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John Sieh Insurance Agency 702 S Main, Aberdeen SD is hiring a Personal Lines Sales & Customer Service Representative, full benefits, competitive wage, full time-40 hours per week, licensing necessary but not required to apply. Proficiency in Excel and Microsoft Office programs, phone skills with professional etiquette required. Primary job responsibility is to service & sell personal lines policy for the agency and assist other producers in the office with quoting and new applications, claims, payments and helping customers with questions or concerns. Self-motivated and team player are required for this position. Please email resume to kathy@jsains.com or drop off at 702 S Main, Aberdeen, SD 57401. (0629.0713)

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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Late Score Costs Groton Legion Post #39 Against Lake Norden

Wednesday's game against Lake Norden (SD) was a heartbreaker for Groton Legion Post #39, as they lost the lead late in a 5-1 defeat. The game was tied at one with Lake Norden (SD) batting in the top of the seventh when Mathew S singled on a 0-1 count, scoring two runs.

Lake Norden (SD) got things started in the first inning. Luke S drove in one when S singled.

In the bottom of the third inning, Groton Legion Post #39 tied things up at one when Alex Morris singled on a 2-2 count, scoring one run.

Nicholai Arbach pitched Lake Norden (SD) to victory. The ace surrendered one run on four hits over seven innings, striking out 11 and walking zero.

Chandler Larson took the loss for Groton Legion Post #39. Larson lasted six and two-thirds innings, allowing eight hits and three runs while striking out eight and walking one.

Larson led Groton Legion Post #39 with two hits in three at bats. Groton Legion Post #39 was sure-handed in the field and didn't commit a single error. Morris had the most chances in the field with eight.

Lake Norden (SD) racked up ten hits in the game. Dawson Noem and Jackson Noem each managed multiple hits for Lake Norden (SD).

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Spotlight on Groton Area Staff

Name: Greg Kjellsen
Position: High School Math Teacher
Length of Employment: 1988-2018, 2021-Present

As a fundamental part of standard public education, Math of all varieties and stages is taught in schools. From the fundamentals of counting taught in elementary school to the advanced calculus taught in college, Math is an essential part of a student's education. While students may not always particularly enjoy learning about formulas and variables, Math is essential to continued success as an employee in almost every sector of work imaginable. It takes an individual with a particular breadth of knowledge to correctly and efficiently teach mathematics to the students of Groton Area High School, and Greg Kjellsen certainly fits the bill.

At Groton Area, Mr. Kjellsen teaches Algebra, Algebra 2, and Pre-Calculus. Mr. Kjellsen prefers to think of himself as a more traditional Math teacher, being a staunch believer that students should be able to perform calculations by themselves without heavily relying on external devices such as calculators.

Greg Kjellsen graduated from the University of South Dakota with a major in Math Education and a minor in Economics. Mr. Kjellsen worked as a Math teacher for thirty years at Groton Area High School before he took a small break working in the real estate sector for a year and spent two more teaching at Aberdeen Central. After that, he chose to return to teaching at Groton. The motivation for his return to Groton lies in his dedication to teaching students and the fulfillment he achieves by teaching others. During his previous time in Groton, Kjellsen was the head coach for Boys Basketball. He is going to return to coaching Basketball at the start of the next school year.

Mr. Kjellsen believes that the most important thing for students to understand before they graduate and move out into the world is that "hard work pays off". He said that attempting to take shortcuts to success will never end well and that it is only through determination and effort that students can obtain success

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.

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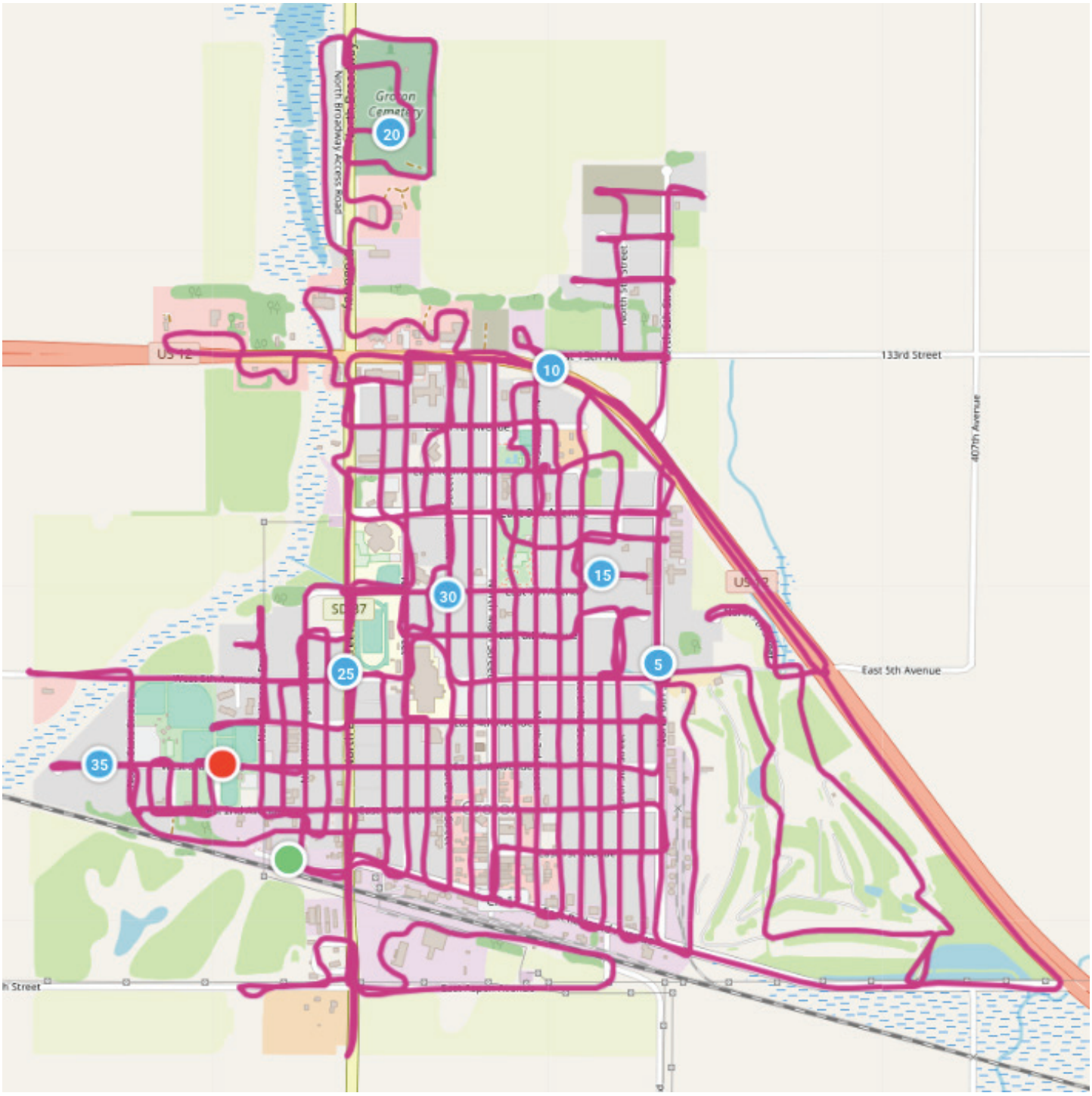
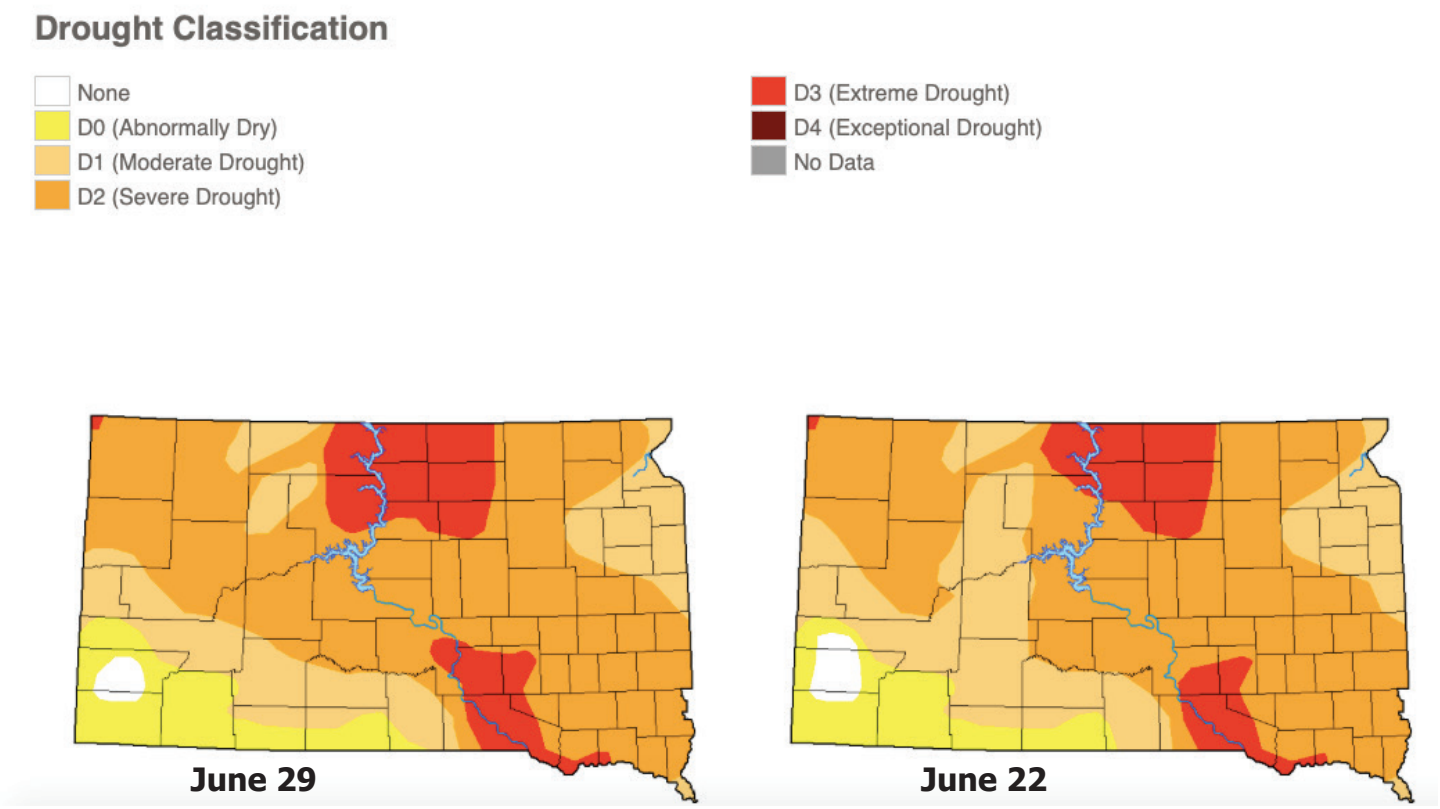
Mosquito Control done last night



The City of Groton conducted adult mosquito control Thursday night. Eleven gallons of Evolver 4x4 was used. The wind was light out of the east-southeast and the temperature was 75 degrees. The route ended at 36 miles and it took three hours to complete the job.

Drought Monitor



High Plains

The same stalled frontal boundary that affected the Lower Midwest this week also brought widespread rain to the region with the largest totals (2 to 8-plus inches) falling over eastern Kansas and eastern Nebraska. One-category improvements were made in southeast Kansas, eastern and north central Nebraska, and parts of North Dakota as short-term rainfall deficits decreased and streamflow and soil moisture improved. In Colorado, improvements were made to small areas of exceptional (D4) and extreme (D3) drought as recent rainfall has helped chip away at shorter term deficits. Hydrological and ecological drought, which generally occur on longer time scales, remain a concern. In areas which missed out on the heaviest rain, drought continues to impact the region with cattle producers feeling the brunt of the impacts. The USDA reports that 90% of South Dakota and 66% of North Dakota's topsoil moisture is short to very short, leading to forage shortages. Producers from Wyoming eastward across the Dakotas are having to make tough decisions as to what to do with cattle, with many selling entire herds. In response to the worsening conditions, extreme drought (D3) expanded in South Dakota and parts of Wyoming where supported by increasing rainfall deficits, declining soil moisture and streamflow, and vegetation stress.

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July Drought Hours to Address Livestock Nutrition, Crop Quality Concerns

Brookings, S.D. - More South Dakota acres are now in an extreme drought condition as lack of moisture and high temperatures continue to impact much of the state. According to the latest U.S. Drought Monitor, nearly 13% of the state is in Extreme Drought (D3), while another 56% follows as Severe Drought (D2).

"In response to deteriorating conditions, extreme drought did expand, especially the area just southeast of the Missouri River," says South Dakota State University (SDSU) Extension State Climatologist Laura Edwards. "Looking over our latest data from Mesonet (climate.sdstate.edu/), topsoil moisture is a half to a third of what it was a month ago in some parts of the state. As we get into mid-July, the outlook does not look good for corn pollination, nor for building up a steady forage supply for livestock."

This July SDSU Extension will continue its virtual educational program series, Drought Hour. From 11 a.m. to noon CST, participants are invited to join the online conversation and stay ahead of drought impacts with climate updates, business insights and the latest research-tested management tips for farms, ranches and properties of all sizes.

Drought Hour will be featured on the following Mondays during the month and will cover a variety of production topics:

July 12
"Livestock Water Quality: A Statewide Concern," Robin Salverson, SDSU Extension Cow/Calf Field Specialist
"Culling Decisions During Drought," Adele Harty, SDSU Extension Cow/Calf Field Specialist

July 19
"Corn Pollination Under Drought Conditions," Jonathan Kleinjan, SDSU Extension Agronomist
"Crop Conditions and Market Outlooks," Jack Davis, SDSU Extension Crops Business Management Field Specialist

July 26
"2021 Drought in Perspective: Current Conditions and Forecasts," Laura Edwards, SDSU Extension
"Dry Lotting Decisions," Adele Harty, SDSU Extension; Warren Rusche, SDSU Extension Beef Feedlot Management Associate; and Zach Smith, SDSU Assistant Professor

There is no fee to attend, but participants will need to register for the weekly webinars on the SDSU Extension Events page (extension.sdstate.edu/events). Confirmation Zoom links and reminders will be emailed to attendees.

In addition to the weekly webinar series, SDSU Extension has devoted an entire page on the Extension website to addressing drought concerns (extension.sdstate.edu/drought). To receive regular updates and the latest resources on drought conditions, South Dakotans are also encouraged to subscribe to Extension's newsletters (extension.sdstate.edu/about/newsletters).

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Conservation Reserve Program Rental Rates Improved and Sign Up Deadlines Announced

PIERRE, S.D. – The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) recently updated rental rates and created new incentives for producers and landowners to enroll environmentally sensitive agricultural land into perennial cover for 10 to 15 years through the federally funded Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

"CRP is a great alternative for producers," said Kevin Robling, Secretary for South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks. "Enrolling land in CRP creates quality wildlife habitat and hunting opportunities which, in turn, strengthens our local economies as well as our state's deep-rooted hunting heritage."

Participants receive annual rental payments and 50 percent cost share to establish the perennial cover, which can be grasses or forbs to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat. There are options for haying and grazing in accordance with a conservation plan, but it could adjust payment amount.

"CRP has a proven track record of benefitting long-term soil health and improving water quality by reducing soil erosion and runoff. It can also increase profitability on marginal lands," said Hunter Roberts, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources. "It's good for producers and for South Dakota's natural resources."

A cropping history of four out of six years from 2012 to 2017 is required to enroll cropland. Land currently enrolled, but expiring on Sept. 30, 2021, is also eligible to be re-enrolled this year. The deadline for the General CRP sign-up is July 23, 2021 and accepted offers will begin Oct. 1, 2021.

The non-competitive continuous CRP program is also an option for landowners and producers. If producers would like their contracts to begin by October 1 they will need to apply by August 6. It allows for the enrollment of buffer strips, wetland restoration, duck, pheasant, and pollinator habitat, prairie strips, windbreaks, shelterbelts, and marginal pastureland buffers. There is no sign-up deadline for new enrollments in continuous CRP and it is eligible for additional payment incentives and up to 100% cost-share for establishing perennial cover.

"This is a very short window of time for South Dakota producers and landowners to enroll. The time to reach out to your local FSA offices is now to see if any of these CRP programs will work within your farm or ranch operation. Thank you in advance for considering this opportunity and for being stewards of South Dakota's water, land and wildlife resources." Robling concluded.

Individuals looking for more information on CRP can contact their local USDA Service Center or Habitat Advisor with any questions about how CRP on their operation.

Johnson's Office Now Accepting Fall 2021 Internship Applications

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Representative Dusty Johnson (R-S.D.) is seeking internship applications for the fall in his Washington, D.C., Rapid City, Aberdeen, and Sioux Falls offices.

Duties will include researching legislation, writing memos, attending committee hearings and briefings, answering constituent phone calls, sorting mail, and providing support to the staff and the Member of Congress.

Interns will be given the opportunity to develop their research, writing, and communications skills while working closely alongside staff. They will also gain an in-depth understanding of how the legislative branch of government operates while helping to serve South Dakota constituents.

"Fulfilling the duties of a congressional office is a team effort," said Johnson. "Interns are an integral part of our team in both Washington and in the state. Our office strives to ensure South Dakota's interns leave their congressional internship with the experience and skills necessary to successfully enter the workforce."

Interested applicants should complete the online internship application and submit a resume online no later than July 30, 2021. More information about the internship program, along with the application, can be found online at dustyjohnson.house.gov/services/internships.

