin, has been an adult leader for more than a decade as two sons went

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through Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. He believes the programs have invaluable benefits: teaching leadership skills, offering adventures such as a 78-mile hike at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico that his eldest son completed as a 14-year-old.

"I'm a firm believer in what scouting can be," Koch said. "It helps us develop more well-rounded and aware young men and women. That's sorely needed in our country right now."

Yet he says membership in his Boy Scout troop dropped by 30% in recent years as boys and parents turned to other activities.

"There's not really a passive way to go through scouting and get the full experience," Koch said. "It takes a lot of time for the scout, for the parents."

Josh Garner has been scoutmaster of Boy Scout Troop 30 in Jackson, Mississippi, for six years; his oldest son will soon be an Eagle Scout. Troop membership has dropped by 25% during his tenure, and even more sharply in the Cub Scout pack that's also sponsored by St. Richard Catholic Church.

Garner said the BSA's national leadership "has a lot of baggage right now" and needs to devise better recruitment strategies. Yet he'd hate to see the organization fold.

"I've watched boys learn all kinds of skills, from welding to giving speeches," he said. "It's a fantastic program -- too important to a lot of people for it to just go away."

California tests off-the-grid solutions to power outages

By DAISY NGUYEN Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — When a wildfire tore through Briceburg nearly two years ago, the tiny community on the edge of Yosemite National Park lost the only power line connecting it to the electrical grid.

Rather than rebuilding poles and wires over increasingly dry hillsides, which could raise the risk of equipment igniting catastrophic fires, the nation's largest utility decided to give Briceburg a self-reliant power system.

The stand-alone grid made of solar panels, batteries and a backup generator began operating this month. It's the first of potentially hundreds of its kind as Pacific Gas & Electric works to prevent another deadly fire like the one that forced it to file for bankruptcy in 2019.

The ramping up of this technology is among a number of strategies to improve energy resilience in California as a cycle of extreme heat, drought and wildfires hammers the U.S. West, triggering massive blackouts and threatening the power supply in the country's most populous state. Other tactics include raising the cost of electricity during high-demand hours — when it's most expensive to provide it — and offering cash and prizes to conserve energy when the grid is strained.

"I don't think anyone in the world anticipated how quickly the changes brought on by climate change would manifest. We're all scrambling to deal with that," said Peter Lehman, the founding director of the Schatz Energy Research Center, a clean energy institute in Arcata.

The response follows widespread blackouts in California in the past two years that exposed the power grid's vulnerability to weather. Fierce windstorms led utilities to deliberately shut off power to large swaths of the state to keep high-voltage transmission lines from sparking fire. Then last summer, an oppressive heat wave triggered the first rolling outages in 20 years. More than 800,000 homes and businesses lost power over two days in August.

During both crises, a Native American reservation on California's far northern coast kept the electricity flowing with the help of two microgrids that can disconnect from the larger electrical grid and switch to using solar energy generated and stored in battery banks near its hotel-casino.

As most of rural Humboldt County sat in the dark during a planned shutoff in October 2019, the Blue Lake Rancheria became a lifeline for thousands of its neighbors: The gas station and convenience store provided fuel and supplies, the hotel housed patients who needed a place to plug in medical devices, the local newspaper used the conference room to put out the next day's edition, and a hatchery continued pumping water to keep its fish alive.

"We've had outages before, but they were not severe. This one lasted almost three days for us," said

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Shad Overton, a manager at Mad River Hatchery. "The electricity from the microgrid pumped the diesel fuel we needed for our generator."

During a few hours of rolling blackouts last August, the reservation's microgrids went into "island mode" to help ease stress on the state's maxed-out grid.

"We seemed to arrive just in time to handle these emergencies, but it's about good governance over the last decades that paid attention to ... what tribal elders were saying about how the conditions were changing, and taking that information and planning for it," said Jana Ganion, the tribe's director of sustainability.

Energy experts said the tribe's \$8 million microgrids highlight the technology's potential in providing reliable power to hospitals, fire stations and other small-scale operations that can provide emergency services during a disaster, and to remote communities vulnerable to power loss.

"Anything that can give you a little bit of electricity, charge your phone or keep the fridge running when it's dark is enormously valuable. Microgrids can play a huge part in that," said Severin Borenstein, an energy economist at the University of California, Berkeley.

The state's energy commission has funded dozens of projects, serving as test beds for policies that might lead to commercialization of microgrids. Regulators are trying to resolve a longstanding rule that prohibits private microgrids from selling their excess electricity "over the fence" because they are not regulated by the state.

In Briceburg, PG&E determined the cost of installing and maintaining the remote grid outweighed the long-term expense and risk of replacing power lines, utility spokesman Paul Doherty said. The five customers who draw power from it will pay the same rate as they did before.

Meanwhile, the state's grid managers are grappling with the same challenge they faced last year. California routinely buys electricity from neighboring states when it is short on power, but imports are hard to come by when other states are hit by the same heat wave.

Bracing for another summer of heatwaves, utilities across the U.S. West have been signing contracts for more emergency power supplies and are trying to make sure they aren't relying on the same suppliers as everyone else.

The grid needs to be balanced at all times between electricity supply and demand. On hot days, it is stressed in the late afternoon and early evening, when solar power generation tails off after dark.

The California Independent System Operator said there have been upgrades in power storage and transmission since last summer, including four times the amount of battery storage from the current 500 megawatts on its system to 2,000 megawatts by August. In all, there will be about 3,500 megawatts of capacity — enough to power some 2.6 million homes.

There are setbacks too: An intensifying drought is weakening the state's hydroelectric facilities.

Officials warned power shortages could still happen this summer.

"We just don't know how hot it's going to get and we don't know how much demand will be," said Borenstein, who also sits on ISO's board of governors.

To encourage utility customers to shift some energy use to times when renewable resources are most plentiful, utilities are moving customers to new rate plans where they pay less in the daytime and more during peak demand hours.