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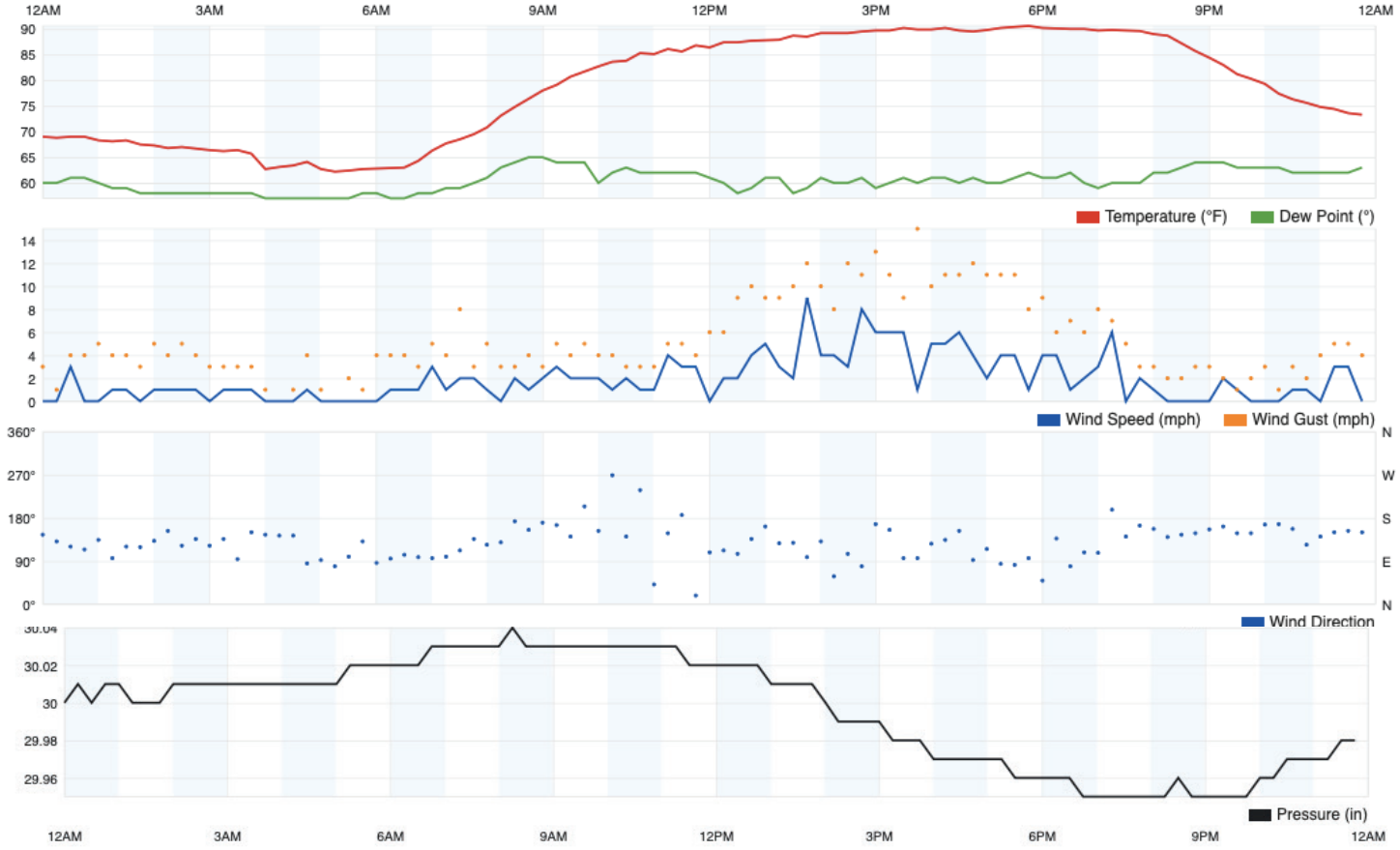
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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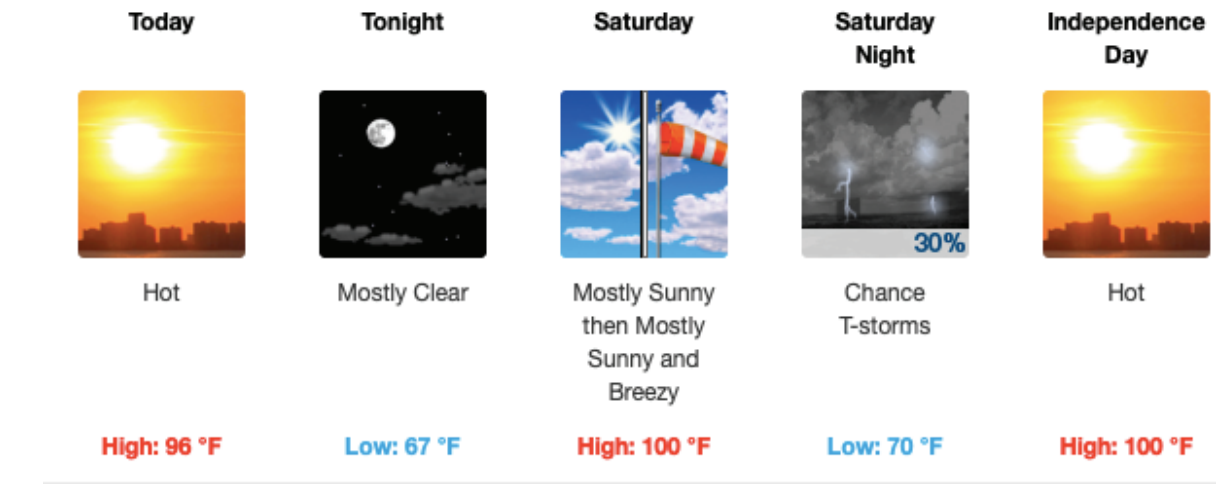
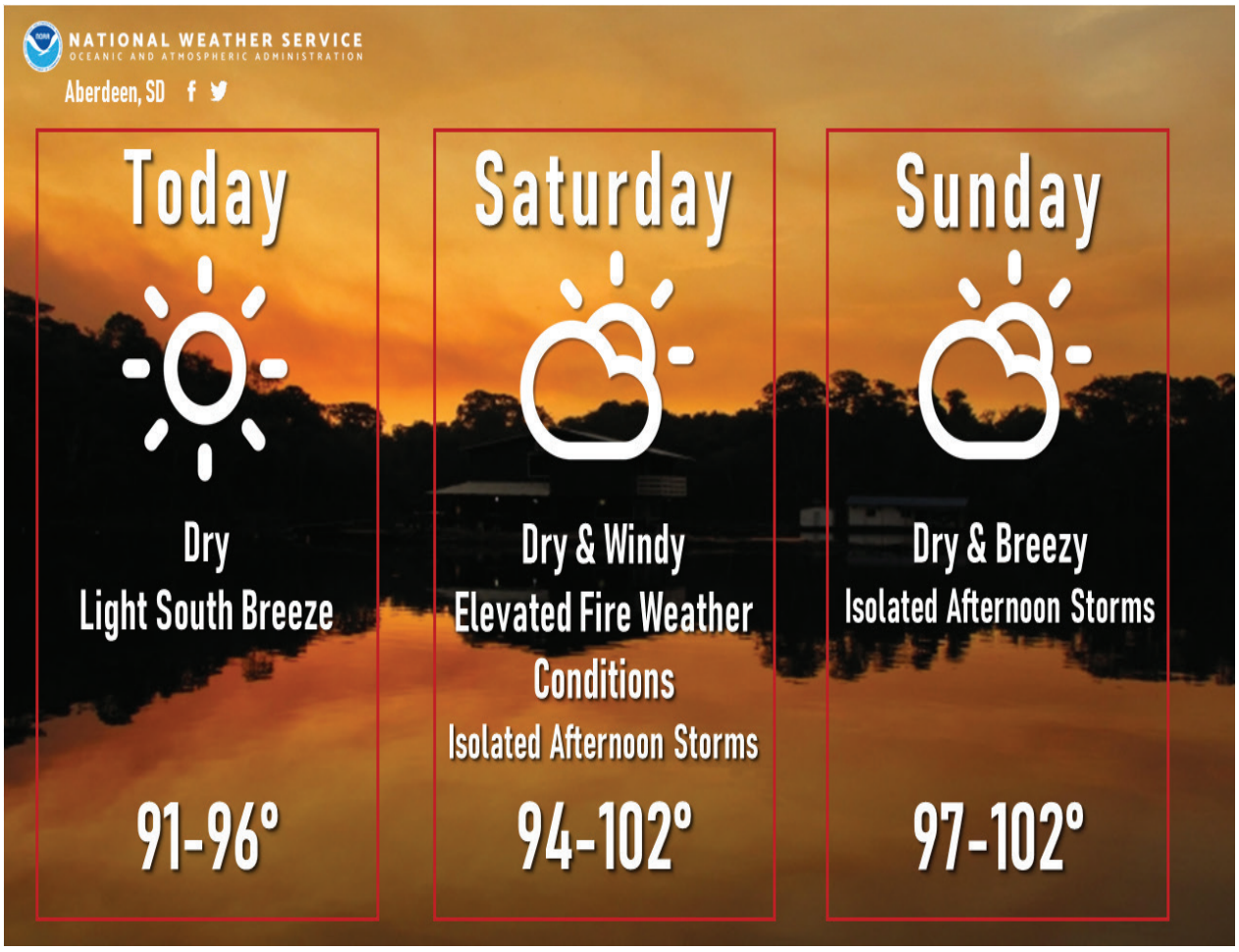
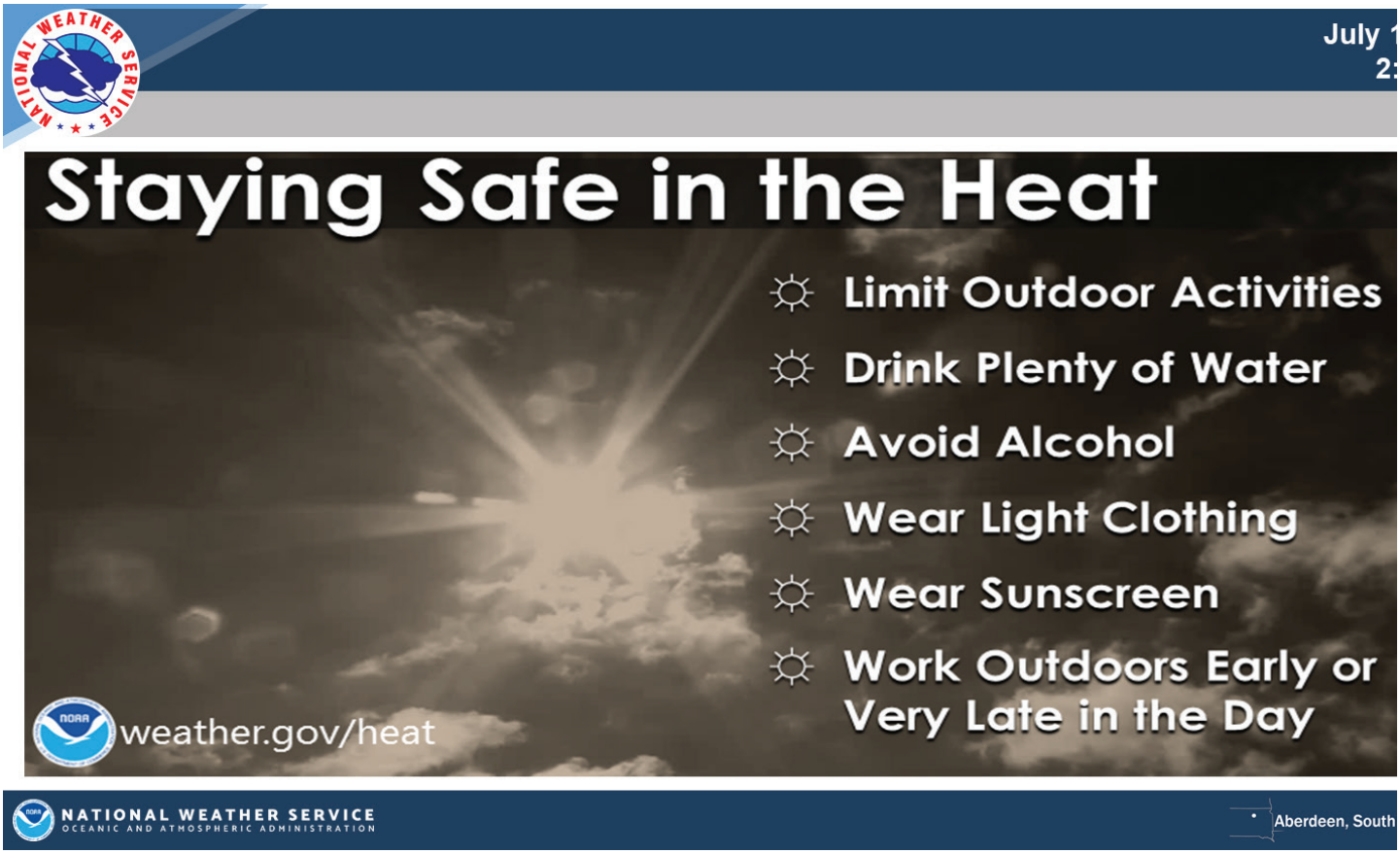




Hot and dry conditions are expected through the weekend. Today will feature a south breeze, Saturday will see stronger winds which will result in an elevated fire threat, and Sunday will see winds shift to northerly and continue breezy. There is a low chance for storms mainly Saturday and Sunday afternoons, but widespread moisture is not anticipated.



The rest of the work week, and upcoming weekend will be hot, so take some precautions! #sdwx #mnwx

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Today in Weather History

July 2, 1921: Barns were destroyed on two farms near Frederick in Brown County. A boy who could not make it to the cellar was killed in the open near a barn. This death is one of the earliest known from a significant, estimated F2 tornado in Brown County.

July 2, 1960: Hail shredded corn flattened grain and hay and pounded soybeans into the ground in a strip extending from Clinton to Montevideo in Minnesota. Leaves and bark were stripped from trees. Hailstones were reported to pile up to a depth of four feet in low spots. One farmer lost 2000 turkeys. Twelve barns demolished, many outbuildings destroyed and several homes damaged by winds. Near Appleton, 45 cars of a moving 174 car freight train derailed by the wind, one hanger destroyed, and two planes were damaged. In Big Stone County alone, the cost to repair power lines and poles estimated to be near 10,000 dollars. Total crop acreage affected was near 64,000 acres. The three counties of Big Stone, Swift, and Chippewa Counties, was designed a disaster area.

July 2, 2005: A line of severe thunderstorms with powerful straight-line winds moved from northeast Wyoming and southeast Montana across northwest South Dakota during the evening. Widespread wind gusts of 60 to 80 mph affected northwestern South Dakota; breaking tree limbs, downing trees, and knocking down snow fences. The high winds capsized a boat on the Belle Fourche Reservoir near Orman Dam. Five people, including an infant, were rescued by emergency personnel with no one injured. The strongest winds were reported north of Newell, near Castle Rock, where gusts estimated at 100 mph damaged a barn roof and ripped a chimney off a house. Hail to the size of quarters was also reported across parts of the area, and combined with the wind, caused some minor damage.

1833: The following is from the "History and Description of New England" published in 1860: "On the 2nd of July, 1833, this town (Holland, Vermont) was visited by a violent tornado, which commenced on Salem Pond in Salem, and passed over this place in a northeasterly direction. It was from half to three-quarters of a mile wide and prostrated and scattered nearly all the trees, fences, and buildings in its course. It crossed the outlet of Norton Pond and passed into Canada, and its path could be traced through the forests nearly to Connecticut River."

1833 - An unusually large New England tornado, one half to three quarters of a mile wide, went from Salem Pond to Norton Pond, VT, and then into Canada. It prostrated nearly everything in its path. (The Weather Channel)

1843 - An alligator reportedly fell from the sky onto Anson Street in Charleston, SC, during a thunderstorm. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Thunderstorms in Colorado produced hail as large as golf balls northwest of Kiowa, which accumulated to a depth of twelve inches. Hail two and a half inches in diameter was reported at Black Forest. Hail damaged 900 acres of crops south of the town of Wiggins. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Twenty-six cities in the eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. The morning low of 47 degrees at Roanoke, VA, broke the July record set the previous day. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the south central U.S., with 158 reports of large hail and damaging winds through the day. Evening thunderstorms in northeastern Texas produced softball size hail which caused more than five million dollars damage at Allen, and wind gusts to 90 mph at Dallas, which injured eight persons and caused seven million dollars damage. Winnfield LA reported 29.52 inches of rain in six days, for a total of 62.50 inches for the first six months of the year. Midland, TX, reported an all-time record high of 112 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2001: In Michigan, frost and freezing temperatures were observed in some locations with Grant dropping to 29 degrees. Muskegon reported their coldest July temperature on record with 39 degrees. Other daily record lows included: Lansing: 38, Muskegon: 39, Flint: 40, Youngstown, Ohio: 40, and Grand Rapids, Michigan: 43 degrees.

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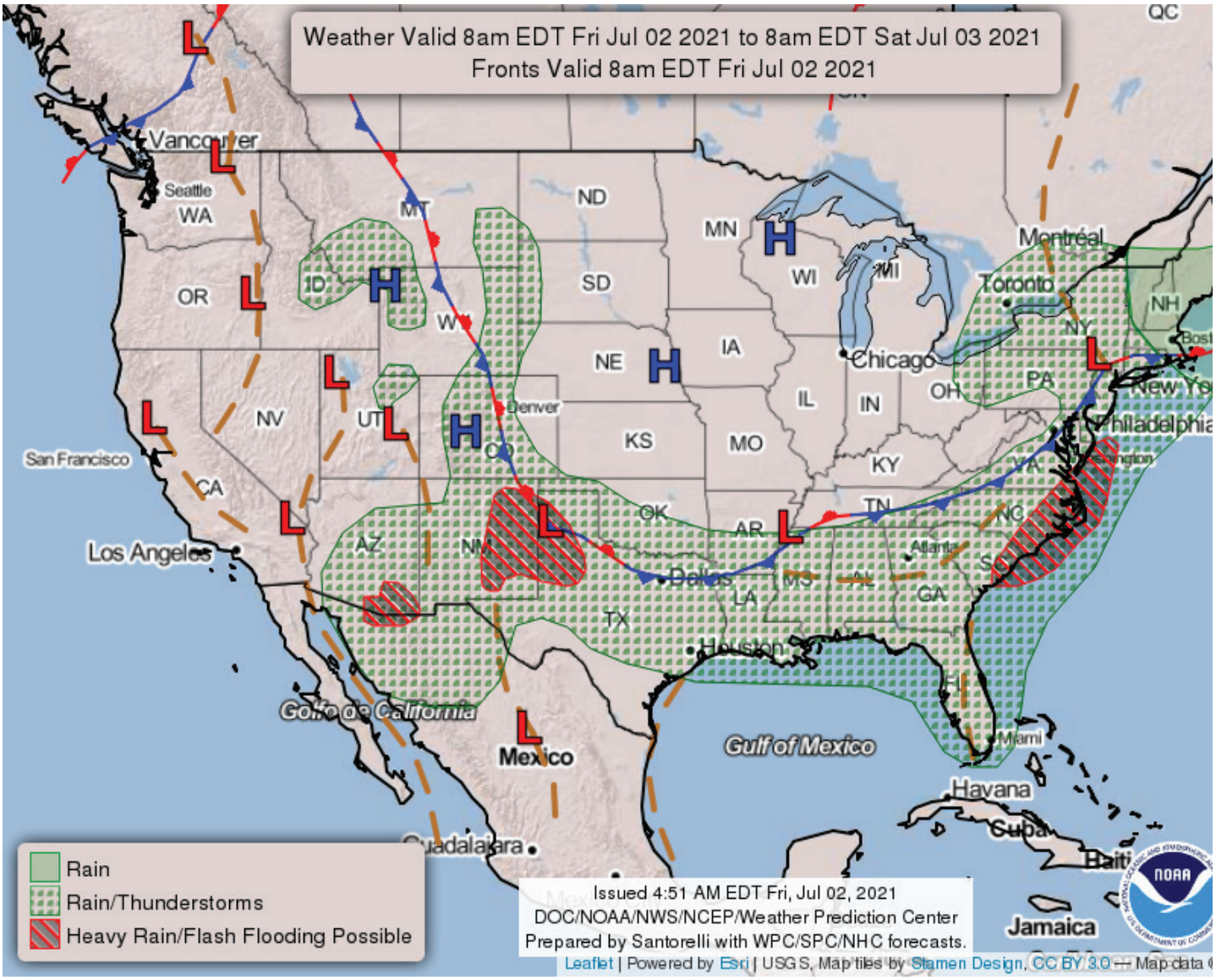
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 90.6 °F at 5:45 PM
Low Temp: 62.2 °F at 5:15 AM
Wind: 15 mph at 3:45 PM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 103° in 1949
Record Low: 37° in 1945
Average High: 84°F
Average Low: 59°F
Average Precip in July.: 0.12
Precip to date in July.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 11.13
Precip Year to Date: 4.75
Sunset Tonight: 9:26 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:51 a.m.



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GROWING OLD WITH GOD

Hope is one of the most important words in the vocabulary of many people. It is a word that we hear daily – from many sources for many different reasons. It is used to guard minds and guide lives. Sometimes it gives courage and confidence to people who are on the verge of giving up on life or giving in to their circumstances. There are those who have little of this world's goods – yet have a hope larger than life and believe that one day things will change for them, and they will receive the "good" things they have wanted from the day they were born. Many people use hope as a "wish" that something good would happen to them – something out of the ordinary to change the direction of their lives.

But "hope" in Scripture is different from that concept of hope. In God's Word hope is always directed to "some-thing or Someone we can believe in that will eventually come true or come to our rescue." It is someThing – God's Word. If God declared it, His Word revealed it, and we can believe it because His-story records it accurately. Whatever He said came to pass.

Then there is Someone – God's Son. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." We can believe in and have confidence in Him because what He said about Himself came true. "I will rise again in three days." And again, His-story records it factually and accurately.

A famous heart surgeon once said, "Christians who have hope will find that their hope in God is far more reliable and will do more for them than any medication I can prescribe or any procedure I can perform." Where is your hope and what can it do for you?

Prayer: We thank You, Father, for a fact-filled faith that gives us true hope and the assurance we need for our lives. May we find true hope in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more. Psalm 71:14

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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

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News from the Associated Press

Noem: GOP donor's $1M for National Guard was a 'surprise'

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem said late Thursday it came as a surprise when a billionaire GOP donor reached out with a $1 million offer to fund the National Guard's deployment to the U.S. border with Mexico.

The Republican governor spoke to reporters for the first time on Thursday after receiving intense scrutiny for accepting the donation. Critics have said it created a troubling precedent that effectively turned National Guard troops into soldiers-for-hire. But Noem described the transaction as a "wonderful" happenstance in which Willis Johnson, the billionaire Republican donor, gave her an unexpected phone call as she was deliberating where to come up with the money to send the National Guard or law enforcement officers to the border.

"It really was a surprise when he gave me that phone call and said that he wanted to help support the state of South Dakota," Noem said.

The governor said she has not known Johnson long — their recent interaction was limited to a handshake and a short visit. But that's all it took for Johnson to wire $1 million from his private foundation into state coffers.

Meanwhile, Democratic lawmakers, who hold just a handful of seats in the Legislature, have called on the governor to return the donation and cancel the deployment.

"Privatized deployments set dangerous precedent for further political use of our National Guard," they stated in a letter sent to the governor's office.

Medicaid expansion takes effect in deep-red Oklahoma

By SEAN MURPHY and RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — A voter-approved expansion of Medicaid took effect Thursday in Oklahoma after a decade of Republican resistance in a state that has become emblematic of the political struggle to extend the federal health insurance program in conservative strongholds.

Oklahoma moved ahead with its expansion at a time when Democrats in Washington and across the states are pressing to complete the work of the Obama-era Affordable Care Act, recently upheld by the Supreme Court for the third time in a decade. So far, 38 states and Washington, D.C., have expanded Medicaid, and expansion in a dozen mostly Southern states may be the biggest piece of unfinished business.

"Anyone banking on the idea that Obamacare was just going to be struck down — the Supreme Court has moved past that," said Cindy Mann, who served as federal Medicaid chief during the Barack Obama administration.

"All of the states that are still debating the issue are constantly looking at other states' experience to get a sense of what they can expect," added Mann, now with the Manatt Health consultancy. "Having Oklahoma — a very red state — moving forward judiciously and with very strong enrollment is showing that this is a sensible path to go."

More than 123,000 low-income people already have been approved for Medicaid coverage in Oklahoma, a state where nearly 15% of the population has been uninsured — the highest rate in the nation behind Texas, according to the non-profit Kaiser Family Foundation. State Medicaid officials say they expect that number to increase to more than 200,000 as more people get approved.

Danielle Gaddis of Oklahoma City is 26 and preparing to begin medical school. She has been without private health insurance since her mother, whose health plan she was on, retired two years ago.

When Gaddis began running a fever over the winter, she couldn't afford to see a doctor and instead spent two weeks trying to recover on her own. That will change since she's been approved for Medicaid thanks to the expansion.

"Just the financial worry is gone," Gaddis said. "It's nice to know that's something I don't have to worry about."

Oklahoma voters narrowly approved a constitutional amendment last year to expand eligibility for benefits. Now, an individual who earns up to $17,796 annually, or $36,588 for a family of four, qualifies for Medicaid health care coverage. By contrast, the median income limit for parents in states that didn't expand their program is about $8,905 for a family of three, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

"I want to congratulate Oklahoma on joining the ranks of states that are bringing quality health coverage to our neighbors and families," said U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra, who visited Oklahoma Thursday to discuss the significance of Medicaid expansion.

Medicaid started out in the 1960s as a federal-state health insurance program for severely disabled people and low-income families on welfare, but it now covers nearly 74 million people, or more than one in five Americans. The program expansion under Obama brought in some 12 million low-income people, mostly low-wage workers.

The states most closely watching Oklahoma are Missouri – where voters approved an expansion but GOP legislators balked at funding it – as well as Kansas, where Medicaid expansion has been actively debated. In Missouri, a judge recently ruled that the ballot question there was unconstitutional.

In South Dakota, several major health care systems last month announced plans to begin gathering signatures for a ballot measure to expand Medicaid there.

Opponents of expansion argue that the costs to the states are excessive. Missouri Gov. Mike Parson has described the expansion as "a massive tax increase that Missourians cannot afford." Oklahoma helped offset the costs by increasing a fee that hospitals must pay.

President Joe Biden's coronavirus relief law dangles a significant financial bonus in front of states that expand their programs now. Oklahoma is the first to qualify.

Under the Biden legislation, states newly expanding will receive a two-year, 5-percentage-point bump up in federal matching funds for their regular Medicaid programs. That's on top of a 90% federal match for the costs of covering the newly insured through the expansion. Manatt estimates the bonus alone would work out to $786 million for Oklahoma, but bigger states like Texas and Florida would reap much more.

More than 2 million low-income uninsured people remain in a coverage gap as long as Medicaid expansion is unfinished. They make too much to qualify for Medicaid under their individual state's rules, but not enough to qualify for "Obamacare's" subsidized private insurance.

"Right now, millions of Americans do not have health care coverage through no fault of their own because their states haven't expanded their Medicaid programs," said Rep. Frank Pallone, D-N.J., chair of the U.S. House committee that oversees Medicaid.

In Washington, there's a growing demand among Democrats for the federal government to step in and take direct action if states continue to hold out. It's seen as a health equity issue, since many of the uninsured people in the coverage gap are racial and ethnic minorities.

"Having Oklahoma and Missouri going in two different directions really illustrates the need for the federal government to do something," said Jesse Cross-Call, a health policy expert with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in Washington, which advocates for low-income people. "There continue to be states that are going to throw up roadblocks and resist this no matter what you put in front of them."

James Capretta, a health policy expert with the business-oriented American Enterprise Institute in Washington, said there's also been a reluctance among Democrats to compromise, since they reject ideas that would alter the basic terms of the Obama health law.

Nonetheless, "there ought to be a bipartisan consensus here, since there really is no alternative to Medicaid as the safety net health insurance program," Capretta added. "We already have a program. And there is still a gap population. The logical thing to do is find some way to make sure these people are at least being helped."

Health department lists conditions for medical marijuana

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Department of Health has compiled a preliminary list of health conditions that will be covered by the state's medical marijuana program.

The list includes AIDS, HIV, Lou Gehrig's disease, multiple sclerosis, Crohn's disease, epilepsy and seizures, glaucoma, post-traumatic stress disorder and cancer associated with severe or chronic pain, nausea or severe vomiting, or cachexia or severe wasting.

"Under the law passed by the voters, patients must be experiencing a 'debilitating medical condition' and be certified by a doctor that medical cannabis will help alleviate their condition," South Dakota Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon said in a release. "This preliminary list of conditions meets the definition as passed by the voters, and is a result of feedback the department has already received."

Malsam-Rysdon said residents would be allowed to petition for new conditions in the future.

Over 70% of voters in the November election passed Initiated Measure 26 to legalize medicinal cannabis.

North Dakota law aimed at regulating PBMs gets support

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A coalition of attorneys general from nearly three dozen states and nine pharmacy associations are supporting a North Dakota law aimed at regulating pharmacy benefit managers.

The groups on Thursday announced the so-called friend-of-the-court filings on Thursday.

A trade group representing pharmacy benefit managers filed a federal lawsuit in 2017 challenging a North Dakota law that sought oversight on the managers and required disclosure of some financial information.

Pharmacy benefit managers, or PBMs, negotiate with drug makers on behalf of health insurers, employers and unions that cover medications.

A federal appeals court later ruled North Dakota law regulating pharmacy benefit managers is preempted by federal law.

The case is headed back to the appeals court after the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a similar Arkansas law late last year that said federal law doesn't prevent states from regulating reimbursement rates.

North Dakota is among some three dozen states that have enacted legislation to regulate PBM reimbursement rates.

The attorneys general are from Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington.

South Dakota Highway Patrol pushes limits on tribe's pot IDs

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem's administration is guiding law enforcement officers not to honor Native American tribes' medical marijuana identification cards if they are not issued to tribe members.

The guidance, released by the South Dakota Highway Patrol just hours before the voter-approved medical marijuana law took effect Thursday, sets up a potential conflict between prosecutors and the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, which has set up the state's first marijuana dispensary and plans to issue medical cannabis ID cards to anyone with a certified medical condition, the Argus Leader reported.

People seeking medical cannabis ID cards in South Dakota currently only have the option to obtain one from a Native American tribe because the state will not begin issuing ID cards until November.

However, the highway patrol's guidance also states that troopers should not arrest people who have no more than three ounces of pot if they have an ID card from another state or can show a statement from a doctor certifying they have been diagnosed with a debilitating medical condition. While the guidance only officially applies to the Highway Patrol, it encouraged other law enforcement officers to follow it to "promote consistency" in enforcing the state's new laws on medical marijuana.

But the attorney general for the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, Seth Pearman, said it is ready to challenge the Highway Patrol's stance in court if someone is arrested after presenting a tribe-issued cannabis card. He said the tribe's ID cards are valid under state law because they are certified by a medical recommendation or a medical ID from another state.

"That is a fight we will back," he said.

However, some local law enforcement agencies are easing up on enforcing low-level marijuana laws, regardless of medical status. Law enforcement agencies in the state's largest city, Sioux Falls, told the Argus Leader they will no longer prosecute marijuana possession charges for three ounces or less starting on Thursday.

Nebraska man sentenced to life for fatal 2018 kidnapping

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A Nebraska man has been sentenced to a mandatory life term in federal prison for helping kidnap a South Dakota woman who was later killed on the Santee Sioux Indian Reservation in Nebraska.

Ramon Simpson, 51, of Norfolk, was sentenced Wednesday for the November 2018 kidnapping of 59-year-old Phyllis Hunhoff, federal prosecutors said in a news release.

Prosecutors said Simpson and Joseph James, also of Norfolk, abducted Hunhoff as she left her mother's home in Utica, South Dakota, for her home in Yankton, South Dakota. Simpson and James entered Hunhoff's car before she could drive away and took her to Norfolk.

The U.S. Attorney's office said after he got out of the car in Norfolk, Simpson tried to delete location information from James' cell phone that showed where they had been that day.

James then drove Hunhoff to the reservation where he stabbed and strangled her before setting fire to her body and vehicle.

Simpson was convicted in March by a federal jury following a seven-day trial. James pleaded guilty to murder last year and was sentenced to life in prison.

Federal agriculture officials tour drought-stricken ND

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Federal agriculture officials were continuing their tour of drought-stricken North Dakota Thursday, to hear directly from farmers and ranchers about how one of the driest years in recent history is affecting their livelihood.

U.S. Sen. John Hoeven invited Farm Service Agency Administrator Zach Ducheneaux and Risk Management Agency Acting Administrator Richard Flournoy to visit the state. About two-thirds fo the state is under extreme or exceptional drought conditions — the top two categories, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

The two-day tour took the group to a federal Agricultural Research Service grazing unit in Mandan Wednesday with a second stop in Minot. Thursday's stops are in Carrington and Argusville.

Lt. Gov. Brent Sanford, who joined the tour group, said a shortage of hay is among the biggest concerns for producers, the Bismarck Tribune reported.

"It's not going to be a good year anywhere," he said. "We're asking for flexibility. If there's a total loss, can you take what's there and hay it."

Producers want to graze some failed crops but feel stifled by some of the rules in place, said Sterling farmer Lucas Lang, who serves on the North Dakota Farm Bureau board.

"We've got to get cows out on these crops that are shot, and we've got to do it without the grazing or haying (insurance) penalty," he said.

A plan to allow emergency haying on land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program before Aug. 1 is in the works, Hoeven said. Acreage in the program is usually left idle to prevent erosion and provide wildlife habitat.

Ducheneaux ranches on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. He said any new programs or adjustments need to be made with a long-term outlook in mind.

Strong growth continues in nine Midwest, Plains states

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The economy continues growing at a strong pace in nine Midwest and Plains states despite supply delays that are hindering manufacturing, according to a new monthly survey of business

leaders and managers.

The overall economic index for the region remained at a very strong level when it crept up to 73.5 in June from May's 72.3. Any score above 50 on the survey's indexes suggests growth, while a score below 50 suggests a shrinking economy.

"The region is adding manufacturing business activity at a very healthy pace, and that growth will remain strong with the overall regional economy returning to pre-pandemic levels in the first quarter of 2022," said Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the survey.

Nearly all the business leaders surveyed reported problems with supply bottlenecks in June, and inflation continues to be a concern. The report's inflation gauge climbed to 98.4 and set another record in June, up from May's already high 96.3.

Businesses continued hiring in June and the employment index grew to 61.7 from May's 55.6 even though many managers said they were having a hard time finding workers to hire. Goss said the shortage of workers pushed wages for manufacturing jobs up 4.9% over the past year in the region.

Business leaders are less confident about the economy but they still have a positive outlook. The survey's confidence index fell to 60.8 in June from May's 88.6 but remained in positive territory.

The monthly survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

Midwest Economy: June state-by-state glance

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Institute for Supply Management, formerly the Purchasing Management Association, began formally surveying its membership in 1931 to gauge business conditions.

The Creighton Economic Forecasting Group uses the same methodology as the national survey to consult supply managers and business leaders. Creighton University economics professor Ernie Goss oversees the report.

The overall index ranges between 0 and 100. Growth neutral is 50, and a figure greater than 50 indicates growth in that factor over the next three to six months. A figure below 50 indicates decline.

Here are the state-by-state results for June:

Arkansas: The overall index for Arkansas rose to 68.6 in June from May's 67.8. Components of the index were: new orders at 73.8, production or sales at 75.8, delivery lead time at 80.4, inventories at 58.7, and employment at 54.3. "According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, average hourly wages for manufacturing production workers in Arkansas rose 6.1% over the past 12 months. Among the nine Mid-America states, this growth ranked fifth," Goss said.

Iowa: The state's overall index slipped to 69.5 in June from 70.2 in May. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 74.1 production, or sales, at 76.2, delivery lead time at 81.8, employment at 57.6, and inventories at 62.4. "According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, average hourly wages for manufacturing production workers in Iowa rose 7.7% over the past 12 months. Among the nine Mid-America states, this growth ranked third," Goss said.

Kansas: The overall index in Kansas climbed to 76.9 in June from May's 71.8. Components of the index were: new orders at 75.8, production or sales at 78.2, delivery lead time at 89.2, employment at 59.7, and inventories at 89.2. "According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, average hourly wages for manufacturing production workers in Kansas declined 1.7% over the past 12 months. Among the nine Mid-America states, this growth ranked ninth, or last," Goss said.

Minnesota: The state's overall index dipped to 73.7 in June from 74.5 in May. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 80, production or sales at 83.5, delivery lead time at 71.2, inventories at 62.3, and employment at 71.5. "According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, average hourly wages for manufacturing production workers in Minnesota rose 2.1% over the past 12 months. Among the nine Mid-America states, this growth ranked seventh," Goss said.

Missouri: The June index for Missouri decreased to 67.7 from 69.5 in May. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 74.3, production or sales at 76.4, delivery lead time at 64.3, inventories at 64.6,

and employment at 58.9. "According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, average hourly wages for manufacturing production workers in Missouri rose 6.9% over the past 12 months. Among the nine Mid-America states, this growth ranked fourth," Goss said.

Nebraska: The state's overall index slipped to 74.5 in June from 76.1 in May. Components of the index were: new orders at 74.9, production or sales at 77.1, delivery lead time at 85.3, inventories at 71.7, and employment at 63.4. "According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, average hourly wages for manufacturing production workers in Nebraska rose 3.3% over the past 12 months. Among the nine Mid-America states, this growth ranked sixth," Goss said.

North Dakota: The overall index for North Dakota slipped to 75.1 in June from 75.2 in May. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 77.6, production or sales at 80.5, delivery lead time at 97.6, employment at 64.8, and inventories at 55.1. "According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, average hourly wages for manufacturing production workers in North Dakota rose 7.9% over the past 12 months. Among the nine Mid-America states, this growth ranked second," Goss said.

Oklahoma: The state's overall index rose to 73.6 in June from the already strong level of 68.9 in May. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 75, production or sales at 77.2, delivery lead time at 85.6, inventories at 72.6, and employment at 57.5. "According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, average hourly wages for manufacturing production workers in Oklahoma rose 11.4% over the past 12 months. Among the nine Mid-America states, this growth ranked first," Goss said.

South Dakota: The overall index for South Dakota slipped to 74 in June from 75.5 in May. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 75.1, production or sales at 77.3, delivery lead time at 86.1, inventories at 73.8, and employment at 57.8. "According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, average hourly wages for manufacturing production workers in South Dakota rose 1.2% over the past 12 months. Among the nine Mid-America states, this growth ranked fifth," Goss said.

US hands Bagram Airfield to Afghans after nearly 20 years

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — After nearly 20 years, the U.S. military left Bagram Airfield, the epicenter of its war to oust the Taliban and hunt down the al-Qaida perpetrators of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on America, two U.S. officials said Friday.

The airfield was handed over to the Afghan National Security and Defense Force in its entirety, they said on condition they not be identified because they were not authorized to release the information to the media.

One of the officials also said the U.S. top commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Austin S. Miller, "still retains all the capabilities and authorities to protect the forces."

Miller met Afghan President Ashraf Ghani Friday and according to a Dari-language tweet by the presidential palace the two discussed "continued U.S. assistance and cooperation with Afghanistan, particularly in supporting the defense and security forces."

There were no specifics but the U.S. is already committed to paying nearly $4 billion annually until 2024 to finance the Afghani national security forces. While no one was calling Miller's visit a farewell, in the backdrop of the evacuation of Bagram Airfield it had the hallmarks of a goodbye.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's district administrator for Bagram, Darwaish Raufi, said the American departure was d one overnight without any coordination with local officials, and as a result early Friday dozens of local looters stormed through the unprotected gates before Afghan forces regained control.

"They were stopped and some have been arrested and the rest have been cleared from the base," Raufi told The Associated Press, adding that the looters ransacked several buildings before being arrested and the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces (ANDSF) took control.

"Unfortunately the Americans left without any coordination with Bagram district officials or the governor's office," Raufi said. "Right now our Afghan security forces are in control both inside and outside of the base."

The deputy spokesman for the defense minister, Fawad Aman, said nothing of the early morning looting.

He said only the base has been handed over and the "ANDSF will protect the base and use it to combat terrorism."

The Taliban too welcomed the American withdrawal from Bagram Airfield. In a tweet by spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, they called it a "positive step," urging for the "withdrawal of foreign forces from all parts of the country."

The previous U.S. administration had signed an agreement with the Taliban promising to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan.

The withdrawal from Bagram Airfield is the clearest indication that the last of the 2,500-3,500 U.S. troops have left Afghanistan or are nearing a departure, months ahead of President Joe Biden's promise that they would be gone by Sept. 11.

It was clear soon after the mid-April announcement that the U.S. was ending its "forever war," that the departure of U.S. soldiers and their estimated 7,000 NATO allies would be nearer to July 4, when America celebrates its Independence Day.

Most NATO soldiers have already quietly exited as of this week. 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 in 2001.

The U.S. has refused to say when the last U.S. soldier would leave Afghanistan, citing security concerns, but also the protection of Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport is still being negotiated. Turkish and U.S. soldiers currently are protecting the airport. That protection is currently covered under the Resolute Support Mission, which is the military mission being wound down.

Until a new agreement for the airport's protection is negotiated between Turkey and the Afghan government, and possibly the United States, the Resolute Support mission would appear to have to continue in order to give international troops the legal authority.

The U.S. will also have about 650 troops in Afghanistan to protect its sprawling embassy in the capital. Their presence it is understood will be covered in a bilateral agreement with the Afghan government.

The U.S. and NATO leaving comes as Taliban insurgents make strides in several parts of the country, overrunning dozens of districts and overwhelming beleaguered Afghan security Forces.

In a worrying development, the government has resurrected militias with a history of brutal violence to assist the Afghan security forces. At what had all the hallmarks of a final press conference, Gen. Miller this week warned that continued violence risked a civil war in Afghanistan that should have the world worried.

At its peak around 2012, Bagram Airfield saw more than 100,000 U.S. troops pass through its sprawling compound barely an hour's drive north of the Afghan capital Kabul.

The departure is rife with symbolism. Not least, it's the second time that an invader of Afghanistan has come and gone through Bagram.

The Soviet Union built the airfield in the 1950s. When it invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to back a communist government, it turned it into its main base from which it would defend its occupation of the country. For 10 years, the Soviets fought the U.S.-backed mujahedeen, dubbed freedom fighters by President Ronald Reagan, who saw them as a front-line force in one of the last Cold War battles.

When the U.S. and NATO inherited Bagram in 2001, they found it in ruins, a collection of crumbling buildings, gouged by rockets and shells, most of its perimeter fence wrecked. It had been abandoned after being battered in the battles between the Taliban and rival mujahedeen warlords fleeing to their northern enclaves.