One company is offering incentives, in the form of cash and gift cards, to people who reduce their household consumption at key times. OhmConnect, a regulated participant on the electricity market, said during a four-day period last summer when ISO issued "FlexAlerts" urging conservation, customers who agreed to let the company manage their smart thermostats and appliances helped take off almost 1 gigawatt-hour of energy — the equivalent of San Francisco's typical hourly use.

Cisco DeVries, CEO of the Oakland-based startup, joked that the opportunity to earn money by saving energy seems too good to be true so the company enlisted actress Kristen Bell to win over skeptics.

"Blackouts feel like a thing that happens that you have no control over, when the reality is that if we work together we actually can prevent it," DeVries said.

Microsoft exec: Targeting of Americans' records 'routine'

By ERIC TUCKER and MATT O'BRIEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal law enforcement agencies secretly seek the data of Microsoft customers thousands of times a year, according to congressional testimony Wednesday by a senior executive at the technology company.

Tom Burt, Microsoft's corporate vice president for customer security and trust, told members of the House Judiciary Committee that federal law enforcement in recent years has been presenting the company with between 2,400 to 3,500 secrecy orders a year, or about seven to 10 a day.

"Most shocking is just how routine secrecy orders have become when law enforcement targets an American's email, text messages or other sensitive data stored in the cloud," said Burt, describing the widespread clandestine surveillance as a major shift from historical norms.

The relationship between law enforcement and Big Tech has attracted fresh scrutiny in recent weeks with the revelation that Trump-era Justice Department prosecutors obtained as part of leak investigations phone records belonging not only to journalists but also to members of Congress and their staffers. Microsoft, for instance, was among the companies that turned over records under a court order, and because of a gag order, had to then wait more than two years before disclosing it.

Since then, Brad Smith, Microsoft's president, called for an end to the overuse of secret gag orders, arguing in a Washington Post opinion piece that "prosecutors too often are exploiting technology to abuse our fundamental freedoms." Attorney General Merrick Garland, meanwhile, has said the Justice Department will abandon its practice of seizing reporter records and will formalize that stance soon.

Burt is among the witnesses at a Judiciary Committee hearing about potential legislative solutions to intrusive leak investigations.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler said in opening remarks Wednesday that the Justice Department took advantage of outdated policies on digital data searches to target journalists and others in leak investigations. The New York Democrat said that reforms are needed now to guard against future overreach by federal prosecutors — an idea also expressed by Republicans on the committee.

"We cannot trust the department to police itself," Nadler said.

Burt said that while the revelation that federal prosecutors had sought data about journalists and political figures was shocking to many Americans, the scope of surveillance is much broader. He criticized prosecutors for reflexively seeking secrecy through boilerplate requests that "enable law enforcement to just simply assert a conclusion that a secrecy order is necessary."

Burt said that while Microsoft Corp. does cooperate with law enforcement on a broad range of criminal and national security investigations, it often challenges surveillance that it sees as unnecessary, resulting at times in advance notice to the account being targeted.

Among the organizations weighing in at the hearing was The Associated Press, which called on Congress to act to protect journalists' ability to promise confidentiality to their sources. Reporters must have prior notice and the ability to challenge a prosecutor's efforts to seize data, said a statement submitted by Karen Kaiser, AP's general counsel.

"It is essential that reporters be able to credibly promise confidentiality to ensure the public has the information needed to hold its government accountable and to help government agencies and officials function more effectively and with integrity," Kaiser said.

As possible solutions, Burt said, the government should end indefinite secrecy orders and should also be required to notify the target of the data demand once the secrecy order has expired.

Just this week, he said, prosecutors sought a blanket gag order affecting the government of a major U.S. city for a Microsoft data request targeting a single employee there.

"Without reform, abuses will continue to occur and they will occur in the dark," Burt said.

Putin reveals he was vaccinated with Russia's Sputnik V

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

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MOSCOW (AP) — President Vladimir Putin revealed Wednesday that he had received the domestically developed Sputnik V vaccine earlier this year, stressing the importance of getting vaccinated amid a surge of new coronavirus infections and deaths in Russia.

During an annual call-in show taking pre-screened questions, Putin voiced hope the immunization drive could help avoid a nationwide lockdown.

Russia on Wednesday reported 21,042 new infections and 669 deaths — similar to numbers it has been reporting daily since June 24. The number of reported deaths was a record for a single day for the country.

While reaffirming his position that vaccinations should be voluntary, Putin emphasized that decisions by local authorities in regions across Russia that made shots mandatory for some workers should help contain the surge.

Those decisions were based on the law and “aimed at avoiding the need for a lockdown, when entire enterprises shut down and people are left without their jobs, without their salaries,” Putin said.

Russian officials have blamed the rise in cases on Russians’ lax attitude toward taking precautions, the growing prevalence of more infectious variants and vaccination hesitancy. Although Russia was among the first countries to announce and deploy a coronavirus vaccine, just over 23 million people — or 15% of its 146 million population — have received at least one shot.

Experts have blamed this on wariness of the rushed approval of the Russian-made vaccines and limited production capacity.

Putin said that he initially didn’t identify the vaccine he received to avoid offering a competitive advantage to its maker.

“But I see that there are lots of questions,” the president said.

Putin got his first shot in late March and his second in mid-April, both out of the public eye.

On Wednesday, Putin said he hadn’t consulted with his doctors “as much” about which vaccine to take but rather looked at what choices his acquaintances made. He said he went for Sputnik V because it provided the longest protection out of the two jabs available to Russians at the time.

“Especially since our armed forces are being vaccinated with Sputnik V, and I’m the commander in chief, after all,” he said, chuckling.

Russia gave Sputnik V regulatory approval in August 2020, and it faced criticism at home and abroad because it had only been tested on a few dozen people at the time. However, the criticism was blunted by a report in the British medical journal *The Lancet* this year that said large-scale testing showed it to be safe, with an efficacy rate of 91%.

Its one-dose version, Sputnik Light, received approval last month and was released into circulation earlier this month.