The enormous base has two runways. The most recent, at 12,000 feet long, was built in 2006 at a cost of $96 million. There are 110 revetments, which are basically parking spots for aircraft, protected by blast walls. GlobalSecurity, a security think tank, says Bagram includes three large hangars, a control tower and numerous support buildings. The base has a 50-bed hospital with a trauma bay, three operating theaters and a modern dental clinic. Another section houses a prison, notorious and feared among Afghans.

There was no immediate comment from Afghan officials as to the final withdrawal from Bagram Airfield

by the U.S. and its NATO allies.

EXPLAINER: When is the US war in Afghanistan really over?

By ROBERT BURNS and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the last U.S. combat troops prepare to leave Afghanistan, the question arises: When is the war really over?

For Afghans the answer is clear but grim: no time soon. An emboldened Taliban insurgency is making battlefield gains, and prospective peace talks are stalled. Some fear that once foreign forces are gone, Afghanistan will dive deeper into civil war. Though degraded, an Afghan affiliate of the Islamic State extremist network also lurks.

For the United States and its coalition partners, the endgame is murky. Although all combat troops and 20 years of accumulated war materiel will soon be gone, the head of U.S Central Command, Gen. Frank McKenzie, will have authority until September to defend Afghan forces against the Taliban. He can do so by ordering strikes with U.S. warplanes based outside of Afghanistan, according to defense officials who discussed details of military planning on condition of anonymity.

U.S. officials said Friday that the U.S. military has left Bagram Airfield after nearly 20 years. The facility was the epicenter of the war, but its transfer to the Afghan government did not mark the U.S. military's final withdrawal from the country. Two officials say the airfield was handed over in its entirety. They spoke on condition they not be identified because they were not authorized to disclose the handover to the media.

A look at the end of the war:

WHAT'S LEFT OF THE COMBAT MISSION?

Technically, U.S. forces haven't been engaged in ground combat in Afghanistan since 2014. But counter-terrorism troops have been pursuing and hitting extremists since then, including with Afghanistan-based aircraft. Those strike aircraft are now gone and those strikes, along with any logistical support for Afghan forces, will be done from outside the country.

Inside Afghanistan, U.S. troops will no longer be there to train or advise Afghan forces. An unusually large U.S. security contingent of 650 troops, based at the U.S. Embassy compound, will protect American diplomats and potentially help secure the Kabul international airport. Turkey is expected to continue its current mission of providing airport security, but McKenzie will have authority to keep as many as 300 more troops to assist that mission until September.

It's also possible that the U.S. military may be asked to assist any large-scale evacuation of Afghans seeking Special Immigrant Visas, although the State Department-led effort may not require a military airlift. The White House is concerned that Afghans who helped the U.S. war effort, and are thereby vulnerable to Taliban retribution, not be left behind.

When he decided in April to bring the U.S. war to a close, President Joe Biden gave the Pentagon until Sept. 11 to complete the withdrawal. The Army general in charge in Kabul, Scott Miller, has essentially finished it already, with nearly all military equipment gone and few troops left.

Miller remained in the country Friday but is expected to depart in coming days. But will his departure constitute the end of the U.S. war? With as many as 950 U.S. troops in the country until September and the potential for continued airstrikes, the answer is probably not.

HOW WARS END

Unlike Afghanistan, some wars end with a flourish. World War I was over with the armistice signed with Germany on Nov. 11, 1918 — a day now celebrated as a federal holiday in the U.S. — and the later signing of the Treaty of Versailles.

World War II saw dual celebrations in 1945 with Germany's surrender marking Victory in Europe (V-E Day) and Japan's surrender a few months later as Victory Over Japan (V-J Day) following the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In Korea, an armistice signed in July 1953 ended the fighting, although technically the war was only suspended because no peace treaty was ever signed.

Other endings have been less clear-cut. The U.S. pulled troops out of Vietnam in 1973, in what many

consider a failed war that ended with the fall of Saigon two years later. And when convoys of U.S. troops drove out of Iraq in 2011, a ceremony marked their final departure. But just three years later, American troops were back to rebuild Iraqi forces that collapsed under attacks by Islamic State militants.

VICTORY OR DEFEAT?

As America's war in Afghanistan draws to a close, there will be no surrender and no peace treaty, no final victory and no decisive defeat. Biden says it was enough that U.S. forces dismantled al-Qaida and killed Osama bin Laden, the group's leader considered the mastermind of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Lately, violence in Afghanistan has escalated. Taliban attacks on Afghan forces and civilians have intensified and the group has taken control of more than 100 district centers. Pentagon leaders have said there is "medium" risk that the Afghan government and its security forces collapse within the next two years, if not sooner.

U.S. leaders insist the only path to peace in Afghanistan is through a negotiated settlement. The Trump administration signed a deal with the Taliban in February 2020 that said the U.S. would withdraw its troops by May 2021 in exchange for Taliban promises, including that it keep Afghanistan from again being a staging arena for attacks on America.

U.S. officials say the Taliban are not fully adhering to their part of the bargain, even as the U.S. continues its withdrawal.

NATO MISSION

The NATO Resolute Support mission to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces began in 2015, when the U.S.-led combat mission was declared over. At that point the Afghans assumed full responsibility for their security, yet they remained dependent on billions of dollars a year in U.S. aid.

At the peak of the war, there were more than 130,000 troops in Afghanistan from 50 NATO nations and partner countries. That dwindled to about 10,000 troops from 36 nations for the Resolute Support mission, and as of this week most had withdrawn their troops.

Some may see the war ending when NATO's mission is declared over. But that may not happen for months.

According to officials, Turkey is negotiating a new bilateral agreement with Afghan leaders in order to remain at the airport to provide security. Until that agreement is completed, the legal authorities for Turkish troops staying in Afghanistan are under the auspices of the Resolute Support mission.

COUNTERTERROR MISSION

The U.S. troop withdrawal doesn't mean the end of the war on terrorism. The U.S. has made it clear that it retains the authority to conduct strikes against al-Qaida or other terrorist groups in Afghanistan if they threaten the U.S. homeland.

Because the U.S. has pulled its fighter and surveillance aircraft out of the country, it must now rely on manned and unmanned flights from ships at sea and air bases in the Gulf region, such as al-Dhafra air base in the United Arab Emirates. The Pentagon is looking for basing alternatives for surveillance aircraft and other assets in countries closer to Afghanistan. As yet, no agreements have been reached.

Over 6 million EU citizens apply to settle in post-Brexit UK

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — More than 6 million European Union citizens applied to settle in the U.K. before the end-June deadline that the British government had imposed as part of the country's departure from the bloc.

In a statement Friday, Britain's Home Office said of the 6.02 million people who had applied, 400,000 applications were made in the final month before the end of the EU Settlement Scheme.

"Having more than 6 million applications to the scheme is an unprecedented achievement and I am delighted that we have secured the rights of so many EU citizens — our friends, neighbours and family members," Home Secretary Priti Patel said.

The Home Office said that the 570,000 people with pending applications will have their rights protected until their application is decided and that there will be "indefinite scope" for anyone who missed the dead-

line to make a late application.

People who submitted an application by the deadline have received a certification that they can use if they need to prove their immigration status for any reason, such as taking up a new job or renting a property.

The scheme was introduced in March 2019 as part of the U.K.'s plans to leave the EU. One of the main impacts of Brexit was the end of freedom of movement, whereby anyone in any EU state can live and work anywhere else within the bloc, which numbers 27 countries after the U.K.'s departure.

Under the scheme, EU citizens in the country will be guaranteed their rights, including access to benefits and healthcare, in the U.K. Any EU citizen who hasn't applied could now potentially lose their rights or even be subject to deportation.

Similar schemes have been in place in the EU with regard to the 1 million or so British citizens who live within the bloc. Those applying for post-Brexit residency permits in France also faced a deadline on Wednesday.

One key concern is that the immigration policy could leave a disastrous legacy similar to Britain's "Windrush" scandal, when many people from the Caribbean who legally settled in the U.K. decades ago were wrongly caught up in tough new government rules to crack down on illegal immigration.

Many in the "Windrush generation" — named after the ship that carried the first post-war migrants from the West Indies — lost their homes and jobs or were even deported simply because they couldn't produce paperwork proving their residency rights.

Some fans. No fans. Tokyo undecided as games open in 3 weeks

By KANTARO KOMIYA and STEPHEN WADE Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Banning all fans from the Tokyo Olympics is still an option with the games opening during a pandemic in just three weeks, Seiko Hashimoto, the president of the Tokyo organizing committee, said Friday.

This would be a reversal of a decision spelled out 10 days ago by organizers to allow a limited number of local fans — up to 10,000 — to attend. Fans from abroad were banned months ago as too great a risk.

The possible about-face is being forced by rising new infections in Tokyo, the appearance of the rapidly spreading delta variant, and fears that the Olympics and Paralympics with 15,400 athletes and tens of thousands of others entering Japan could turn into a super-spreader event.

"The situation of infection changes and how it will be — it is still unclear," Hashimoto said in a Friday briefing. "But from Tokyo 2020's perspective, we also include an option of not having spectators."

Yet another decision on fans could be announced next week after a meeting of the International Olympic Committee, local organizers, the Japanese government, Tokyo metropolitan government officials, and the International Paralympic Committee.

"It's not that we are determined to have spectators regardless of the situation," Hashimoto said.

The government's top COVID-19 adviser, Dr. Shigeru Omi, has said repeatedly that the safest option is without any fans. And Yuriko Koike, the governor of Tokyo, suggested Friday that has been her preference too.

"We will continue to closely watch the infection situation and think what would be best, and mainly consider no spectators," Koike said.

Koike was speaking at a briefing after being hospitalized for more than a week with what was described as "severe fatigue." She denied she was hospitalized for COVID-19, and said she tested negative.

Koike also repeated that all Tokyo legs of the torch relay would be taken off public roads until July 16, except those on remote Tokyo islands. It is unclear what form the torch relay — repeatedly delayed and rerouted since it started in March from northeastern Japan — will take after that.

"I know many people were looking forward to this and I really regret we had to come to a decision like this," she said.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga also said that the option of empty venues was still being considered.

"I have made clear that having no spectators is a possibility," Suga said Thursday.

The decision on fans announced last week would allow all outdoor and indoor venues to accommodate up to 50% of capacity, but not to exceed 10,000.

Toshiro Muto, the CEO of the Tokyo organizing committee, said thousands of officials, sponsors, Olympic dignitaries, and others holding tickets would be allowed to enter venues, over and above any limits for spectators. He said they were not "technically" classed as fans, but rather as "organizers."

It's not clear if those VIPs would be allowed to attend if all other fans were banned, a situation that would likely anger many ordinary fans in Japan.

The local organizing committee expected about $800 million in income from ticket sales. That will be slashed with Japanese government entities — and not the IOC — forced to cover the shortfall.

The IOC is pushing ahead with the Olympics, partially because almost 75% of its income is from the sale of broadcast rights. Estimates suggest the IOC could lose between $3 billion and $4 billion in broadcast income were the Olympics canceled.

The official cost of the Olympics is $15.4 billion, although government audits suggest it is much higher. All but $6.7 billion is public money. The IOC contributes a total of about $1.5 billion.

Agreeable Supreme Court term ends with conservative wins

By MARK SHERMAN and JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An unusually agreeable Supreme Court term ended with conservative-driven decisions on voting rights and charitable-donor disclosures that offered a glimpse of what the coming years of the right's dominance could look like for the nation's highest court.

The court began its summer recess with an already consequential list of cases to be argued beginning in the fall. That includes high-profile cases on abortion and guns, topics that seem more likely to sharpen divisions rather than blur them.

But the term the justices concluded Thursday was unusual in several ways, with arguments conducted entirely by telephone because of the coronavirus pandemic and a new justice, Amy Coney Barrett, coming on board a month into the court's new year.

Her ascent to the bench, the third high court appointee of former President Donald Trump, made it obvious more conservative outcomes could be expected from the court. The court now has six appointees of Republican presidents and a diminished liberal bloc of three justices after the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg in September. Barrett replaced Ginsburg a month later.

Concerned about any further weakening of the left side of the court, some progressives mounted an aggressive, public campaign to persuade 82-year-old Justice Stephen Breyer to retire and allow a Senate with a thin Democratic majority to confirm a younger liberal chosen by President Joe Biden. Breyer has been mum about his plans.

But ideological divisions were not often on display through much of the year. Unusual alliances of justices formed to decide one case and a different lineup would emerge in the next.

Many of the court's biggest cases were decided on narrower grounds with broad majorities, including a Philadelphia dispute in which the court ruled unanimously for a Catholic social service agency that objects to working with married same-sex couples who want to be foster parents.

The justices also preserved the Affordable Care Act against its third major Republican-led challenge and vindicated a high school cheerleader whose raised middle finger and run of curse words on a social media post led to her suspension from the school's squad.

The court ruled unanimously that the NCAA can't prevent colleges from trying to lure student athletes with enhanced allowances for computers and travel, a step in a larger fight over compensation for college athletes. In a multibillion dollar fight between tech giants, the court said Google did nothing wrong when it copied Oracle code to develop the Android operating system.

Breyer, known for his pragmatic approach to cases, was the author of the code copyright, health care and cheerleading cases in an unusually prominent turn for a justice who is known for trying to bridge the court's ideological divide.

Breyer's approach seemed to fit well with the aims of Chief Justice John Roberts, who has repeatedly defended the court against complaints that it is just another partisan branch of government.

Roberts spent the year trying "to prevent anything really huge from happening," said Drexel University law professor Lisa Tucker, who studies the Supreme Court and describes herself as a progressive.

"I think we saw some sidestepping and some near-misses," said Tucker, who described it as a term where there were "no big disasters" for liberals.

Scott Keller, who was for several years Texas' top Supreme Court lawyer, put it differently. "I think the big takeaway from this term is the Roberts court is not swinging for the fences. You could see that in many decisions. The chief justice is trying to get consensus and one method of getting consensus is having narrower rulings," Keller said.

The chief justice is also leading a court with three relatively new justices: Trump appointees Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Barrett.

Barrett replaced the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, joining the court a little more than a month after the death of the liberal icon and just ahead of the presidential election.

In her Senate confirmation hearings, Barrett was impassive in the face of Democratic questioning suggesting that she would be a rubber stamp for Trump, voting his way in any eventual election dispute and casting a crucial vote to strike down "Obamacare," as the ACA is familiarly known. That was not the case.

One area where Barrett made her presence felt, and Roberts was outflanked by his more conservative colleagues, concerned restrictions on religious gatherings put in place because of the pandemic.

On the eve of Thanksgiving, Barrett provided the fifth vote to overturn restrictions, while Roberts dissented. Prior to Ginsburg's death, he had joined a four-justice liberal bloc to reject similar pleas.

But the pandemic-caused restriction on worship was the only area in which Barrett's key role was apparent. Otherwise, she wrote largely unglamorous assignments typical of the court's most junior justice, joining once in an all-woman dissent with Justices Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor in a Clean Air Act case.

She also teamed with Roberts and Kavanaugh to stake out narrower positions when the other three conservative justices, Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch and Clarence Thomas, pushed for broader rulings, including in the Philadelphia foster-care case.

It's unclear at this point, whether that daylight among the conservatives will persist.

But Aziz Huq, a University of Chicago law professor, said the changed makeup of the court is affecting the cases that come to it. Because of the more conservative lineup, "litigants are changing their strategy and bring more aggressive cases," Huq said.

Mississippi's appeal to revive its 15-week ban on most abortions is one such example, Huq said. Before Ginsburg's death, the court had rejected similar appeals.

The new term that begins on the first Monday in October "will be an even bigger test of this consensus approach that many are identifying from this past term," said Elizabeth Wydra, president of the liberal Constitutional Accountability Center.

The new term, said conservative commentator Carrie Severino, "is going to be great to see."

A look at 8 lawmakers appointed to probe Jan. 6 attack

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is acting swiftly to launch a new investigation of the violent Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, choosing a diverse slate of eight lawmakers — one from the opposing party — to serve on a select committee with subpoena power.

Republicans have the chance to recommend five additional members, but it's unclear whether they will do so. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, who could be called to testify about a conversation with former President Donald Trump as the attack unfolded, has not committed to any appointments.

All but two Republicans voted against creating the committee in a vote Wednesday. Pelosi made one of the two Republicans — Liz Cheney of Wyoming, an unsparing critic of Trump — one of her appointments to the panel.

A look at eight lawmakers who have been appointed to the committee so far:

REP. BENNIE THOMPSON, D-MISS.

Thompson is chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee and will be leading the Jan. 6 select committee. Serving his 14th full term in office, he is the only Democratic member of Mississippi's congressional delegation. He was a teacher before entering local politics, serving as a mayor and country supervisor, which served as a springboard to the House. He says the committee will focus on delivering a "definitive accounting of the attack — an undertaking so vital to guarding against future attacks."

REP. ZOE LOFGREN, D-CALIF.

Lofgren is chairwoman of the Committee on House Administration, which has oversight of the U.S. Capitol Police. She has been a member of the House since 1995 and is an immigration attorney and immigration law professor who participated in the impeachment process for three presidents — Trump, Bill Clinton and Richard Nixon, the latter as a congressional staffer. She said making the Capitol safer is not a substitute for what happened on Jan. 6th: She said: "Who paid for it? How was it organized? We need to find that out to keep the country safe."

REP. ADAM SCHIFF, D-CALIF.

Schiff is chairman of the House Intelligence committee and best known as the leader and public face of Trump's first impeachment for his actions involving Ukraine. He has served in the House for two decades and prior to entering Congress served as an assistant U.S. attorney in Los Angeles and as a state senator. He expressed dismay on Twitter that only two House Republicans voted for the select committee: "An attack on the Capitol. The Article I branch of our government. Our temple of democracy. If Republicans won't support that, what will they support? Only what Trump wants."

REP. LIZ CHENEY, R-WYO.

The daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney is so far the lone Republican on the new committee. She is one of 10 House Republicans who voted to impeach Trump over the insurrection at the Capitol, saying he "lit the flame" that ignited the attack. She has only amplified her criticism of Trump since then, angering colleagues who voted to remove her from a leadership position. She took time to visit law enforcement officers and families on Wednesday in the House galleries while lawmakers debated whether to form the committee. She says what happened on Jan. 6. can never be allowed to happen again. "Those who are responsible for the attack need to be held accountable and this select committee will fulfill that responsibility in a professional, expeditious, and non-partisan manner."

REP. JAMIE RASKIN, D-MD.

Raskin is serving his third term representing a district adjacent to Washington. He served as a professor of constitutional law at American University's Washington College of Law for more than 25 years and was the lead prosecution lawyer in Trump's second impeachment trial. In a memorable presentation, he recalled for senators how he was at the Capitol on Jan. 6 with his daughter and son-in-law when Trump supporters broke into the building. He fought back tears as he told senators how he had promised his daughter her next trip would be better and she replied: "Dad, I don't want to come back to the Capitol." The siege of the Capitol came just days after Raskin's 25-year-old son, Tommy, took his own life.

REP. ELAINE LURIA, D-VA.

Luria has only been in Congress since 2019, but held many weighty responsibilities before then, serving two decades in the Navy and retiring at the rank of commander. She served at sea on six ships, deployed to the Middle East and culminated her career by commanding a combat-ready unit of 400 sailors. She represents a swing district with a large military and veterans population along the Virginia coast.

REP. PETE AGUILAR, D-CALIF.

Aguilar is serving his fourth term in the House and now holds the No. 6 position in House Democratic leadership. He is a former mayor who now serves on the House Administration and Appropriations committees. "Everyone touched by Jan. 6 deserves to find the truth of what transpired, what led up to it, and how we can protect our democracy moving forward," Aguilar said Thursday.

REP. STEPHANIE MURPHY, D-FLA.

Murphy is a former national security specialist at the Defense Department now serving her third term in Congress. She worked on a wide range of security issues: counterterrorism, foreign military relations, strategic planning for the department and more. She is the first Vietnamese-American woman elected to Congress. After her appointment to the select committee, she recalled that her family fled Vietnam when she was a baby. "We were rescued by the U.S. Navy and given refuge in America," she said. "I love this country beyond words." She added: "To see the citadel of American democracy assaulted is a reminder that our democracy is not self-sustaining. It needs to be preserved and protected by American patriots of every political stripe."

Collapse survivors escaped with their lives, but little else

By RUSS BYNUM and KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — Susana Alvarez fled her home on the 10th floor of Champlain Towers South, escaping with her life and almost nothing else.

"I don't have anything," said the 62-year-old survivor of the condominium building collapse just outside Miami. "I walked out with my pajamas and my phone."

The disaster that killed at least 18 people, with more than 140 still missing, also rendered dozens of people homeless. Many lost cars, too, buried in the building's underground parking garage.

Though most who managed to flee to safety lived in parts of the building that remain standing, they have little hope of returning to reclaim clothing, computers, jewelry and sentimental possessions they left behind.

Officials said Thursday they're making plans for the likely demolition of all parts of the building that didn't collapse. The announcement came after search and rescue operations were paused for hours because of growing signs the structure was dangerously unstable.

Alvarez is still dealing with the trauma. She hasn't slept in a bed since the collapse a week ago. Instead she's been sleeping in a chair, constantly thinking of the victims who couldn't escape. She still hears the screams from that night.

"I lost everything," Alvarez said, "and it doesn't mean anything to me."

Still, friends and even complete strangers have been helping replace what she's lost. Friends she's staying with outfitted her with new clothes and a computer. An eyeglass store refilled her prescription, even though she never called it in. And she got the last condo in a 16-unit building that was opened up rent-free to Surfside survivors for the month of July.

It's unclear exactly how many residents have been displaced, but those with insurance policies should recoup at least a portion of their losses.

Victims also appear likely to get some money from the liability insurer for Champlain Towers South's condominium association, which has at least four lawsuits pending related to the collapse.

An attorney for James River Insurance Company wrote to the judge in one case this week that it plans to "voluntarily tender its entire limit" from the association's policy toward resolving claims. An attached copy of the policy showed limits between $1 million and $2 million.

Michael Capponi, the president of a Miami-area nonprofit that for the past decade has helped victims of disasters from hurricanes to wildfires in the U.S. and abroad, said he has personally dealt with 50 people who lost homes in the building.

Capponi's organization, Global Empowerment Mission, has distributed roughly $75,000 in gift cards among surfside survivors, and he's also working with hotel and condo owners to find places they can live for the next two months.

Most people who have contacted his nonprofit for help lived in the part that is still standing but assume their homes and anything inside are a complete loss.

"They are going to basically have to start all over again," Capponi said. "Some of them don't have insurance, and they've lost everything they worked all their lives for."

Raysa Rodriguez, a retired postal worker who lived at Champlain Towers South for 17 years and was close to paying off her mortgage, described in a lawsuit she filed against the condominium association

how crashing sounds roused her from bed the night of the collapse.

"The building swayed like a sheet of paper. ... I ran to the balcony. I (opened) the doors and a wall of dust hit me," she said in the filing.

Rodriguez helped neighbors escape to a second-floor balcony where firefighters helped them to the ground. Now she has moved in with family members and assumes what's left of the building will be torn down with no chance to recover belongings.

"She lived there for a long time," said Adam Schwartzbaum, her attorney, "and she was planning to live there for the rest of her life."

Ryan Logan, the American Red Cross' regional disaster officer for south Florida, said the organization has been helping about 18 families, and some of them have been looking for ways they can help other victims.

"These folks that we are serving, who we know they are having the worst experience of their lives, are turning around and asking you what can they do to serve," Logan said. "It's nothing short of amazing."

Gabriel Nir narrowly escaped a first-floor apartment with his mother and 15-year-old sister. The family had just moved in six months ago. Nir, a recent college graduate, was living there while he looked for a job and considered medical school.

For now they are staying at a nearby hotel, the floor of their room cluttered with items donated by friends and strangers. They have no luggage. Their car was destroyed in the building's garage. But all the material possessions they lost can be replaced, he said.

"I'm just grateful I made it out alive with my family," Nir said.

Interview: Merkel's likely heir favors her centrist path

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

DUESSELDORF, Germany (AP) — As a child of the Cold War in West Germany, Armin Laschet remembers when then-U.S. President Ronald Reagan came to Berlin in 1987, stood at the barrier separating East from West, and said, "Tear down this wall!"

"For many West Germans, that was a utopia that didn't seem realistic, but which fulfilled itself in the end," said Laschet, who is seeking to succeed Angela Merkel as chancellor in the country's Sept. 26 election.

The 60-year-old governor of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany's most populous state, is still grateful that in his youth the Americans were reliable guarantors of peace and stability against the Soviet Union.

"They were always there for us, they secured the freedom of Berlin," Laschet said in an interview this week with The Associated Press at his office in the western city of Duesseldorf.

For Laschet, close U.S. relations are of utmost importance as Merkel steps down after nearly 16 years in power. He hopes to advance progress on global challenges with the help of a new U.S. leader, President Joe Biden.

Recent polls give the Union bloc a 7-10 percentage-point lead over the environmentalist Greens, making Laschet a front-runner to become the leader of Germany, with Europe's biggest economy. The bloc is made up of his Christian Democratic Union party and the Bavaria-only Christian Social Union party.

In his interview with AP, Laschet expressed relief that Biden has brought the U.S. back into the leadership of international challenges, such as global warming, after the Donald Trump administration.

"It is good that the new American administration has returned to multilateral agreements and has rejoined the Paris climate accord," Laschet said. "I have big hopes that under the leadership of the U.S., which has dedicated itself to this goal politically, economically and also financially, we will manage to bring about a big push forward."

He is more reserved about Biden's assertive stance on China, favoring Merkel's firm but not so confrontational approach.

"China is a partner, but a systemic rival, and that means we have to keep our principles up, continue to remind China about them, but at the same time foster our economic relations to China," he said, adding that this is true of other countries that aren't close Western allies.

"Wherever countries have a model of society that is different from ours, we need to win them over to

join us — whether it is Russia, China or the Arab world."

Like Merkel, Laschet is known as a centrist favoring integration over polarization. So far, he has been guarded in deviating from her successful middle-of-the-road path on domestic issues.

"Currently, Laschet appears to all of us like a Merkel 2.0 light version," said Wolfgang Merkel, a political analyst at Berlin's Social Science Center and no relation to the chancellor. "He has not distinguished himself as somebody who will do politics differently from Merkel. In many ways he is so much alike her that he cannot differentiate himself from her."

Laschet "is somebody who can build bridges as a political leader, somebody who mediates, who can make compromises," he added. "He is not a macho politician."

So far, Laschet hasn't taken positions glaringly different from those of the outgoing chancellor.

"I don't think he will really do that until the election," the analyst said. "He's extremely careful. The slogan right now is: Don't make any mistakes now in the final spurt of the campaign."

Laschet is the son of a miner in Aachen, a university town on Germany's western border with Belgium and the Netherlands. A slim man with a shock of dark hair and a mischievous smile, he still speaks in the region's singsong dialect.

He married his childhood sweetheart, Susanne, and the devout Catholics have three adult children and still live in Aachen's Burtscheid district.

Growing up in the heart of the continent made him a true European, he says.

"Many people live in one country and work in the other, for shopping one goes across the border ... and the idea of the classic nation-state has long been overcome because one knows that many problems can only be solved transnationally," Laschet said.

He earned a law degree and worked as a journalist before joining Germany's parliament as a lawmaker with the CDU in 1994. From 1999-2005, Laschet was a member of the European Parliament. He became governor of North Rhine-Westphalia, a center-left stronghold, in 2017.

Laschet has led his state in a coalition with the pro-business Free Democrats, a traditional CDU ally, but is considered capable of working with the more leftist Greens.

In the late 2000s, Laschet was his state's minister for the integration of immigrants. Well before other German states, he stressed the importance of language fluency, stronger women's rights in immigrant communities, an easier path to citizenship and a need to bring Islamic religious teaching out of storefront mosques and into classrooms, with teachers raised and educated in Germany.

The fight against growing antisemitism in Germany is also close to his heart. He strengthened high school exchanges between Germans and Israelis, and, like Merkel, is a strong supporter of Israel.

"I think every young person should have visited Auschwitz once to get a sense of the place, of the horror that happened there, to understand what the Holocaust meant as a crime against humanity," he said.

Laschet worries about recent populist and autocratic tendencies in central and eastern Europe, but is very clear about his vision of the European Union.

"We need all 27 member states, also Hungary and Poland, if we want to further develop Europe. At the same time, one needs to insist on the rule of law. Everybody who joined the EU has to accept the position of the European Court of Justice, and if somebody violates European law that will lead to sanctions and consequences, for example, when it comes to the allocation of funds," he warns.

The new chancellor must "intensify the dialogue with the democracies of central and eastern Europe."

Sitting on the white couch in his office that overlooks the Rhine, Laschet remembered how a previous German chancellor, Helmut Kohl, initiated another key dialogue early in his career.

Kohl organized a meeting of young lawmakers with President Bill Clinton in 1997 to "talk to him for 45 minutes about world politics."

"And that really impressed me," he said, leaping off the couch to grab a framed, yellowed photo of himself shaking hands with Clinton in the Oval Office.

'Nobody's winning' as drought upends life in US West basin

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

TULELAKE, Calif. (AP) — Ben DuVal knelt in a barren field near the California-Oregon border and scooped up a handful of parched soil as dust devils whirled around him and birds flitted between empty irrigation pipes.

DuVal's family has farmed the land for three generations, and this summer, for the first time ever, he and hundreds of others who rely on irrigation from a depleted, federally managed lake aren't getting any water from it at all.

As farmland goes fallow, Native American tribes along the 257-mile-long (407-kilometer) river that flows from the lake to the Pacific watch helplessly as fish that are inextricable from their diet and culture die in droves or fail to spawn in shallow water.

Just a few weeks into summer, a historic drought and its on-the-ground consequences are tearing communities apart in this diverse basin filled with flat vistas of sprawling alfalfa and potato fields, teeming wetlands and steep canyons of old-growth forests.

Competition over the water from the river that snakes through it has always been intense. But this summer there is simply not enough, and the farmers, tribes and wildlife refuges that have long competed for every drop now face a bleak and uncertain future together.

"Everybody depends on the water in the Klamath River for their livelihood. That's the blood that ties us all together. ... They want to have the opportunity to teach their kids to fish for salmon just like I want to have the opportunity to teach my kids how to farm," DuVal said of the downriver Yurok and Karuk tribes. "Nobody's coming out ahead this year. Nobody's winning."

With the decadeslong conflict over water rights reaching a boiling point, those living the nightmare worry the Klamath Basin's unprecedented drought is a harbinger as global warming accelerates.

"For me, for my family, we see this as a direct result of climate change," said Frankie Myers, vice chairman of the Yurok Tribe, which is monitoring a massive fish kill where the river enters the ocean. "The system is crashing, not just for Yurok people ... but for people up and down the Klamath Basin, and it's heartbreaking."

ROOTS OF A CRISIS

Twenty years ago, when water feeding the farms was drastically reduced amid another drought, the crisis became a national rallying cry for the political right, and some protesters breached a fence and opened the main irrigation canal in violation of federal orders.

But today, as reality sinks in, many irrigators reject the presence of anti-government activists who have once again set up camp. In the aftermath of the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, irrigators who are at risk of losing their farms and in need of federal assistance fear any ties to far-right activism could taint their image.

Some farmers are getting some groundwater from wells, blunting their losses, and a small number who get flows from another river will have severely reduced water for just part of the summer. Everyone is sharing what water they have.

"It's going to be people on the ground, working together, that's going to solve this issue," said DuVal, president of the Klamath Water Users Association. "What can we live with, what can those parties live with, to avoid these train wrecks that seem to be happening all too frequently?"

Meanwhile, toxic algae is blooming in the basin's main lake — vital habitat for endangered suckerfish — a month earlier than normal, and two national wildlife refuges that are a linchpin for migratory birds on the Pacific Flyway are drying out. Environmentalists and farmers are using pumps to combine water from two stagnant wetlands into one deeper to prevent another outbreak of avian botulism like the one that killed 50,000 ducks last summer.

The activity has exposed acres of arid, cracked landscape that likely hasn't been above water for thousands of years.

"There's water allocated that doesn't even exist. This is all unprecedented. Where do you go from here? When do you start having the larger conversation of complete unsustainability?" said Jamie Holt, lead fisheries technician for the Yurok Tribe, who counts dead juvenile chinook salmon every day on the lower

Klamath River.

"When I first started this job 23 years ago, extinction was never a part of the conversation," she said of the salmon. "If we have another year like we're seeing now, extinction is what we're talking about."

The extreme drought has exacerbated a water conflict that traces its roots back more than a century.

Beginning in 1906, the federal government reengineered a complex system of lakes, wetlands and rivers in the 10 million-acre (4 million-hectare) Klamath River Basin to create fertile farmland. It built dikes and dams to block and divert rivers, redirecting water away from a natural lake spanning the California-Oregon border.

Evaporation then reduced the lake to one-quarter of its former size and created thousands of arable acres in an area that had been underwater for millennia.

In 1918, the U.S. began granting homesteads on the dried-up parts of Tule Lake. Preference was given to World War I and World War II veterans, and the Klamath Reclamation Project quickly became an agricultural powerhouse. Today, farmers there grow everything from mint to alfalfa to potatoes that go to In 'N Out Burger, Frito-Lay and Kettle Foods.

Water draining off the fields flowed into national wildlife refuges that continue to provide respite each year for tens of thousands of birds. Within the altered ecosystem, the refuges comprise a picturesque wetland oasis nicknamed the Everglades of the West that teems with white pelicans, grebes, herons, bald eagles, blackbirds and terns.

Last year, amid a growing drought, the refuges got little water from the irrigation project. This summer, they will get none.

SPEAKING FOR THE FISH

While in better water years, the project provided some conservation for birds, it did not do the same for fish — or for the tribes that live along the river.

The farmers draw their water from the 96-square-mile (248-square-kilometer) Upper Klamath Lake, which is also home to suckerfish. The fish are central to the Klamath Tribes' culture and creation stories and were for millennia a critical food source in a harsh landscape.

In 1988, two years after the tribe regained federal recognition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed two species of suckerfish that spawn in the lake and its tributaries as endangered. The federal government must keep the extremely shallow lake at a minimum depth for spawning in the spring and to keep the fish alive in the fall when toxic algae blooms suck out oxygen.

This year, amid exceptional drought, there was not enough water to ensure those levels and supply irrigators. Even with the irrigation shutoff, the lake's water has fallen below the mandated levels — so low that some suckerfish were unable to reproduce, said Alex Gonyaw, senior fish biologist for the Klamath Tribes.

The youngest suckerfish in the lake are now nearly 30 years old, and the tribe's projections show both species could disappear within the next few decades. It says even when the fish can spawn, the babies die because of low water levels and a lack of oxygen. The tribe is now raising them in captivity and has committed to "speak for the fish" amid the profound water shortage.

"I don't think any of our leaders, when they signed the treaties, thought that we'd wind up in a place like this. We thought we'd have the fish forever," said Don Gentry, Klamath Tribes chairman. "Agriculture should be based on what's sustainable. There's too many people after too little water."

But with the Klamath Tribes enforcing their senior water rights to help suckerfish, there is no extra water for downriver salmon — and now tribes on different parts of the river find themselves jockeying for the precious resource.

The Karuk Tribe last month declared a state of emergency, citing climate change and the worst hydrologic conditions in the Klamath River Basin in modern history. Karuk tribal citizen Aaron Troy Hockaday Sr. used to fish for salmon at a local waterfall with a traditional dip net. But he says he hasn't caught a fish in the river since the mid-1990s.

"I got two grandsons that are 3 and 1 years old. I've got a baby grandson coming this fall. I'm a fourth-generation fisherman, but if we don't save that one fish going up the river today, I won't be able to teach them anything about our fishing," he said. "How can I teach them how to be fishermen if there's no fish?"

'IT'S LIKE A BIG, DARK CLOUD'

The downstream tribes' problems are compounded by hydroelectric dams, separate from the irrigation project, that block the path of migrating salmon.

In most years, the tribes 200 miles (320 kilometers) to the southwest of the farmers, where the river reaches the Pacific, ask the Bureau of Reclamation to release pulses of extra water from Upper Klamath Lake. The extra flows mitigate outbreaks of a parasitic disease that proliferates when the river is low.

This year, the federal agency refused those requests, citing the drought.

Now, the parasite is killing thousands of juvenile salmon in the lower Klamath River, where the Karuk and Yurok tribes have coexisted with them for millennia. Last month, tribal fish biologists determined 97% of juvenile spring chinook on a critical stretch of the river were infected; recently, 63% of fish caught in research traps near the river's mouth have been dead.

The die-off is devastating for people who believe they were created to safeguard the Klamath River's salmon and who are taught that if the salmon disappear, their tribe is not far behind.

"Everybody's been promised something that just does not exist anymore," said Holt, the Yurok fisheries expert. "We are so engrained within our environment that we do see these changes, and these changes make us change our way of life. Most people in the world don't get to see that direct correlation — climate change means less fish, less food."

Hundreds of miles to the northeast, near the river's source, some of the farmers who are seeing their lives upended by the same drought now say a guarantee of less water — but some water — each year would be better than the parched fields they have now. And there is concern that any problems in the river basin — even ones caused by a drought beyond their control — are blamed on a way of life they also inherited.

"I know turning off the project is easy," said Tricia Hill, a fourth-generation farmer who returned to take over the family farm after working as an environmental lawyer.

"But sometimes the story that gets told ... doesn't represent how progressive we are here and how we do want to make things better for all species. This single-species management is not working for the fish — and it's destroying our community and hurting our wildlife."

DuVal's daughter also dreams of taking over her family's farm someday. But DuVal isn't sure he and his wife, Erika, can hang onto it if things don't change.

"To me it's a like a big, dark cloud that follows me around all the time. It's depressing knowing that we had a good business and that we had a plan on how we're going to grow our farm and to be able to send my daughters to a good college," said DuVal. "And that plan just unravels further and further with every bad water year."

Anxious Afghans fear tomorrow; many seeking to leave

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Imtiaz Mohmand, just 19, makes a living selling melons out of a crate perched on his three-wheel motorcycle in the Afghan capital's Kart-e-Now neighborhood. He only managed to finish Grade 7 before being sent to work to help support a family of 13. He has been robbed twice. Both times, his mobile phone was taken, along with his meager earnings of the day.

In four days, he and four friends will leave Afghanistan. They have paid a smuggler to sneak them across the border to Iran and into Turkey.

"There's no job, no security here. There are thieves everywhere. I tried to make a living but I can't," said Mohmand, who has seven friends already on their way to Turkey.

Mohmand's frustration and anxieties run like a theme through most conversations in today's Afghanistan as Afghans witness the final withdrawal of the U.S. military and its NATO allies.

U.S. President Joe Biden said America did what it came to Afghanistan to do -- hunt down and punish the al-Qaida terrorist network that carried out the 9/11 attacks. After nearly 20 years, Biden said it was time to end America's "forever war"

Afghans, however, say international forces are leaving a country deeply impoverished, on the brink of another civil war and with a worsening lawlessness that terrifies some more than the advancing Taliban insurgency. The warlords with whom the U.S.-led coalition partnered to oust the Taliban are resurrecting militias with a history of devastating violence to fight the insurgents, who have made gains even in the warlords' northern strongholds.

So significant is the danger that Washington's top general in Afghanistan, Gen. Austen Miller, warned this week in Kabul at what had all the hallmarks of a farewell press briefing that escalating violence risked a civil war "that should be a concern to the world."

Outside the Turkish Visa Center in Kabul's city center, the road is crowded with four-wheel drive vehicles and new Toyota corollas belonging to the wealthier who are looking for visas to leave. Since the announcement of the final withdrawal, thousands of visa applications have inundated the Turkish Embassy in Kabul. Other embassies have also reported a dramatic increase.

"Our people are thinking maybe a civil war will start and that is the main problem why people want to go abroad," said Abdullah Saeed, a lecturer at Kabul's Polytechnic University. He was applying for a visa to attend a conference. "Our political parties are all getting weapons. Everyone has weapons here, so that is why people are frightened."

The closure of some Western embassies and warnings by others for their citizens to leave only deepen the sense of dread. While some Afghans choose to leave, legally or illegally, others settle their families abroad then continue to work in Afghanistan.

Afghans are lining up by the thousands at the Afghan Passport office to get new passports, possibly to leave, uncertain what tomorrow will bring.