Two other Russian vaccines — EpiVacCorona and CoviVac — have also received regulatory approval before completing late-stage trials. No data on the efficacy of those two vaccines has been released, and Sputnik V remains the most widely used coronavirus vaccine in the country.

Putin on Wednesday said all four Russian vaccines are “cutting-edge, safe and rather effective.”

Whether Russia will have enough vaccines to cope with a spike in demand remains unclear. Several regions have already reported shortages, but the Kremlin assured that those were merely temporary logistical difficulties.

Industry and Trade Minister Denis Manturov said Tuesday that, to date, 36.7 million sets of all four domestically developed coronavirus vaccines have been released in Russia.

Amid the latest surge of cases, about 20 Russian regions — from Moscow and St. Petersburg to the remote far-eastern region of Sakhalin — have made vaccinations mandatory this month for employees in certain sectors. The move seemingly helped ramp up the immunization drive in recent weeks but also elicited some pushback.

As of Monday, restaurants, bars and cafes in Moscow can only admit customers who have been vaccinated, have recovered from COVID-19 in the past six months or can provide a negative test in the previous 72 hours. Customers must visit a government website and get a QR code, a digital pattern designed

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to be read by a scanner.

In one concession, city officials agreed that the QR codes aren't needed for customers using outdoor terraces. Underage customers won't have to provide documentation if they are with their parents.

Small protests against mandatory vaccinations erupted in Moscow and the Sakhalin region this week.

EXPLAINER: How bad is the pandemic in North Korea?

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

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — After saying for months that it kept the coronavirus at bay, North Korea on Wednesday came closest to admitting that its anti-virus campaign has been less than perfect.

Kim Jong Un's mention of a "great crisis" created by a "crucial" failure in national pandemic measures during a ruling party meeting has triggered outside speculation about how bad the situation in North Korea may be.

A look at some of the clues:

EXPERTS DIVIDED OVER EPIDEMIC

Du Hyeogn Cha, an analyst at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies, said the North could be dealing with a huge COVID-19 outbreak that has spread beyond border towns and rural areas and is now reaching urban centers, possibly including capital Pyongyang.

While North Korea has told the World Health Organization it has not found a single coronavirus infection after testing more than 30,000 people, experts widely doubt its claim considering its poor health infrastructure. Cha said North Korea has no other way to deal with outbreaks than quarantining people and locking down entire areas until transmissions subside.

Other experts, including Park Won Gon, a professor of North Korea studies at Seoul's Ewha Womans University, said the large Politburo meeting attended by party officials from across the country would have been planned in advance and may have not taken place if the virus was circulating aggressively.

In case of large outbreaks, the North would deploy extreme measures to seal off affected regions, something outside monitoring groups haven't detected, said Ahn Kyung-su, the head of the Seoul-based Research Center of DPRK Health and Welfare.

IS IT ABOUT POWER SHAKEUP?

Most analysts agree that Kim's remarks indicate a development that's significant enough to warrant a shakeup of Pyongyang's leadership.

The North's state media said Kim berated senior party and government officials for neglecting "important decisions of the party on taking organizational, institutional, material, scientific and technological measures as required by the prolonged state emergency epidemic prevention campaign."

The report also said that the party during the meeting recalled an unidentified member of the Politburo's powerful Presidium, which consists of Kim and four other top officials. It's possible that Kim could be replacing Cabinet Premier Kim Tok Hun, his top economic official, who could be held responsible for anti-epidemic failures.

There was also speculation that Kim may have sacked Ri Pyong Chol, one of his top military officials. North Korean TV video of the meeting showed Ri looking downward and not participating in a vote as Kim and other senior officials on stage raised their hands to indicate their consent on a matter that the broadcast didn't specify.

CALL FOR OUTSIDE HELP?

Even if it was dealing with an alarming rise in infections, it's highly unlikely that the North would admit it. Still, Kim's decision to publicly address a major setback in the fight against the pandemic could also be an appeal for outside help.

Cha said the North could request stronger assistance from China, its main ally and economic lifeline,

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as they approach the 60th anniversary of their friendship treaty next month.

Leif-Eric Easley, professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University, said Kim's efforts to find the scapegoats for the outbreak could also be in preparation for accepting vaccines from abroad.

COVAX, the U.N.-backed program to distribute vaccines worldwide, said in February that the North could receive 1.9 million doses in the first half of the year. But the plans have been delayed due to global shortages.

Kim Sin-gon, a professor at Seoul's Korea University College of Medicine, said that Kim Jong Un likely aimed to raise international awareness of the North's pandemic-related difficulties.

UN war crimes court convicts 2 Serbs over Bosnia atrocities

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A United Nations court on Wednesday convicted two former allies of late Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic of aiding and abetting crimes committed by Serb paramilitaries in a Bosnian town in 1992.

It is the first time that Serbian officials have been convicted by a U.N. court of involvement in crimes in Bosnia.

However, the court said there was not sufficient evidence to convict them of similar crimes committed in other towns and villages in Bosnia and Croatia as the former Yugoslavia violently disintegrated in the early 1990s.

Jovica Stanisic and Franko Simatovic were convicted of aiding and abetting the crimes of murder, deportation, forcible transfer and persecution in the town of Bosanski Samac, and each was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment. The judgment can be appealed.

Stanisic is a former head of Serbia's State Security Service, and Simatovic was a senior intelligence operative with the service.

"The trial chamber is satisfied that the accused provided practical assistance which had a substantial effect on the commission of the crimes of murder, forcible displacement and persecution committed in Bosanski Samac and were aware that their acts assisted in their commission," Presiding Judge Burton Hall said.

Hall said that Serb forces and paramilitaries took over the town in northern Bosnia in April 1992.

"Numerous crimes were committed against the non-Serb population ... including looting, rape and the destruction of religious buildings and cultural monuments," Hall said. Local Bosnian Croats and Muslims were forced into detention centers where they were held in inhumane conditions, tortured and killed, he added.