Salia Siddiqi sat under a tree with three of her seven children, one of thousands of people at the passport office. She was waiting to submit her papers for her family's passports, though she wasn't sure whether she'd be able to travel or how even to afford it.

"There is no security anywhere. You can't travel to the provinces," she said. "It's not about me but what about my children? I don't know if they will have a future here. We think there will be violence, it will be a dark time."

"Our biggest enemy is uncertainty," said Tamim Asey, founder and executive chairman of the Kabul-based Institute of War and Peace Studies. "It is not that we don't have hope ... It's not that we don't have the capability to formulate or create a vision for the country in the absence of the international community. It's that dark cloud of uncertainty looming."

Afghanistan looks significantly different than in 2001. There is internet, most people have mobile phones, women are in the workforce and schools for boys and girls are open, though most Afghans, who can afford only public schools, complain of the lack of qualified teachers, supplies and even buildings.

Even the Taliban have sought to encourage Afghans to stay home, promising they have nothing to fear from them. The Taliban have sent some of their senior council members from their political headquarters in the Middle Eastern state of Qatar to assure minority ethnic groups that they can live safely under the Pashtun-dominated movement.

Still, many Afghans say after 20 years and billions of dollars their future seems bleak. Afghanistan is one of the most corrupt countries in the world, according to Transparency International. Its political leadership is deeply divided, squabbling over almost everything, even the presidency. Last year, there were briefly two presidents.

Many of Afghanistan's elite and political leadership have a passport other than Afghan, and often their families live abroad. "They are dual citizens. They do their business here, whether it's in government, outside of the government," said Asey. "They are not invested in blood and treasure in this country."

The jobless rate is officially at 35%, though likely higher. Asey says barely 13% of the hundreds of thousands of new university graduates every year find jobs. According to the World Bank, 54% of the population is below the poverty line, making less than $1.90 a day.

The melon seller Imtiaz Mohmand earns roughly 300 Afghanis a day, around $3, but there's days he

doesn't make a sale, like Thursday, when he had to pay 400 Afghanis out of pocket to his supplier. Nearby, Azizullah Rahman makes 200 Afghanis ($2.50) a day selling car cleaning cloths. He's single but back home in Logar province, and he has more than a dozen people relying on his income. Across from the grand Eid Gah Mosque, Dost Mohammad, who drives a communal taxi on the route to the eastern city to Jalalabad, hasn't had a fare in two days.

Yet since 2002, the United States has spent more than $144 billion on reconstruction and development -- more than $17 billion just to assist Afghan government ministries, according to Washington's own watchdog monitoring U.S. tax dollar spending on Afghan reconstruction. Billions more have been spent on security.

Gen. Dawlat Waziri, a former Defense Ministry spokesman, complained that the international community didn't create lasting jobs or hand off skills and industries to Afghans to become self-sufficient.

"For example, every bullet had to come from America," he said. "Why weren't we making them here?"

But most Afghans blame corrupt politicians and officials, many of whom live in Kabul's luxurious Shairpur neighborhood. There, five- and six-story marble mansions jostle for space, many protected by barricade and heavily armed guards. For decades, the district was home to some of the city's poorest, living in homes of sun-baked mud or rough-hewn bricks, until they were pushed out by the rich.

At his small family woodworking shop, Ghulam Farooq complained that all the foreign cash ended up going to warlords.

"For every regime we had hope and every regime disappointed us, even the foreigners," he said. "Now people are escaping through every border ... Only those who have no money and no means will stay here as they always have. And they will suffer."

Experts question if WHO should lead pandemic origins probe

By MARIA CHENG and DAKE KANG Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — As the World Health Organization draws up plans for the next phase of its probe of how the coronavirus pandemic started, an increasing number of scientists say the U.N. agency it isn't up to the task and shouldn't be the one to investigate.

Numerous experts, some with strong ties to WHO, say that political tensions between the U.S. and China make it impossible for an investigation by the agency to find credible answers.

They say what's needed is a broad, independent analysis closer to what happened in the aftermath of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

The first part of a joint WHO-China study of how COVID-19 started concluded in March that the virus probably jumped to humans from animals and that a lab leak was "extremely unlikely." The next phase might try to examine the first human cases in more detail or pinpoint the animals responsible — possibly bats, perhaps by way of some intermediate creature.

But the idea that the pandemic somehow started in a laboratory — and perhaps involved an engineered virus — has gained traction recently, with President Joe Biden ordering a review of U.S. intelligence within 90 days to assess the possibility.

Earlier this month, WHO's emergencies chief, Dr. Michael Ryan, said that the agency was working out the final details of the next phase of its probe and that because WHO works "by persuasion," it lacks the power to compel China to cooperate.

Some said that is precisely why a WHO-led examination is doomed to fail.

"We will never find the origins relying on the World Health Organization," said Lawrence Gostin, director of the WHO Collaborating Center on Public Health Law and Human Rights at Georgetown University. "For a year and a half, they have been stonewalled by China, and it's very clear they won't get to the bottom of it."

Gostin said the U.S. and other countries can either try to piece together what intelligence they have, revise international health laws to give WHO the powers it needs, or create some new entity to investigate.

The first phase of WHO's mission required getting China's approval not only for the experts who traveled there but for their entire agenda and the report they ultimately produced.

Richard Ebright, a molecular biologist at Rutgers University, called it a "farce" and said that determining whether the virus jumped from animals or escaped from a lab is more than a scientific question and has political dimensions beyond WHO's expertise.

The closest genetic relative to COVID-19 was previously discovered in a 2012 outbreak, after six miners fell sick with pneumonia after being exposed to infected bats in China's Mojiang mine. In the past year, however, Chinese authorities sealed off the mine and confiscated samples from scientists while ordering locals not to talk to visiting journalists.

Although China initially pushed hard to look for the coronavirus's origins, it pulled back abruptly in early 2020 as the virus overtook the globe. An Associated Press investigation last December found Beijing imposed restrictions on the publication of COVID-19 research, including mandatory review by central government officials.

Jamie Metzl, who sits on a WHO advisory group, has suggested along with colleagues the possibility of an alternative investigation set up by the Group of Seven industrialized nations.

Jeffrey Sachs, a professor at Columbia University, said the U.S. must be willing to subject its own scientists to a rigorous examination and recognize that they might be just as culpable as China.

"The U.S. was deeply involved in research at the laboratories in Wuhan," Sachs said, referring to U.S. funding of controversial experiments and the search for animal viruses capable of triggering outbreaks.

"The idea that China was behaving badly is already the wrong premise for this investigation to start," he said. "If lab work was somehow responsible (for the pandemic), the likelihood that it was both the U.S. and China working together on a scientific initiative is very high."

Collapsed Florida condo building likely to be demolished

By RUSS BYNUM and TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — Florida officials are working on plans to tear down what's left of a partially collapsed oceanfront condominium building after concerns about the structure's instability prompted a 15-hour halt to the search for survivors.

After rescue efforts resumed Thursday evening, officials said they had started planning for the likely demolition of the remaining structure even as searchers continue to comb the rubble pile beneath it.

Scott Nacheman, a FEMA structures specialist, said engineers are looking at different methods for the demolition and how to proceed "to make the site safe for ongoing rescue operations."

Nacheman said that if the building comes down, there initially will be a slowdown in the rescue operation. But he said the demolition of the structure would create a safer working environment that could allow more personnel on the site and accelerate the pace of the work.

He said it would likely be weeks before officials schedule the demolition.

Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said the decision about the demolition needs to be made "extremely carefully and methodically," considering the potential impact on the pile of debris and the effect on the search.

The rescue work was halted early Thursday after crews noticed widening cracks and up to a foot of movement in a large column.

Work resumed shortly before 5 p.m. after the site was evaluated by structural engineers, Cava said, describing firefighters as "really, really excited out there."

"We will continue to search feverishly, as we have done all along in the parts of the collapse that we currently have access to," she said.

The work stoppage had threatened to dim hopes for finding anyone alive in the debris a week after the tower came down. Surfside Mayor Charles Burkett said the halt was worrisome since "minutes and hours matter, lives are at stake."

The temporary halt to rescue operations unfolded on the same day that President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden visited the devastated community.

The collapse of the 12-story Champlain Towers South condominium killed at least 18 people and left 145

missing. No one has been rescued since the first hours after the collapse.

"This is life and death," Biden said during a briefing. "We can do it, just the simple act of everyone doing what needs to be done, makes a difference."

"There's gonna be a lot of pain and anxiety and suffering and even the need for psychological help in the days and months that follow," he said. "And so, we're not going anywhere."

Peter Milián is a cousin of Marcus Guara, who died along with his wife, Anaely Rodriguez, and their two children, 10-year-old Lucia Guara and 4-year-old Emma Guara. Milián said he understood why the rescue work had to be temporarily halted.

"I mean, they've done everything they can. But we trust the people that are on the ground. And obviously, they've got to do what's best for their people, right? Because it is a dangerous situation," he said.

During a private meeting with family members, Biden drew on his own experiences with grief to try to comfort them. Biden lost his first wife and baby daughter in a car crash and decades later lost an adult son to brain cancer.

"I just wish there was something I could do to ease the pain," he said in a video posted on Instagram by Jacqueline Patoka, a woman who was close to a couple and their daughter who are still missing.

Biden spoke of wanting to switch places with a lost or missing loved one. "The waiting, the waiting is unbearable," he 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.

Federal executions halted; Garland orders protocols reviewed

By MICHAEL BALSAMO, COLLEEN LONG and MICHAEL TARM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department is halting federal executions after a historic use of capital punishment by the Trump administration, which carried out 13 executions in six months.

Attorney General Merrick Garland made the announcement Thursday night, saying he was imposing a moratorium on federal executions while the Justice Department conducts a review of its policies and procedures. He gave no timetable.

"The Department of Justice must ensure that everyone in the federal criminal justice system is not only afforded the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States, but is also treated fairly and humanely," Garland said. "That obligation has special force in capital cases."

Garland said the department would review the protocols put in place by former Attorney General William Barr. A federal lawsuit has been filed over the protocols — including the risk of pain and suffering associated with the use of pentobarbital, the drug used for lethal injection.

The decision puts executions on hold for now, but it doesn't end their use and keeps the door open for another administration to simply restart them. It also doesn't stop federal prosecutors from seeking the death penalty; the Biden administration recently asked the U.S. Supreme Court to reinstate the Boston Marathon bomber's original death sentence.

President Joe Biden has said he opposes the death penalty and his team vowed that he would take action to stop its use while in office. But the issue is uncomfortable one for Biden. As a then-proponent of the death penalty, Biden helped craft 1994 laws that added 60 federal crimes for which someone could be put to death, including several that did not cause death. He later conceded the laws disproportionately impacted Black people. Black people are also overrepresented on death rows across the United States.

Anti-death penalty advocates had hoped for a more definitive answer from the Biden administration. Sup

port for the death penalty among Americans is at near-historic lows after peaking in the mid-1990s and steadily declining since, with most recent polls indicating support now hovers around 55%, according to the nonpartisan Death Penalty Information Center in Washington, D.C.

Ruth Friedman, Director of the Federal Capital Habeas Project, which represented some of the prisoners on death row, said Garland's action was a step in the right direction, but it's not enough. She called on Biden to commute the sentences.

"We know the federal death penalty system is marred by racial bias, arbitrariness, over-reaching, and grievous mistakes by defense lawyers and prosecutors that make it broken beyond repair," she said. There are 46 people still on federal death row.

White House spokesman Andrew Bates said Biden was "pleased the Attorney General is taking these steps" and emphasized that the president has "significant concerns about the death penalty and how it is implemented."

The review is strikingly similar to one to one imposed during the Obama administration. In 2014, following a botched state execution in Oklahoma, President Barack Obama directed the Justice Department to conduct a broad review of capital punishment and issues surrounding lethal injection drugs.

Barr announced the restarting of executions in 2019, saying the Obama-era review had been completed and clearing the way for executions to resume. He approved the new procedure for lethal injections that replaced the three-drug combination previously used in federal executions with one drug, pentobarbital. This is similar to the procedure used in several states, including Georgia, Missouri and Texas, but not all.

Donald Trump's Justice Department resumed federal executions in July, following a 17-year hiatus. No president in more than 120 years had overseen as many federal executions. The last inmate to be executed, Dustin Higgs, was put to death at the federal prison complex in Terre Haute, Indiana, less than a week before Trump left office.

They were carried out during a worsening coronavirus pandemic. Toward the end of the string of executions, 70% of death row inmates were sick with COVID-19, guards were ill and traveling prisons staff on the execution team had the virus. It's impossible to know precisely who introduced the infections and how they started to spread, in part because prisons officials didn't consistently do contact tracing and haven't been fully transparent about the number of cases. But an Associated Press analysis found the executions were likely a superspreader event.

There were major discrepancies in the way executioners who put the 13 inmates to death described the process of dying by lethal injection. They likened the process in official court papers to falling asleep and called gurneys "beds" and final breaths "snores."

But those tranquil accounts are at odds with reports by The Associated Press and other media witnesses of how prisoners' stomachs rolled, shook and shuddered as the pentobarbital took effect inside the U.S. penitentiary death chamber in Terre Haute. The AP witnessed every execution.

Secrecy surrounded all aspects of the executions. Courts relied on those carrying them out to volunteer information about glitches. None of the executioners mentioned any.

Lawyers argued that one of the men put to death last year, Wesley Purkey, suffered "extreme pain" as he received a dose of pentobarbital. The court papers were filed by another inmate, Keith Nelson, in an effort to halt or delay his execution. But it went forward.

The federal Bureau of Prisons has declined to explain how it obtained pentobarbital for the lethal injections under Trump. But states have resorted to other means as the drugs used in lethal injections have become increasingly hard to procure. Pharmaceutical companies in the 2000s began banning the use of their products for executions, saying they were meant to save lives, not take them.

As US companies scramble to hire, workers enjoy upper hand

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — With the economy growing rapidly as it reopens from the pandemic, many employers are increasingly desperate to hire. Yet evidence suggests that as a group, the unemployed aren't feeling the same urgency to take jobs.

Many people who are out of work are either seeking higher pay than they had before or are still reluctant to take jobs in public-facing service companies for fear of contracting COVID-19. How those two trends balance themselves out will likely set the pace for how many open positions employers can fill in the coming months.

On Friday, analysts expect the government to report that the economy added 675,000 jobs in June. That would be a substantial gain but nowhere near the gains that could be expected given the record-high number of job openings.

In fact, some economists have estimated that monthly job growth would be at least twice what the three-month average gain was for March, April and May — 540,000 — if there were no constraints on the number of workers available to fill jobs.

For June, the unemployment rate is projected to have dipped from 5.8% in May to a still-elevated 5.7%.

Total available jobs reached 9.3 million in April, the highest in 20 years of data, according to the Labor Department. The employment website Indeed has said that job postings have increased still further since then.

As the competition to keep and attract workers intensifies, especially at restaurants and tourist and entertainment venues, employers are offering higher pay, along with signing and retention bonuses and more flexible working hours. The proportion of job advertisements that promise a bonus has more than doubled in the past year, Indeed found.

The supply of potential hires is being held back by a variety of factors. Many Americans still have health concerns about working around large numbers of people. About 1.5 million people, mostly women, are no longer working or looking for work because they had to care for children when schools and day care centers shut down. And roughly 2.6 million older workers took advantage of enlarged stock portfolios and home values to retire early.

A temporary $300-a-week federal unemployment benefit, on top of regular state jobless aid, may be enabling some people to be more selective in looking for and taking jobs. Roughly half the states plan to stop paying the supplement by the end of July in what proponents say is an effort to nudge more of the unemployed to seek jobs.

Economists at Goldman Sachs have calculated that in states that are cutting off the federal jobless payment early, the number of people who are receiving state jobless aid is declining faster than in states that plan to pay the $300-a-week benefit until it officially ends Sept. 6. That trend, which suggests could help boost hiring in June and in the subsequent months.

On Thursday, the government reported that the number of people who applied for jobless aid last week fell to 364,000, the lowest level since the pandemic began.

There are also signs that people are re-evaluating their work and personal lives and aren't necessarily interested in returning to their old jobs, particularly those that offer modest wages. The proportion of Americans who quit their jobs in April reached its highest level in more than 20 years.

Nearly 6% of workers who are in an industry category that includes restaurants, hotels, casinos, and amusement parks quit their jobs in April — twice the proportion of workers in all sectors who did so.

Rising numbers of people quitting jobs, often for higher-paying positions, mean that even employers that have been hiring may be struggling to maintain sufficient staffing levels.

A survey of manufacturers in June found widespread complaints among factory executives about labor shortages. Many said they were experiencing heavy turnover because of what they called "wage dynamics": Other companies are luring their workers away with higher pay.

Karen Fichuk, chief executive of Randstad North America, a recruiting and staffing firm, said that the Monster job board, which Randstad owns, found that job postings jumped 40% from May to June. Job searches, by contrast, rose just 4%.

"There is a significant gap between supply and demand," Fichuk said.

The struggle to fill jobs coincides with a swiftly growing economy. In the first three months of the year, the government estimated that the economy expanded at a strong 6.4% annual rate. In the just-ended April-June quarter, the annual rate is thought to have reached a sizzling 10%.

And for all of 2021, the Congressional Budget Office estimated Thursday that growth will amount to 6.7%. That would be the fastest calendar-year expansion since 1984.

In the meantime, consumer confidence rose in June, according to the Conference Board, and is nearly back to its pre-pandemic level. Americans also seem undeterred by recent price increases, with the percentage of consumers who plan to buy a home, car or major appliance all rising. Home prices shot up in April by the most in 15 years.

Factory output is also expanding at a healthy pace, in part because companies are investing more in industrial machinery, aircraft and technology. Those investments could make workers more efficient in the coming years and boost longer-term growth.

Hundreds believed dead in heat wave despite efforts to help

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Many of the dead were found alone, in homes without air conditioning or fans. Some were elderly — one as old as 97. The body of an immigrant farm laborer was found in an Oregon nursery.

As forecasters warned of a record-breaking heat wave in the Pacific Northwest and western Canada last weekend, officials set up cooling centers, distributed water to the homeless and took other steps. Still, hundreds of people are believed to have died from Friday to Tuesday.

An excessive heat warning remained in effect for parts of the interior Northwest and western Canada Thursday.

The death toll in Oregon alone reached 79, the Oregon state medical examiner said Thursday, with most occurring in Multnomah County, which encompasses Portland.

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

She said it was too soon to say with certainty how many deaths were heat related, but that it was likely the heat was behind most of them.

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

In Oregon's Multnomah County, the average victim's age was 67 and the oldest was 97, according to county Health Officer Jennifer Vines.

In a telephone interview Thursday, Vines said she had been worried about fatalities amid the weather forecasts. Authorities tried to prepare as best they could, turning nine air-conditioned county libraries into cooling centers.

Between Friday and Monday, 7,600 people cooled off amid the stacks of books. Others went to three more cooling centers. Nearly 60 teams sought out homeless people, offering water and electrolytes.

"We scoured the county with outreach efforts, with calls to building managers of low-income housing to be checking on their residents," Vines said.

But the efforts weren't enough, she said: "It's been really sobering to see these initial (fatality) numbers come out."

Oregon Office of Emergency Management Director Andrew Phelps agreed. "Learning of the tragic loss of life as a result of the recent heat wave is heartbreaking. As an emergency manager – and Oregonian – it is devastating that people were unable to access the help they needed during an emergency," he said.

Among the dead was a farm laborer who collapsed Saturday and was found by fellow workers at a nursery in rural St. Paul, Oregon. The workers had been moving irrigation lines, said Aaron Corvin, spokesman for the state's worker safety agency, Oregon Occupational Safety and Health, or Oregon OSHA.

Oregon OSHA, whose database listed the death as heat-related, is investigating labor contractor Andres Pablo Lucas and Ernst Nursery and Farms, which did not respond to a request for comment. Pablo Lucas declined to comment Thursday.

Farm worker Pedro Lucas said the man who died was his uncle, Sebastian Francisco Perez, from Ixcan,

Guatemala. He had turned 38 the day before he died.

Lucas, who is cousins with the labor contractor, was summoned to the scene. But by the time he arrived, his uncle was unconscious and dying. An ambulance crew tried to revive him but failed. Lucas said Perez was used to working in the heat and that the family is awaiting an autopsy report.

Reyna Lopez, executive director of a northwest farmworkers' union, known by its Spanish-language initials, PCUN, called the death "shameful" and faulted both Oregon OSHA for not adopting emergency rules ahead of the heat wave, and the nursery.