Stanisic and Simatovic were originally acquitted in 2013 by judges who said prosecutors had failed to prove important elements of their links to the crimes. Appeals judges quashed the not-guilty verdicts in 2015 and ordered the retrial that took place at the U.N. International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals.

The verdicts Wednesday are the final U.N. prosecution in The Hague for crimes committed during the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia.

The court's chief prosecutor, Serge Brammertz, said in a statement that his office would study the judgment "and decide whether there are grounds to appeal."

"As senior officials in the State Security Service of the Republic of Serbia, Stanisic and Simatovic contributed to the commission of crimes by paramilitary forces and other armed groups in furtherance of ethnic cleansing campaigns against non-Serbs," Brammertz said.

Stanisic's lawyer, Wayne Jordash, said he would appeal.

"They found one incident in a municipality, and the evidence of that was weak," he said. "And to me it looks like a cynical compromise that we have to find some way to convict him to justify putting a man on trial for 18 years."

Prosecutors had alleged that both defendants were part of a "joint criminal enterprise" among top Ser-

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bian officials to force non-Serbs out of parts of Croatia and Bosnia.

Judges said they were convinced the enterprise existed, and that Stanasic and Simatovic knew about it, but said prosecutors had not proven beyond reasonable doubt that they actually participated.

Munira Subasic, leader of a Bosnian survivors' group called the Mothers of Srebrenica, welcomed the ruling that there was a Serbian plan to drive non-Serbs out of Bosnia.

"Serbia is responsible for the war in Bosnia ..., there is no way Serbia can find to absolve itself of that," she said.

Earlier this month, appeals judges at the same court confirmed former Bosnian Serb military chief Ratko Mladic's convictions for his role in atrocities throughout the Bosnian war, and upheld his life sentence.

Natasa Kandic, a prominent Serbian rights activist and the former head of the Humanitarian Law Fund group, described the verdict as "very important" because it is the last Hague trial and because "the accused and sentenced individuals belong to the most important institution in Serbia."

Iva Vukusic, a historian at Utrecht University, said ahead of Wednesday's hearing that the prosecution of Stanasic and Simatovic, who were originally sent to The Hague to face trial in 2003, has taken too long.

"I think this case is really showing us that if international justice wants to be a viable solution, this is not the way to run it," she said in a telephone interview. "It's been too long in the making."

Even so, it offered an opportunity to pass the first judgment at an international court on Serbia's role in the wars.

Milosevic was charged in a broader indictment with fomenting crimes in the Balkan wars but he died in his cell in The Hague in 2006 before judges could deliver verdicts.

July 4, Juneteenth and the meaning of national holidays

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress formally endorsed the Declaration of Independence. Celebrations began within days: parades and public readings, bonfires and candles and the firing of 13 musket rounds, one for each of the original states.

Nearly a century passed before the country officially named its founding a holiday.

With the recent passage of the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act, commemorating the end of slavery in the United States, the country now has 12 federal holidays. Many are fixtures in the American calendar, but their presence isn't only a story of continuity. They reflect how the U.S. has evolved — from an affiliation of states with a relatively small federal government to a more centralized nation.

Statewide and local gatherings for Independence Day and other holidays are as old as the country itself. But the first round of federal holidays, identified as such because federal employees (initially only federal employees in Washington, D.C.) were given the day off, was only signed into law in 1870, by President Ulysses S. Grant, five years after the Civil War ended.

"The Civil War consolidated national power in all sorts of ways, and national holidays are an illustration of that," says the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Eric Foner. "There were many, many firsts after the Civil War."

Juneteenth and other federal holidays have passed with substantial majorities in Congress, suggesting broad, bipartisan consensus. The first holidays, notes Grant biographer Ron Chernow, were the safest ones at the time — New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas and George Washington's birthday (enacted in 1879).

"They followed the Civil War, but, by no accident, they had nothing to do with the Civil War. The war wounds were still deep and irrevocable, and any commemoration of the war itself would have been seen as divisive," Chernow says. He notes that Memorial Day, the honoring of those who died in war, did not become a federal holiday until 1888.

"The first five federal holidays ... attempted to restore common ground between North and South," Chernow says. "Both sides in the Civil War claimed to have fought in the spirit of the American Revolution. It was therefore easy for both sides to honor Washington's birthday and Independence Day."

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Whether statements of patriotism or social justice, federal holidays mirror a part of the country's sense of itself and how it changes.

Public support to make the Rev. Martin Luther King's birthday a holiday was so strong that it was signed into law in 1983 by President Ronald Reagan, who had opposed the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act in the 1960s and privately believed the late civil rights leader's standing was "based on an image, not reality." Even then, Arizona, New Hampshire and South Carolina resisted making it a state holiday, with South Carolina waiting until 2000. Alabama and Mississippi still pair King's birthday with the birthday of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee.

Columbus Day became a national holiday in 1968, endorsed by Congress and President Lyndon Johnson as a tribute to immigrants and as a "declaration of willingness to face with confidence the imponderables of unknown tomorrows," according to a Senate report at the time. But over the past 40 years, as Columbus' image has shifted from the "discoverer of America" to that of a racist and imperialist, cities and states have either changed the holiday's name (Hawaii calls it "Discovery Day") or used the day to honor others; since 1989, South Dakota has called it "Native American Day."

"You can think of federal holidays as being like monuments erected in parks," says Matthew Dennis, author of "Red, White, and Blue Letter Days," a 2002 book on American holidays. "With a monument, you try to set the meaning of the past in stone. But that can change, and people might say, 'Wait, who is this guy?'"

Among national holidays, July 4 stands as the most complex and debated, a reflection of the questions and contradictions about the country's origins and about the Declaration of Independence itself.

Independence Day has been caught up in the country's divisions almost from the start. In the 1780s and 1790s, supporters of a stronger central government (Federalists) and those who worried about a return to British-style monarchy (sometimes called Jeffersonian Republicans), argued over the authorship of the Declaration of Independence, with Republicans giving sole credit to their own Thomas Jefferson and Federalists countering (correctly) that many others had worked on it.