Corvin said Oregon OSHA is "exploring adopting emergency requirements, and we continue to engage in discussions with labor and employer stakeholders."

He added that employers are obligated to provide ample water, shade, additional breaks and training about heat hazards.

An executive order issued in March 2020 by Oregon Gov. Kate Brown would formalize protecting workers from heat, but it is coming too late for the dead farmworker. Brown's order focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and also tells the Oregon Health Authority and Oregon OSHA to jointly propose standards to protect workers from excessive heat and wildfire smoke.

They had until June 30 to submit the proposals, but due to the coronavirus pandemic, the two agencies requested the deadline be pushed back to September.

In Bend, Oregon, a scenic town next to the snowy Cascade Range, the bodies of two men were found Sunday on a road where dozens of homeless people stay in trailers and tents.

Volunteer Luke Richter said he stepped into the trailer where one of the men, Alonzo "Lonnie" Boardman, was found.

"It was very obviously too late. It was basically a microwave in there," Richter told Oregon Public Broadcasting.

Cooling stations had been set up at the campsite on Saturday, with water, sports drinks and ice available.

Weather experts say the number of heat waves are only likely to rise in the Pacific Northwest, a region normally known for cool, rainy weather, with a few hot, sunny days mixed in, and where many people don't have air conditioning.

"I think the community has to be realistic that we are going to be having this as a more usual occurrence and not a one-off, and that we need to be preparing as a community," said Dr. Steven Mitchell of Seattle's Harborview Medical Center, which treated an unprecedented number of severe heat-related cases. "We need to be really augmenting our disaster response."

This week's 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).

'Nobody's winning': Drought upends life in US West basin

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

TULE LAKE, Calif. (AP) — Ben DuVal knelt in a barren field near the California-Oregon border and scooped up a handful of parched soil as dust devils whirled around him and birds flitted between empty irrigation pipes.

DuVal's family has farmed this land for three generations, and this summer, for the first time, he and hundreds of others who rely on a federally managed lake to quench their fields aren't getting any water from it at all.

As the farmland goes fallow, Native American tribes along the 257-mile-long (407-kilometer) river that flows from the lake to the Pacific watch helplessly as fish that are inextricable from their culture hover closer to extinction.

This summer, a historic drought and its consequences are tearing communities apart and attracting

outside attention to a water crisis years in the making. Competition over Klamath River water has always been intense, but now there is simply not enough, and all the stakeholders are suffering.

"Everybody depends on the water in the Klamath River for their livelihood. That's the blood that ties us all together," DuVal said of the competing interests. "Nobody's coming out ahead this year. Nobody's winning."

Those living the nightmare worry the extreme drought is a harbinger of global warming.

"The system is crashing ... for people up and down the Klamath Basin," said Frankie Myers, vice chairman of the Yurok Tribe, which is monitoring a massive fish kill on the river. "It's heartbreaking."

Twenty years ago, when water feeding the irrigation system was drastically reduced amid another drought, the crisis became a national rallying cry for the political right, and some protesters opened the main irrigation canal in violation of federal orders.

This time, many irrigators reject the presence of anti-government activists. Farmers who need federal assistance to stay afloat fear ties to the far right could hurt them.

Meanwhile, toxic algae is blooming in the basin's main lake, and two national wildlife refuges critical to migratory birds are drying out.

The conditions have exacerbated a water conflict that traces its roots back more than a century.

Beginning in 1906, the federal government reengineered a complex system of lakes, wetlands and rivers in the 10 million-acre (4 million-hectare) Klamath River Basin to create tens of thousands of acres of irrigated farmland.

The Klamath Reclamation Project draws its water from the 96-square-mile (248-square-kilometer) Upper Klamath Lake. But the lake is also home to suckerfish central to the Klamath Tribes' culture and creation stories.

In 1988, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed two species of sucker fish as endangered. The federal government must keep the lake at a minimum depth to support the fish — but this year, amid exceptional drought, there was not enough water to do that and supply irrigators.

"Agriculture should be based on what's sustainable. There's too many people after too little water," said Don Gentry, the Klamath Tribes chairman.

With the Klamath Tribes enforcing their senior water rights to help suckerfish, there is also no extra water for downriver salmon.

The Karuk Tribe last month declared a state of emergency, citing climate change and the worst hydrologic conditions in the Klamath River Basin in modern history. Karuk tribal citizen Aaron Troy Hockaday Sr. is a fourth-generation fisherman but says he hasn't caught a fish in the river since the mid-1990s.

"I got two grandsons that are 3 and 1 years old. I've got a baby grandson coming this fall," he said. "How can I teach them how to be fishermen if there's no fish?"

The downstream tribes' problems are compounded by hydroelectric dams that block the path of migrating salmon.

In most years, the tribes 200 miles (320 kilometers) to the southwest of the farmers, where the river reaches the ocean, ask the Bureau of Reclamation to release pulses of extra water from Upper Klamath Lake. The extra water mitigates outbreaks of a parasitic disease that proliferates when the river is low.

This year, the federal agency refused those requests.

Now, the parasite is killing thousands of juvenile salmon in the lower Klamath River, where the Karuk and Yurok tribes have coexisted with them for millennia. An average of 63% of fish caught last month in research traps near the river's mouth were dead.

"This is all unprecedented," said Jamie Holt, lead fisheries technician for the Yurok Tribe. "Where do you go from here? When do you start having the larger conversation of complete unsustainability?"

Near the river's source, some of the farmers who are seeing their lives upended by the same drought say a guarantee of less water — but some water — each year would be better than the parched fields they have now. Some worry problems in the basin are being blamed on a way of life they also inherited.

"I know turning off the project is easy," said Tricia Hill, a fourth-generation farmer. "But sometimes the story that gets told ... doesn't represent how progressive we are here and how we do want to make things

better for all species. This single-species management is not working for the fish — and it's destroying our community and hurting our wildlife."

DuVal's daughter dreams of taking over the family farm someday. But DuVal isn't sure he and his wife, Erika, can hang onto the land if things don't change.

"We had a plan on how we're going to grow our farm and to be able to send my daughters to a good college," said DuVal, president of the Klamath Water Users Association. "And that plan just unravels further and further with every bad water year."

Conservative high court upholds state voting restrictions

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Flexing its new strength, the Supreme Court's conservative majority on Thursday cut back on a landmark voting rights law in a decision likely to help Republican states fight challenges to voting restrictions they've put in place following last year's elections.

The court's 6-3 ruling upheld voting limits in Arizona that a lower court had found discriminatory under the federal Voting Rights Act. It was the high court's second major decision in eight years that civil rights groups and liberal dissenting justices say weakened the Civil Rights-era law that was intended to eradicate discrimination in voting.

The decision fueled new calls from Democrats to pass federal legislation, blocked by Senate Republicans, that would counter the new state laws. Some lawmakers and liberal groups also favor Supreme Court changes that include expanding the nine-justice bench.

"The court's decision, harmful as it is, does not limit Congress' ability to repair the damage done today: it puts the burden back on Congress to restore the Voting Rights Act to its intended strength," President Joe Biden said in a statement.

Republicans argue that the state restrictions are simply efforts to fight potential voting fraud and ensure election integrity.

Biden's Justice Department had actually taken the position that the Arizona measures did not violate the Voting Rights Act, but favored a narrower ruling than the one handed down Thursday.

Justice Amy Coney Barrett's confirmation last year to replace the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg entrenched the right's dominance on a court that now has three appointees of former President Donald Trump.

In an opinion by Justice Samuel Alito, the court reversed an appellate ruling in deciding that Arizona's regulations on who can return early ballots for another person and on refusing to count ballots cast in the wrong precinct are not racially discriminatory.

The federal appeals court in San Francisco had held that the measures disproportionately affected Black, Hispanic and Native American voters in violation of a part of the Voting Rights Act known as Section 2.

Alito wrote for the conservative majority that the state's interest in the integrity of elections justified the measures and that voters faced "modest burdens" at most.

The court rejected the idea that showing a state law disproportionately affects minority voters is enough to prove a violation of law.

In a scathing dissent, Justice Elena Kagan wrote that the court was weakening the federal voting rights law for the second time in eight years.

"What is tragic here is that the Court has (yet again) rewritten — in order to weaken — a statute that stands as a monument to America's greatness, and protects against its basest impulses. What is tragic is that the Court has damaged a statute designed to bring about 'the end of discrimination in voting.' I respectfully dissent," Kagan wrote, joined by the other two liberal justices.

Native Americans who have to travel long distances to put their ballots in the mail were most likely to be affected by Arizona's ballot collection law. Votes cast by Black and Hispanic voters were most likely to be tossed out because they were cast in a wrong precinct, the appeals court found.

Election law expert Rick Hasen wrote on his blog that the decision "severely weakened" Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. He noted that this decision along with others over the past 15 years have "taken away

all the major available tools for going after voting restrictions."

"This is not a death blow for Section 2 claims, but it will make it much, much harder for such challenges to succeed," Hasen, a professor at the University of California, Irvine, Law School, wrote.

Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia was among Democrats who said the high court's decision "raises the sense of urgency for Congress to pass comprehensive voting rights legislation." Sen. Ed Markey of Massachusetts called for passage of his legislation expanding the court to 13 justices "to restore balance to our top court."

With Republicans united in opposition to those measures, Democrats first would have to change Senate filibuster rules that require 60 votes for most legislation.

The challenged Arizona provisions remained in effect in 2020 because the case was still making its way through the courts.

Biden narrowly won Arizona last year, and since 2018, the state has elected two Democratic senators. Arizona's most populous county, Maricopa, has been in the midst of a Republican-led audit challenging last year's vote.

Thursday's Supreme Court ruling came eight years after the high court took away what had been the Justice Department's most effective tool for combating discriminatory voting laws — a different provision of the federal law that required the government or a court to clear voting changes before they could take effect in Arizona and other states, mainly in the South, with a history of discrimination.

Many of the state measures that have been enacted since then would never have been allowed to take effect if the advance clearance provision of the Voting Rights Act had remained in force.

Left in place was Section 2, with its prohibition on rules that make it harder for minorities to exercise their right to vote. At the heart of the Arizona case was the standard for proving a violation of the law.

Alito cautioned that the court did not on Thursday "announce a test to govern all ... claims involving rules, like those at issue here, that specify the time, place, or manner for casting ballots."

Many Republicans continue to question the 2020 election's outcome, despite the absence of evidence. Republican elected officials in a number of states have responded by enacting restrictions on early voting and mailed-in ballots, as well as tougher voter identification laws.

Kagan pointed to some of the new laws in her dissenting opinion.

"Those laws shorten the time polls are open, both on Election Day and before. They impose new pre-requisites to voting by mail, and shorten the windows to apply for and return mail ballots. They make it harder to register to vote, and easier to purge voters from the rolls. Two laws even ban handing out food or water to voters standing in line," she wrote.

Lawsuits challenging laws enacted in Florida and Georgia, including a Justice Department suit in Georgia last week, allege violations of the voting rights law.

Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel called Thursday's ruling "a resounding victory for election integrity and the rule of law. Democrats were attempting to make Arizona ballots less secure for political gain, and the Court saw right through their partisan lies. In Arizona and across the nation, states know best how to manage their own elections."

Democratic elections lawyer Marc Elias vowed the legal fight against the new laws would continue. "If anyone thinks that this decision will stop us from fighting for voting rights, they are wrong. We will fight harder with every tool available to protect voters from suppressive laws," Elias wrote on Twitter.

Boy Scouts of America reaches $850M agreement with victims

By RANDALL CHASE Associated Press

DOVER, Del. (AP) — The Boy Scouts of America have reached an $850 million agreement with attorneys representing some 60,000 victims of child sex abuse in what could prove to be a pivotal moment in the organization's bankruptcy case.

The settlement would mark one of the largest sums in U.S. history involving cases of sexual abuse.

Attorneys for the BSA filed court papers late Thursday outlining a restructuring support agreement with attorneys representing abuse victims. The agreement also includes attorneys representing local Boy Scouts

councils and lawyers appointed to represent victims who might file future claims.

"After months of intensive negotiations, the debtors have reached resolution with every single official and major creditor constituency in these Chapter 11 cases," BSA attorneys wrote.

The Boy Scouts of America, based in Irving, Texas, sought bankruptcy protection in February 2020, moving to halt hundreds of lawsuits and create a compensation fund for men who were molested as youngsters decades ago by scoutmasters or other leaders.

But BSA attorneys have been unable to get attorneys for victims, the BSA's local councils and sponsoring organizations, and insurers to agree on a global resolution that would compensate abuse victims while allowing the 111-year-old organization to continue operating.

The agreement signals the BSA's acknowledgment that the gulf between attorneys representing abuse victims and those representing the BSA's insurers is currently too broad to be resolved. They may very well be left to resolve their differences in future court battles, a prospect that the BSA had sought to avoid.

In an earlier court filing Thursday, attorneys for certain insurance companies accused the BSA of allowing attorneys for abuse victims to rewrite the BSA's restructuring plan to include terms favorable to their clients.

"With only the fox guarding the henhouse, the outcome is utterly at odds with what BSA itself asserted was necessary for a confirmable plan and is permissible under the bankruptcy code," the insurers wrote.

Attorneys for insurers appear to be particularly concerned that the BSA's liability for abuse claims would be adjudicated under proposed trust distribution procedures in an effort to decide insurance coverage issues.

Meanwhile, in connection with the restructuring support agreement, attorneys for the Boy Scouts are asking for U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Laurie Selber Silverstein to declare that they have no obligation to seek court approval of a previously announced settlement with The Hartford, one of the BSA's insurers.

The Hartford agreed to pay $650 million into the victims' trust in exchange for being released from any further obligations under policies dating to 1971. The agreement allowed The Hartford to pay a lesser amount if the BSA or the settlement trust reaches an agreement with another major BSA insurer, Century Insurance Group, and Century's settlement amount is less than two times The Hartford's, or $1.3 billion.

The Hartford settlement was roundly criticized by attorneys for abuse victims, who estimate the insurer's liability exposure at several billion dollars. They made it clear that victims would not support any plan that includes the Hartford settlement.

The Boy Scouts have said that between $2.4 billion and $7.1 billion, including insurance rights, might be available for abuse victims. Attorneys for the tort claimants committee, which is charged with acting as a fiduciary in the bankruptcy case for all abuse victims, have estimated the value of some 82,500 sexual abuse claims at about $103 billion.

"All plaintiff representatives, who represent the vast majority of the holders of direct abuse claims, have indicated that any plan containing the Hartford Settlement would be categorically rejected," BSA attorneys wrote in Thursday's court filing. "Without their support, to be forced to pursue a plan that incorporates the Hartford settlement appears futile."

Matthew Sturdevant, a spokesperson for The Hartford, said the company's agreement with the Boy Scouts "is a crucial building block to move this bankruptcy case toward a conclusion."

"We are disappointed that the Boy Scouts of America have chosen to flout the organization's tenet of keeping promises by seeking to discard a thoughtfully negotiated and mutually agreed upon deal that appropriately values The Hartford's obligations," Sturdevant said.

In a joint statement, representatives for the victims as well as future claimants representative said the restructuring support agreement will allow the Boy Scouts to emerge from bankruptcy "while providing meaningful compensation to the victims, and holding the Boy Scouts' insurers to the terms of the insurance policies purchased by the Boy Scouts and their affiliates over many decades."

In a revised plan submitted barely two weeks ago, the BSA offered to issue an $80 million unsecured promissory note to a trust fund for abuse victims. It also proposed using restricted assets to help cover post-bankruptcy operational expenses, which would make up to $50 million in unrestricted cash available for abuse survivors. With the changes, the BSA's proposed contribution to the trust fund would increase

from about $120 million under a previous plan to as much as roughly $250 million.

Under a new plan expected to be filed Friday, the BSA's 250-odd local councils would contribute $600 million into the fund for abuse victims, double an offer of $300 million from earlier this year.

In return for their contributions to the trust fund and the transfer of insurance rights, the BSA and local councils would be released from liability. Sponsoring organizations such as churches and civic groups also could be released from further liability in exchange for contributing to the fund and transferring insurance rights.

A hearing in the case is schedule for July 20.

Richard Branson announces trip to space, ahead of Jeff Bezos

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson is aiming to beat fellow billionaire Jeff Bezos into space by nine days.

Branson's company announced Thursday evening that its next test flight will be July 11 and that its founder will be among the six people on board. The winged rocket ship will soar from New Mexico — the first carrying a full crew of company employees. It will be only the fourth trip to space for Virgin Galactic.

The news came just hours after Bezos' Blue Origin said Bezos would be accompanied into space on July 20 by a female aerospace pioneer who's waited 60 years to rocket away.

Bezos chose July 20 as his West Texas launch date — the 52nd anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing. He assigned himself to the flight just a month ago, the final stretch in a yearslong race to space between the two rich rocketeers.

Amazon's founder will be on Blue Origin's debut launch with people on board, accompanied by his brother, the winner of a $28 million charity auction and Wally Funk, one of the last surviving members of the Mercury 13 who was chosen as his "honored guest." The 13 female pilots passed the same tests as NASA's original Mercury 7 astronauts back in the early 1960s, but were barred from the corps — and spaceflight — because they were women.

As late as Wednesday, Branson declined to say when he would ride into space because of restrictions placed on him by his publicly traded company. But he stressed he was "fit and healthy" to fly as soon as his engineers give him the go.

"I've always been a dreamer. My mum taught me to never give up and to reach for the stars. On July 11, it's time to turn that dream into a reality aboard the next @VirginGalactic," he said via Twitter.

Virgin Galactic launches its rocket ship from an aircraft, reaching an altitude of roughly 55 miles (88 kilometers). Blue Origin launches its New Shepard rocket from the ground, with its capsule soaring to about 66 miles (106 kilometers). Both those heights are considered the edge of space. By comparison, Elon Musk's SpaceX launches its capsules — both crew and cargo — into orbit around Earth.

All three private space companies plan to take paying customers into space. SpaceX will be the first with a private flight coming up in September.

Flights by Virgin Galactic and Blue Origin last about 10 minutes, with three or so minutes of weightlessness. But the returns are quite different: Virgin Galactic's rocket plane glides to a landing on a runway, like NASA's old space shuttles did, with a pair of pilots in charge. Blue Origin's automated capsules parachute to the desert floor, similar to how NASA's Mercury, Gemini and Apollo capsules made ocean splashdowns. Their spaceports are just 200 miles (320 kilometers) apart.

Funk, at age 82, will become the oldest person to launch into space when Blue Origin takes its turn.

"I'll love every second of it. Whoooo! Ha-ha. I can hardly wait," Funk said in an Instagram video posted by Bezos.

"Nothing has ever gotten in my way," she added. "They said, 'Well, you're a girl, you can't do that.' I said, 'Guess what, doesn't matter what you are. You can still do it if you want to do it and I like to do things that nobody has ever done."

She'll beat the late John Glenn, who set a record at age 77 when flying aboard space shuttle Discovery

in 1998. Glenn pooh-poohed the idea of women flying in space, shortly after he became the first American to orbit the world in 1962.

"No one has waited longer," Bezos said via Instagram. "It's time. Welcome to the crew, Wally."

Bezos is stepping down as Amazon's CEO on Monday.

Blue Origin has yet to announce ticket prices or when the public might strap into the spacious six-seat capsule. Its New Shepard rocket is named for Alan Shepard, the first American in space.

Virgin Galactic has more than 600 reservations in the pipeline. These original tickets went for $250,000. The company will start accepting more following the upcoming flight with Branson. Keen to get to space, Funk reserved a seat years ago.

Virgin Galactic plans three more test flights before taking up customers, Branson was initially supposed to be on the second demo coming up, but moved it up in an apparent bid to outdo Bezos. He said Wednesday, after his other company Virgin Orbit launched a batch of satellites, that it's important for his customers to see him ride his rocket ship first, before they climb on board.

TAKEAWAYS: Trump's safe for now, but company's in hot water

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — With Thursday's arraignment of Donald Trump's company and his longtime finance chief on tax fraud charges, New York authorities notched their first indictment in a two-year ongoing investigation of the former president.

Trump and his lawyers say the Democrats who brought the case against the Trump Organization and CFO Allen Weisselberg are making a criminal case out of what should be minor disputes usually settled in civil court. Both the Trump Organization and Weisselberg have pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Prosecutors say this is serious. Weisselberg alone, they say, cheated the federal government, state and city out of more than $900,000 in unpaid taxes.