In the decades before the Civil War, Black Americans were often excluded from official July 4 events and instead would celebrate on July 5, both acknowledging July 4 and their distance from it. Frederick Douglass delivered his famed 1852 speech, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July," on July 5.

The Civil War itself was a time for competing interpretations. Southerners embraced the Declaration of Independence's message of defiance against tyranny. The North looked to it as a blueprint. In a letter to Congress sent on July 4, 1861, just months after the Civil War began, President Abraham Lincoln spoke of Independence Day as inspiration for a new and more humane society.

"Our adversaries have adopted some declarations of independence in which, unlike the good old one penned by Jefferson, they omit the words 'all men are created equal,'" Lincoln wrote, adding that the Union was upholding "government whose leading object is to elevate the condition of men; to lift artificial weights from all shoulders; to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all; to afford all an unfettered start and a fair chance in the race of life."

The meaning of July 4 has continued to evolve, from president to president. Franklin D. Roosevelt and George W. Bush are among those who dedicated Independence Day speeches to the military, whether during World War II or in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks. John F. Kennedy's 1962 address, in the midst of the Cold War, called independence the "single issue that divides the world today" and invoked "the longing for independence behind the Iron Curtain." In 2014, President Barack Obama cited the promise of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" as a reason "immigrants from around the world dream of coming to our shores."

For Independence Day in 2020, less than two months after the murder of George Floyd, President Donald Trump denounced Black Lives Matters protesters and what he called "a merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values and indoctrinate our children." His eventual successor, Joe Biden, issued a brief video saying the country had yet to live up to its promise of equality, noting that even Jefferson was a slaveholder.

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"But once proposed, it (equality) was an idea that couldn't be constrained," he said. "It survived the rages of the Civil War, the dogs of Bull Connor, the assassination of Martin Luther King and more 200 years of systematic racism."

"America is no fairy tale," Biden added. "It's been a constant push and pull between two parts of our character: the idea that all men and women — all people — are created equal and the racism that has torn us apart."

Joining Trump at border, GOP congressman eyes path to power

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — At the invitation of Donald Trump, Indiana Rep. Jim Banks recently led a small group of House Republicans to the former president's New Jersey golf club, where they dined on beef tenderloin, posed for photos and briefed him on strategy for the 2022 midterm elections.

Banks tweeted a picture of himself and Trump grinning widely while flashing a thumbs-up after the session in June. "It was entirely focused on the future of the Republican Party," he said.

Whatever that future may hold, the 41-year-old Banks is working aggressively to play a prominent role in it. A politician with mountaintop ambition, he is rising in the ranks of the House Republicans — and in the estimation of the mercurial Trump.

Banks' overnight trip to Trump's Bedminster resort punctuated a political journey from a county council seat in small-town northeast Indiana to prominence in Congress in little more than a decade. It also served as a testament to the conversion Banks underwent from Trump critic to unapologetic supporter.

Recently selected to lead the Republican Study Committee, a powerful voting bloc that includes most members of the House Republican conference, Banks is now tasked with crafting a policy agenda that bridges mainstream, Reagan-era conservatism and Trump's grievance-driven populism. If successful, it's a project that could catapult Banks higher in the House leadership.

On Wednesday, Banks was invited to join Trump for a tour of the U.S.-Mexico border in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, where the former president was expected to rail against illegal immigration.

"Jim understands there's no future for the Republican Party without Trump supporters. But he also understands traditional conservative principles need to have a future," said Luke Messer, a former Indiana congressman who retired in 2019 after a failed Senate run. "He is trying to work both halves of that equation and his colleagues recognize his talent."

Like other Republican strivers, including New York Rep. Elise Stefanik, the No. 3 ranking member of the House GOP, his evolution was swift.

Banks supported special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into the Trump campaign's potential ties to Russia and once said that "America deserved better" after a video emerged of Trump discussing sexually grabbing women without their consent.

He now says Trump's 2016 election was a "gift" that could make Republicans "a majority party for a long time to come."

While Banks has proved politically adroit in dealing with Trump, his colleagues also say he grasps policy as well.

"There are some members of Congress who excel in the political arena and don't do as much in the policy arena, and vice versa. But Jim is one of the rare people who do both," said Rep. Mike Johnson, R-La., who served a previous term leading the group Banks now does.

Figures such as Banks have a long history in Congress. So long, in fact, that a 19th century nautical term has historically been applied to their ilk.

"He's a trimmer," said Ross Baker, a political science professor at Rutgers University, who studies congressional history. "It means a guy who trims his sails depending on which way the wind is blowing. In his case, he is a serial trimmer."

Banks describes it differently.

"I was very skeptical," Banks said of his early views of Trump. But, Banks said, "he won me over more

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and more every single day by doing what he said he was going to do.”

Banks’ critics use another term: political expedience.

“Everything Jim Banks does is based on how it will help him politically,” said Gary Snyder, a Republican-turned-Democrat who writes a politics newsletter in Indiana. The two were close earlier in Banks’ political career before a falling out when Snyder’s wife ran against Banks as a libertarian in 2016.

“He’s cunning and manipulative. But he plays the game very well,” Snyder said.

Banks’ beginnings trace to a trailer park in Columbia City, Indiana, near Fort Wayne. His father worked as an axle-maker for the Dana Corp., while his mother cooked in a nursing home. The family was largely apolitical, Banks has said, though his parents did vote for Democrats. Like much of Indiana, by the time Banks was elected to Congress on the same night Trump won the presidency, his father had become a convert.

“My dad could not have cared as much about (my election) as he did about Donald Trump becoming president,” Banks fondly recalls at GOP dinners in Indiana.

Banks, the first in his family to go to college, got his initial taste of politics when he joined the Indiana University College Republicans. That’s where he met his wife, Amanda. Afterward, he went to work for now-former Indiana Rep. John Hostettler, then honed his political instincts working on mostly unsuccessful campaigns in Ohio, Indiana and Colorado.

“You always learn more when you lose,” Banks said. He later got a “real job” working for a construction business before he and his wife had the first of their three daughters. His political ascent began when he became GOP chairman of Whitley County and later secured a spot on the county’s council.

He launched a bid for the Indiana state Senate two years later. Party insiders quickly took note.

A veteran state representative had signaled interest in the vacant seat, and Banks said he would only run if the legislator did not, the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette reported. Behind the scenes, however, Banks was working to outmaneuver the potential rival. Banks asked Snyder, then a blogger, to convey a message: stand down or face a tough primary.

“I basically went to the guy and said, ‘Jim wants you to step aside. He’ll help you run for state representative instead.’ And that’s basically what happened,” said Snyder.

Later in the race, Banks would tip Snyder off to the actions of another rival, asking Snyder to write negative blog posts about the candidate, according to emails provided to The Associated Press.

One email passed along a list of mocking instances in which Banks’ opponent used poor grammar. Another asked Snyder to write a critical post noting that the rival was sending campaign materials to people with government email addresses, giving the appearance of inappropriate co-mingling of political and official business.

Banks said the campaign was a “long time ago” but he did not deny the account. His former opponent, Tom Wall, said the two made amends long ago.

“I like the guy. I pray for him all the time,” said Wall. “Don’t tell him too much of this or his head will swell too much, but I am so proud of him when I see him on Fox News.”

Like many politicians with an eye on higher office, Banks also saw value in a military credential. In his early 30s, Banks was accepted into the Navy Supply Corps, a program focused on supply chain management. He was commissioned as a reserve officer in November 2012.

In 2014, after his third daughter was a born, Banks deployed to Afghanistan for eight months. Amanda Banks was appointed to fill his state Senate seat. During his deployment he tweeted photos of himself meeting Republican Sens. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and Ben Sasse of Nebraska.

When Banks returned, a film crew was on hand to catch the family’s reunion. The footage was used in political ads after he formally began his campaign for Congress three weeks later. His combat boots were put on prominent display at his kickoff event.

“A lot of families go through that over and over again, a lot more than my family did,” said Banks, who disputed any suggestion that politics were a factor in his decision to join, calling it “offensive to anyone who has served.”

He won a tight primary race with the help of the conservative group Club for Growth, which spent more

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than \$250,000 on ads. The hard-line House Freedom Caucus spent \$100,000 supporting his bid, though he ultimately chose not to join the group.

Nearly half of the campaign cash he has raised since has come from trade associations and corporate political action committees, a source of money that winnowed after Banks' voted against certifying Joe Biden's presidential election victory on Jan. 6, when a mob of Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol. Banks says corporate money is no longer needed in the party of Trump.

"For most of my time in Republican Party politics, we've heard the mantra that Republicans are the party of Big Business," he said. "That paradigm has shifted. Now Joe Biden and Democrats' top donors are Wall Street and big tech companies and Republicans' donor base are small-dollar working-class voters."

Banks has cultivated a close relationship with House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy of California. And he played a prominent public role building the GOP's case for ousting Rep. Liz Cheney, a Wyoming congresswoman who was booted from her No. 3 spot in the House leadership in May.

"The reason you and I are talking about Liz Cheney," Banks told Fox News is "she has failed in her mission as the chief spokesperson of our party."

But he's also won over other influential members in the House Republican caucus.

"I'm a serious legislator and I appreciate other people who are serious legislators," said Rep. Mike Rogers, of Alabama, the top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee. "We have some people in this town who all they want to do is chase TV cameras — and that's not Jim."

Banks' rise echoes that of another Indiana congressman who parlayed his leadership of the Republican Study Committee to reach broader prominence: former Vice President Mike Pence.

"Jim Banks wants to be influential," said Andy Downs, a professor of political science at Purdue University Fort Wayne. "If Jim Banks decides that his (House seat) is an office from which he wants to do things, he's in a position to be influential for decades to come."

Kim berates North Korean officials for 'crucial' virus lapse

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un berated top officials for failures in coronavirus prevention that caused a "great crisis," using strong language that raised the specter of a mass outbreak in a country that would be scarcely able to handle it.

The state media report Wednesday did not specify what "crucial" lapse had prompted Kim to call the Politburo meeting of the ruling Workers' Party, but experts said North Korea could be wrestling with a significant setback in its pandemic fight.

So far, North Korea has claimed to have had no coronavirus infections, despite testing thousands of people and sharing a porous border with China. Experts widely doubt the claim and are concerned about any potential outbreak, given the country's poor health infrastructure.

At the Politburo meeting, Kim criticized the senior officials for supposed incompetence, irresponsibility and passiveness in planning and executing anti-virus measures amid the lengthening pandemic, the North's official Korean Central News Agency said.

Kim said "senior officials in charge of important state affairs neglected the implementation of the important decisions of the party on taking organizational, institutional, material, scientific and technological measures as required by the prolonged state emergency epidemic prevention campaign," according to KCNA. This "caused a crucial case of creating a great crisis in ensuring the security of the state and safety of the people and entailed grave consequences."

The report also said the party recalled an unspecified member of the Politburo's powerful Presidium, which consists of Kim and four other top officials.

The reference indicated Kim may replace his Cabinet Premier Kim Tok Hun, who would be held responsible for failures in the government's anti-epidemic work, said Hong Min, a senior analyst at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification.

There also was speculation that Kim Jong Un may have sacked Ri Pyong Chol, one of his top military

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officials. North Korean TV video of the meeting showed Ri looking downward and not participating in a vote as Kim and other senior officials on stage raised their hands to indicate their consent on a matter that the broadcast didn't specify.

"There is no possibility that North Korea will ever admit to an infection — even if there were mass transmissions, the North will definitely not reveal such developments and will continue to push forward an anti-virus campaign it has claimed to be the greatest," Hong said.

"But it's also clear that something significant happened and it was big enough to warrant a reprimanding of senior officials. This could mean mass infections or some sort of situation where a lot of people were put at direct risk of infections."

Cheong Seong-Chang, an analyst at South Korea's private Sejong Institute, expressed a similar view, saying North Korea is potentially dealing with huge virus-related problems in border towns near China, such as Sinuiju or Hyesan.

But other experts said Kim could be responding to illicit border trade that defied his lockdown measures or setting the stage for a political shakeup or purge to solidify his grip on power as he navigates perhaps the toughest time of his nine-year rule.

South Korea's Unification Ministry, which deals with inter-Korean affairs, said it had no immediate information to share about the North Korean report and that it wouldn't make prejudgments about the country's virus situation.

Wang Wenbin, spokesperson of China's Foreign Ministry, raised the possibility of helping North Korea in the event of a major outbreak of COVID-19.

"China and the DPRK have a long tradition of helping each other when they encounter difficulties," Wang said, referring to North Korea by its official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

"If necessary, China will actively consider providing assistance to the DPRK."

From the start of the pandemic, North Korea described its anti-virus efforts as a "matter of national existence," banned tourists, jettied out diplomats and severely curtailed cross-border traffic and trade. The lockdown has further strained an economy already battered by decades of mismanagement and crippling U.S.-led sanctions over the country's nuclear weapons program.

Kim during a political conference earlier this month called for officials to brace for prolonged COVID-19 restrictions, indicating that the country isn't ready to open its borders despite its economic woes.

North Korea has told the World Health Organization it has not found a single coronavirus infection after testing more than 30,000 people, including many described as having fevers or respiratory symptoms.

North Korea's extended border controls come amid uncertainties over the country's vaccination prospects. COVAX, the U.N.-backed program to ship COVID-19 vaccines worldwide, said in February that North Korea could receive 1.9 million doses in the first half of the year, but the plans have been delayed due to global shortages.

"Kim will likely find scapegoats for the incident, purging disloyal officials and blaming their ideological lapses. This may provide Pyongyang justification for demanding that citizens hunker down more, but it could also be political preparation for accepting vaccines from abroad," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul.

Economic crisis, severe shortages make Lebanon 'unlivable'

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Ibrahim Arab waits in line several hours a day in the hot summer sun to buy gas for his taxi.

When he's not working, the 37-year-old father of two drives from one Beirut pharmacy to another, looking for baby formula for his 7-month-old son — any he can find — even though the infant got severe diarrhea and vomiting from an unfamiliar brand.

He worries what would happen if his children got really sick. Once among the best in the region, Lebanon's hospitals are struggling amid the country's economic and financial crisis that has led to daily power

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outages that last for hours, shortages of diesel fuel for backup generators, and a lack of medical equipment and drugs.

After 20 months of suffering with no end in sight, a new reality is setting in for most of Lebanon's estimated 6 million people: Days filled with severe shortages — from spare parts for cars to medicine, fuel and other basic goods in the import-dependent country.

"My life was already difficult, and now the gasoline crisis only made things worse," Arab said on a recent day. To survive, he works a second job at a Beirut grocery store, but his monthly income in Lebanese pounds has lost 95% of its purchase power.

The crisis, which began in late 2019, is rooted in decades of corruption and mismanagement by a post-civil war political class that has accumulated debt and done little to encourage local industries, forcing the country to rely on imports for almost everything.

The Lebanese pound has nose-dived, banks have clamped down on withdrawals and transfers, and hyperinflation has flared.

The liquidity crunch is crippling the government's ability to provide fuel, electricity and basic services. A shortage of dollars is gutting imports of medical supplies and energy.

The fuel shortage has especially raised fears that the country could become paralyzed. Even private generators, used by the Lebanese for decades, have to be switched off for hours to conserve diesel.

"We are really in hell," tweeted Firas Abiad, director general of Rafik Hariri University Hospital, which leads the country's coronavirus fight. Despite a heat wave, the hospital decided Monday to turn off the air conditioning, except in medical departments.

Electricity cuts have affected internet connections in various cities, while bakeries warn they might have to close due to fuel shortages.

The situation has become critical in recent weeks, with scuffles and shootings at gas pumps, including one in the northern city of Tripoli, where the son of one station's owner was killed.

Many Lebanese decry their leaders' inability or unwillingness to work together to resolve the crisis.

The country has been without a working government since Prime Minister Hassan Diab's Cabinet resigned days after the massive explosion at Beirut's port on Aug. 4, 2020, that killed 211 people and injured more than 6,000. The catastrophic blast was caused by nearly 3,000 tons of highly explosive ammonium nitrate that had been improperly stored there for years.

Residents expect the economy to get even worse, so they look for ways to adapt and cope.

To avoid waiting for hours, some pay people to fill their car for them. Others take their laptops and work from inside their vehicles in the lines that stretch for blocks and are known as "the queues of humiliation."

Many rely on relatives and friends abroad to send medicine and baby formula. Those who can afford it fly to nearby countries for a day or two to stock up for months.

A man who works in solar energy said business is booming, with people fed up with decades of government promises to fix Lebanon's power grid.

Last week, Diab approved financing energy imports at a rate higher than the official exchange rate, effectively reducing fuel subsidies amid the worsening shortages. The move that took effect Tuesday is expected to start easing the crisis temporarily, although prices shot up 35%.

Some people have been hoarding fuel out of fear that prices will nearly double, and this has added to its scarcity. Such an increase in prices will put the cost of fuel out of reach of many in a country where more than half the population lives in poverty.

Others smuggle it to neighboring Syria, which has its own fuel crisis and where the price of gasoline is five times higher than in Lebanon. But that also adds to the shortage in Lebanon.

The crisis has led angry residents across the country to block roads in protest.

They seized several tanker trucks in northern Lebanon and distributed gasoline for free to passersby. Another group confiscated a truck carrying powdered milk and also distributed its contents.

"Our business has become a job of mass destruction," said Ahed Makarem, 24, who works at a gas station in the coastal village of Damour, south of Beirut.

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As he spoke, a line of hundreds of cars moved slowly along the highway. Dozens of workers activated the station's 12 pumps to fill vehicles and scooters. Motorists were limited to 20 liters (about 5 1/4 gallons).

Makarem said his 13-hour shift starts at 6 a.m. and he hardly has time to eat or sit. Fistfights have broken out in recent weeks as some people try to cut in line, he said, adding that when the station closes at 7 p.m., police sometimes have to intervene to turn away angry customers who waited in vain.

Many fear things will only get worse in the coming months, with the central bank's reserves dropping and no solution in sight.

On Wednesday, parliament approved a ration card system that would give some 500,000 poor families about \$93 a month for a period of one year. It is not yet clear how the the estimated \$556 million project, which aims to replace the subsidy system, will be financed.

Arab, the taxi driver, is bracing for when the temporary solutions fall away and the crisis worsens.

He recently had to fix the brakes on his car, and his engine needed a spare part. That cost him more than twice the minimum monthly wage in Lebanon.

"I wish I had the opportunity to leave. This country is unlivable," Arab said.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, July 1, the 182nd day of 2021. There are 183 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 1, 2015, after more than a half-century of hostility, the United States and Cuba declared they would reopen embassies in each other's capitals, marking a historic full restoration of diplomatic relations between the Cold War foes.

On this date:

In 1863, the pivotal, three-day Civil War Battle of Gettysburg, resulting in a Union victory, began in Pennsylvania.

In 1867, Canada became a self-governing dominion of Great Britain as the British North America Act took effect.

In 1903, the first Tour de France began. (It ended on July 19; the winner was Maurice Garin.)

In 1944, delegates from 44 countries began meeting at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, where they agreed to establish the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

In 1946, the United States exploded a 20-kiloton atomic bomb near Bikini Atoll in the Pacific.

In 1962, the African nations of Burundi and Rwanda became independent of Belgium.

In 1963, the U.S. Post Office inaugurated its five-digit ZIP codes.

In 1966, the Medicare federal insurance program went into effect.

In 1973, the Drug Enforcement Administration was established.

In 1991, President George H.W. Bush nominated federal appeals court judge Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, beginning an ultimately successful confirmation process marked by allegations of sexual harassment. Actor Michael Landon, 54, died in Malibu, California.

In 1997, Hong Kong reverted to Chinese rule after 156 years as a British colony. Actor Robert Mitchum died in Santa Barbara, California, at age 79.

In 2019, 15-year-old Coco Gauff, the youngest player to qualify at Wimbledon in the professional era, defeated 39-year-old Venus Williams in the first round, 6-4, 6-4. Los Angeles Angels pitcher Tyler Skaggs, 27, was found dead in his room at the Texas hotel where the team was staying; the medical examiner found that Skaggs had a toxic mix of alcohol and the painkillers fentanyl and oxycodone in his body.

Ten years ago: Leon Panetta took over as U.S. secretary of defense after 2 1/2 years as director of the CIA. Six weeks after ex-California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger revealed that he'd fathered a child with a member of his household staff, Maria Shriver filed divorce papers seeking to end their 25-year marriage. The NBA locked out its players, a long-expected move that put the 2011-12 season in jeopardy. (The

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lockout ended in Dec. 2011 with the adoption of a new collective bargaining agreement.)

Five years ago: New laws targeting abortion took effect in about one-fifth of the states, initiating another wave of restrictions just days after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Texas measure that had led to the closing of several clinics.

One year ago: The mayor of Richmond, Virginia, which was the Confederate capital, ordered the removal of all Confederate statues from city land; hours later, crews removed a statue of Gen. Stonewall Jackson from its concrete pedestal along Richmond's Monument Avenue. Police in Seattle forcibly cleared the city's "occupied" protest zone under orders from the mayor after two recent fatal shootings in the area. Police in San Francisco said they would stop releasing the mug shots of people who'd been arrested unless they posed a threat to the public; they said it was part of an effort to stop perpetuating racial stereotypes. New York City officials delayed the resumption of indoor dining at restaurants, fearing that it would cause a spike in coronavirus infections. A New York appeals court cleared the way for a publisher to distribute a tell-all book by President Donald Trump's niece over the objections of the president's brother. Hugh Downs, host of TV news and game shows from the 1950s through the 1990s, died in Arizona; he was 99.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-dancer Leslie Caron is 90. Actor Jean Marsh is 87. Actor Jamie Farr is 87. Cookiemaker Wally Amos is 85. Dancer-choreographer Twyla Tharp is 80. Actor Genevieve Bujold is 79. Rock singer-actor Deborah Harry is 76. Movie-TV producer-director Michael Pressman is 71. Actor Daryl Anderson is 70. Actor Trevor Eve is 70. Actor Terrence Mann is 70. Rock singer Fred Schneider (B-52s) is 70. Pop singer Victor Willis (Village People) is 70. Actor-comedian Dan Aykroyd is 69. Actor Lorna Patterson is 65. Actor Alan Ruck is 65. R&B singer Evelyn "Champagne" King is 61. Olympic gold medal track star Carl Lewis is 60. Country singer Michelle Wright is 60. Actor Andre Braugher is 59. Actor Dominic Keating is 59. Actor Pamela Anderson is 54. Rock musician Mark Pirro is 51. Rock musician Franny Griffiths (Space) is 51. Actor Henry Simmons is 51. Hip-hop artist Missy Elliott is 50. Actor Julianne Nicholson is 50. Actor Melissa Peterman is 50. Actor/writer Jill Kargman is 47. Rock musician Bryan Devendorf (The National) is 46. Singer/songwriter Sufjan Stevens is 46. Actor Thomas Sadoski is 45. Actor Liv Tyler is 44. Actor Hilarie Burton is 39. Actor Lynsey Bartilson is 38. Actor Lea Seydoux (LEE'-uh say-DOO') is 36. Actor Evan Ellingson is 33. Actors Andrew and Steven Cavarno are 29. Actor/singer Chloe Bailey is 23. Actor Storm Reid is 18.