Takeaways from Thursday's arraignment in New York:

TRUMP WASN'T CHARGED. IS HE OUT OF THE HOT SEAT?

Hard to say. The Manhattan district attorney and New York attorney general say they are still investigating. State Attorney General Letitia James called the indictment an "important marker in the ongoing criminal investigation."

WHAT ARE THE TRUMP ORGANIZATION AND ALLEN WEISSELBERG CHARGED WITH?

Multiple counts, including scheme to defraud in the first degree, conspiracy in the fourth degree, criminal tax fraud in the third degree, criminal tax fraud in the fourth degree and falsifying records in the first degree. Weisselberg is also charged with offering a false instrument for filing in the first degree and grand larceny in the second degree.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN, PRACTICALLY?

The indictment says Weisselberg failed to pay taxes on more than $1.7 million worth of off-the-books perks.

WHAT DID WEISSELBERG GET FROM THE COMPANY?

The Trump Organization paid the rent on his Manhattan apartment, covered private school tuition for his grandchildren, leased him and his wife Mercedes-Benz automobiles, gave him cash to hand out as holiday tips and paid for flat-screen TVs, carpeting, and furniture for his winter home in Florida. Weisselberg's son also didn't have to pay rent, or paid a below-market rent, while living in Trump-owned apartments.

ANYTHING ELSE?

Prosecutors say Weisselberg claimed a house on Long Island as his official residence, rather than the Manhattan apartment where he spent a majority of his time. That enabled him to avoid paying the city's income tax.

WHAT DO LAWYERS FOR THE TRUMP ORGANIZATION AND WEISSELBERG SAY?

Weisselberg's attorneys have taken a low-key approach, saying only that he'll fight the charges. The Trump Organization's lawyers say it is an outrage, and that companies do things like this all the time and

aren't prosecuted or even punished. Trump, a Republican, excoriated the case as a "political Witch Hunt by the Radical Left Democrats."

WAIT — JUST WHAT DOES THE TRUMP ORGANIZATION ACTUALLY DO?

It's a business entity through which Trump manages his many entrepreneurial affairs, including his investments in office towers, hotels and golf courses, his many marketing deals and his television pursuits. It's sprawling, but its operations are simple and behind the scenes: It runs golf clubs and hotels, collects checks from companies occupying offices it owns, and charges licensing fees to buildings and others using its name.

COMPANIES DO OFFER TOP EXECUTIVES FANCY PERKS. WHY IS THE TRUMP ORGANIZATION BEING TARGETED?

Perks that aren't legitimate business expenses have to be reported as taxable income. You can't help employees avoid income tax by paying them in lots of free stuff.

PROSECUTORS ASSERTED THE 'MOST SENIOR EXECUTIVES' WERE BEHIND THE ALLEGED SCHEME. THEN WHY WAS WEISSELBERG THE ONLY INDIVIDUAL CHARGED?

Prosecutors haven't explained.

DOES RUDY GIULIANI HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THIS?

No. There is an ongoing investigation by federal prosecutors in New York into Giuliani's work for Trump in Ukraine, but it is not related to this inquiry by state prosecutors.

HOW DID THIS ALL GET STARTED?

After Trump's former personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, got indicted for tax evasion and other offenses, he publicly claimed that the Trump Organization frequently found ways to dodge taxes. That got prosecutors extra interested. Prosecutors also got help from Jen Weisselberg, who had a bitter divorce from Weisselberg's son.

SO IS ALLEN WEISSELBERG BEHIND BARS NOW?

No. He is free pending trial, though he had to turn over his passport so he can't leave the country.

WILL WEISSELBERG TURN ON TRUMP?

The charges could enable prosecutors to pressure Weisselberg to cooperate with the investigation and tell them what he knows. He might cooperate to try to avoid a tough prison sentence. But prosecutors haven't actually accused Trump himself of breaking any laws. Although Trump's signature was on some checks at the center of the case, nothing in the indictment addressed whether he was personally aware of how the company treated Weisselberg's compensation for tax purposes. And Weisselberg's been a loyal lieutenant to the Trump family for decades.

SO WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Everybody has to come back to court in late September to begin the process of getting ready for a trial. New York City's judicial system is seriously backlogged because of the coronavirus pandemic so this could take awhile.

Federal executions halted; Garland orders protocols reviewed

By MICHAEL BALSAMO, COLLEEN LONG and MICHAEL TARM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department is halting federal executions after a historic use of capital punishment by the Trump administration, which carried out 13 executions in six months.

Attorney General Merrick Garland made the announcement Thursday night, saying he was imposing a moratorium on federal executions while the Justice Department conducts a review of its policies and procedures. He gave no timetable.

"The Department of Justice must ensure that everyone in the federal criminal justice system is not only afforded the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States, but is also treated fairly and humanely," Garland said. "That obligation has special force in capital cases."

Garland said the department would review the protocols put in place by former Attorney General William Barr. A federal lawsuit has been filed over the protocols — including the risk of pain and suffering

associated with the use of pentobarbital, the drug used for lethal injection.

The decision puts executions on hold for now, but it doesn't end their use and keeps the door open for another administration to simply restart them. It also doesn't stop federal prosecutors from seeking the death penalty; the Biden administration recently asked the U.S. Supreme Court to reinstate the Boston Marathon bomber's original death sentence.

President Joe Biden has said he opposes the death penalty and his team vowed that he would take action to stop its use while in office. But the issue is uncomfortable one for Biden. As a then-proponent of the death penalty, Biden helped craft 1994 laws that added 60 federal crimes for which someone could be put to death, including several that did not cause death. He later conceded the laws disproportionately impacted Black people. Black people are also overrepresented on death rows across the United States.

Anti-death penalty advocates had hoped for a more definitive answer from the Biden administration. Sup port for the death penalty among Americans is at near-historic lows after peaking in the mid-1990s and steadily declining since, with most recent polls indicating support now hovers around 55%, according to the nonpartisan Death Penalty Information Center in Washington, D.C.

Ruth Friedman, Director of the Federal Capital Habeas Project, which represented some of the prisoners on death row, said Garland's action was a step in the right direction, but it's not enough. She called on Biden to commute the sentences.

"We know the federal death penalty system is marred by racial bias, arbitrariness, over-reaching, and grievous mistakes by defense lawyers and prosecutors that make it broken beyond repair," she said. There are 46 people still on federal death row.

White House spokesman Andrew Bates said Biden was "pleased the Attorney General is taking these steps" and emphasized that the president has "significant concerns about the death penalty and how it is implemented."

The review is strikingly similar to one to one imposed during the Obama administration. In 2014, following a botched state execution in Oklahoma, President Barack Obama directed the Justice Department to conduct a broad review of capital punishment and issues surrounding lethal injection drugs.

Barr announced the restarting of executions in 2019, saying the Obama-era review had been completed and clearing the way for executions to resume. He approved the new procedure for lethal injections that replaced the three-drug combination previously used in federal executions with one drug, pentobarbital. This is similar to the procedure used in several states, including Georgia, Missouri and Texas, but not all.

Donald Trump's Justice Department resumed federal executions in July, following a 17-year hiatus. No president in more than 120 years had overseen as many federal executions. The last inmate to be executed, Dustin Higgs, was put to death at the federal prison complex in Terre Haute, Indiana, less than a week before Trump left office.

They were carried out during a worsening coronavirus pandemic. Toward the end of the string of executions, 70% of death row inmates were sick with COVID-19, guards were ill and traveling prisons staff on the execution team had the virus. It's impossible to know precisely who introduced the infections and how they started to spread, in part because prisons officials didn't consistently do contact tracing and haven't been fully transparent about the number of cases. But an Associated Press analysis found the executions were likely a superspreader event.

There were major discrepancies in the way executioners who put the 13 inmates to death described the process of dying by lethal injection. They likened the process in official court papers to falling asleep and called gurneys "beds" and final breaths "snores."

But those tranquil accounts are at odds with reports by The Associated Press and other media witnesses of how prisoners' stomachs rolled, shook and shuddered as the pentobarbital took effect inside the U.S. penitentiary death chamber in Terre Haute. The AP witnessed every execution.

Secrecy surrounded all aspects of the executions. Courts relied on those carrying them out to volunteer information about glitches. None of the executioners mentioned any.

Lawyers argued that one of the men put to death last year, Wesley Purkey, suffered "extreme pain" as

he received a dose of pentobarbital. The court papers were filed by another inmate, Keith Nelson, in an effort to halt or delay his execution. But it went forward.

The federal Bureau of Prisons has declined to explain how it obtained pentobarbital for the lethal injections under Trump. But states have resorted to other means as the drugs used in lethal injections have become increasingly hard to procure. Pharmaceutical companies in the 2000s began banning the use of their products for executions, saying they were meant to save lives, not take them.

Whither #MeToo? Chilling effect of Cosby reversal feared

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

When Indira Henard, director of the DC Rape Crisis Center, received the text message Wednesday, she thought she wasn't reading her phone correctly. "Indira oh my god," said the message from a colleague. "Cosby's walking out of prison."

"I put on the news and there it was, and my heart just dropped," Henard said. "I thought about how all our survivors would be feeling."

During the afternoon, Henard says the center's hotline was "off the hook, with survivors needing a place to process, and people asking, 'What happened? I don't understand. He got convicted. Why would they do this?'" The center held support sessions Wednesday evening and scheduled emergency sessions Thursday to deal with the news.

When America watched Bill Cosby — once "America's Dad" — go off to prison nearly three years ago, it was perhaps the most stunning development yet of the nascent #MeToo movement, which had emerged in late 2017 with allegations against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein. Advocates and survivors of sexual assault hoped the movement would usher in an era of accountability for harassers and abusers — and in many ways, it did. Victims have been increasingly emboldened in recent years to seek justice, even for years-ago abuse, hoping their allegations would be taken more seriously.

But on Wednesday, as the nation digested the equally stunning sight of Cosby released from prison, some worried it would have a chilling effect on survivors, who often don't come forward because they don't believe it will bring justice. And they wondered whether some of the movement's momentum, already slowed by the pandemic, would be lost amid the feeling that another powerful man had gotten away with it — albeit on a technicality.

"It's been a hard day," Henard said. "It's a deeply painful moment — not just for survivors in the Cosby case who came forward at great personal risk, but for all survivors."

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This story includes discussion of sexual assault. If you or someone you know needs help, please call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-4673.

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For Tarana Burke, the prominent activist who gave the #MeToo movement its name, the first reaction to the Pennsylvania court's decision was "shock, definitely shock."

"And as the shock settled in and I started seeing some of the (social media) commentary coming in … we, folks who do this work across the field, started huddling together to talk about what our response would be," Burke said in an interview. "It was just real concern for survivors. We're going to have a hard time sleeping."

"The fact of the matter," added Burke, herself a sexual assault survivor in her youth, "is we won't see the ramifications of things like this for a while. People will look back and say, 'I was sexually assaulted a week before the Cosby verdict was overturned. And the way that the backlash hit the Internet made me change my mind.' We won't hear those stories for a while. But those of us who have been through similar things — we know exactly how this hits and where it lands and what the consequences are, unfortunately."

RAINN, the anti-sexual violence organization, said its hotline calls were up 24 percent Wednesday from the previous week. "This is one of those times I really pray people will read beyond the headlines," said Scott Berkowitz, executive director.

"I think the country believes the victims," Berkowitz said in an interview. What does worry him: "Many survivors choose not to report to police, and for those who do report it's a hard decision because they know it's going to be a long, difficult slog through the justice process. It only makes sense to put yourself through that if you believe that at the end, there's a reasonable chance of getting justice." He said RAINN would try to educate people that "the issue that let Bill Cosby out is not an issue that comes up in a normal case."

That's the point that Lisa Banks — one of the nation's most prominent attorneys in #MeToo issues with her partner, Debra Katz — sought to drive home. "The message has to be very clear and simple, that this was a mistake by prosecutors, a very unusual one and a technicality that is unlikely to happen again," she said.

She was referring to the decision of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court that District Attorney Kevin Steele was obligated to stand by his predecessor's promise not to charge the comedian, though there was no evidence that agreement was ever put in writing.

"Sure, the optics of the first major conviction of the #MeToo era walking out of prison is devastating," Banks said. "I don't think that's something many people are going to get past very easily. But I will say one thing that (Cosby accuser) Andrea Constand said when the verdict came down: 'Truth prevails.' I still think I did. And I don't want people to get discouraged by this, although I know it's going to be hard."

For activist Anita Hill, the word "technicality" wasn't quite adequate to describe what she sees as a deeply flawed legal system stacked against survivors.

The issue of the non-prosecution agreement was, Hill said in an interview, "revealing in how hard it is for women to actively prove to prosecutors their claims should be heard in court by a jury." She also found it troubling that the court had left open the question of whether the prosecution's use of five additional accusers was improper, as Cosby had argued, "creating this other uncertainty."

"Uncertainty: that's the thing that keeps people from coming forward," said Hill, who famously came forward herself in 1991 with harassment allegations against Clarence Thomas in his Supreme Court confirmation hearing. "They just don't know what's going to happen. And you do know it's going to be really brutal."

The general public, she said, likely won't understand the complexities of why it happened: "There was a jury verdict. He was in jail. Now he's not."

As for #MeToo: "it's a work in progress," said Hill, who now chairs the Hollywood Commission, which combats harassment in the entertainment industry. "Old systems are hard to change — they require a different mindset. So I think we still have to keep pressing. We have the social movement, we have the public outrage. But we need reform of the systems that have been in place forever."

Henard said she and her colleagues at the DC Rape crisis center were spending Thursday listening to survivors. "I'm really concerned around the chilling effect this will have," she said. "Particularly for Black and brown survivors, this is cutting deep. We are bearing witness to tears and pain, survivors wondering, 'What is it going to take for a verdict to sit and not get turned over because of a technicality?' This man raped not one, not two, not three not four but (dozens of) women, and so we can't forget that," she said, referring to accusations against Cosby that never went to court, often because the statute of limitations had run out.

But Henard said Wednesday's court decision, shocking as it was to so many, "in no way diminishes the good work of the #MeToo movement."

"We've made great strides in the last few years," she said. "There's more great things that have happened and will continue to happen. What this moment does is remind all of us, especially those of us who have boots on the ground, that there's still work to do."

Voting rights ruling increases pressure on Democrats to act

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congressional Democrats are facing renewed pressure to pass legislation that would protect voting rights after a Supreme Court ruling Thursday made it harder to challenge Republican

efforts to limit ballot access in many states.

The 6-3 ruling on a case out of Arizona was the second time in a decade that conservatives on the Supreme Court have weakened components of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, a landmark Civil Rights-era law. But this opinion was released in a much different political climate, in the aftermath of President Donald Trump's lie that last year's election was stolen.

Trump's fabrications spurred Republicans in states such as Georgia and Florida to pass tougher rules on voting under the cloak of election integrity.

Democrats on Capitol Hill have already tried to respond with a sweeping voting and elections bill that Senate Republicans united to block last week. A separate bill, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would restore sections of the Voting Rights Act that the Supreme Court previously weakened, has been similarly dismissed by most Republicans.

Those setbacks, combined with the Supreme Court's decision, have fueled a sense of urgency among Democrats to act while they still have narrow majorities in the House and Senate. But passing voting legislation at this point would almost certainly require changes to the filibuster, allowing Democrats to act without GOP support.

"Absolutely this increases the pressure to take a very hard look at whether the Senate is an institution that will allow itself to be rendered powerless and dysfunctional," said Rep. John Sarbanes, a Maryland Democrat who sponsored a voting bill that passed the House in March.

Change won't be easy. A group of moderate Democratic senators, including Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, have ruled out revisions to the filibuster. In an evenly divided Senate, their rejection denies the votes needed to move forward with a procedural change.

Thursday's ruling was on a case in Sinema's home state. In an opinion by Justice Samuel Alito, the court reversed an appellate ruling in deciding that Arizona's regulations — on who can return early ballots for another person and on refusing to count ballots cast in the wrong precinct — are not racially discriminatory.

Sinema assailed the decision in a statement, saying it would "hurt Arizonans' ability to make their voices heard at the ballot box." She reiterated her support for the bill yet said nothing about her opposition to the filibuster changes. That opposition stands in the way of the bill passing.

Democrats, who say the issue is an existential one for democracy and who need the support of voters of color in next year's midterms, quickly condemned the decision.

"If you believe in open and fair democracy and the principle of one person, one vote, today is one of the darkest days in all of the Supreme Court's history," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called the ruling an "unprecedented assault" that "greenlights the brutal, accelerating campaign of voter suppression."

Speaking in Florida, President Joe Biden said he would have "much more to say" soon, but largely sidestepped comment.

For their part, Republicans show no sign of willingness to engage with Democrats on the issue.

"The states created the federal government, and it's not up to Chuck or Nancy or anyone else in Washington, D.C., to tell Arizona or anyone else how they should conduct an election," Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich, who was a party in the case, said on Fox News.

Many Republicans other have dismissed a series of recent hearings on the John Lewis bill as "theater."

"They are using this issue because they see a political opportunity," said Rep. Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican who sits on the House Judiciary Committee. "The more they advance this narrative that it's us versus them, and oppressors versus the oppressed, and black versus white, it divides the country."

Questions hang over existing lawsuits challenging voting laws.

While experts generally agree that Thursday's decision will make legal challenges under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act more difficult, many of the lawsuits pending against GOP-backed laws this year make separate, constitutional claims. So those lawsuits will proceed.

The U.S. Justice Department's recent lawsuit against Georgia's new voting law does make a Section 2 challenge, although it was narrowly written and alleges an intent by Republican state lawmakers to dis-

criminate against minority voters. In the Arizona case, the legal challenge centered on whether there was a discriminatory effect of the laws.

Still, advocates of voting rights protections were surprised by the breadth of the ruling.

"This ruling is much worse than we had anticipated," said Wendy Weiser, an attorney for the Brennan Center for Justice. "This is going to put a lot of pressure on Congress and the White House to pass the voting bills."

And it could embolden more Republican-led states to pursue further restrictions.

Judicial Watch President Tom Fitton, who supports the ruling, said: "States can be confident that they can go full speed ahead to strengthen elections and protect voting rights with security measures such as voter ID and other sensible measures to make it harder to steal elections."

California sets date for recall election targeting Newsom

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD and KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California on Thursday scheduled a Sept. 14 recall election that could drive Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom from office, the result of a political uprising largely driven by angst over state coronavirus orders that shuttered schools and businesses and upended life for millions of Californians.

The election in the nation's most populous state will be a marquee contest with national implications, watched closely as a barometer of the public mood heading toward the 2022 elections, when a closely divided Congress again will be in play.

The date was set by Lt. Gov. Eleni Kounalakis, a Democrat, after election officials certified that enough valid petition signatures had been turned in to qualify the election for the ballot.

The announcement will set off a furious, 10-week burst of campaigning through the California summer, a time when voters typically are ignoring politics to enjoy vacationing, backyard barbecuing and travel.

Many voters have yet to pay attention to the emerging election, while polls have shown Newsom would beat back the effort to remove him. Republicans haven't won a statewide race in heavily Democratic California since 2006.

Republican candidates have depicted Newsom as an incompetent fop whose bungled leadership inflicted unnecessary financial pain statewide, while Democrats have sought to frame the contest as driven by far-right extremists and supporters of former President Donald Trump.

Newsom's campaign issued a statement describing the election "a naked attempt by Trump Republicans to grab control in California." It called on his supporters to "defend our state." Kevin Faulconer, a former San Diego mayor and one of the leading Republican candidates, predicted that "retirement is coming for Gavin Newsom."

While a final date wasn't set until Thursday, the campaign has been underway for months after it became clear that recall organizers had gathered more than enough of the required 1.5 million petition signatures needed to place the recall on the ballot.

It's not uncommon in California for residents to seek recalls but they rarely get on the ballot — and even fewer succeed. A sitting governor has been ousted just once in the state, when unpopular Democrat Gray Davis was recalled in 2003 and replaced by Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Conservative talk show host Larry Elder, 69, issued a brief statement Wednesday night saying he was seriously considering entering the race and would announce his decision early next week. His entry into the race would give the Republican field a jolt of celebrity sparkle and a name on the ticket known through his nationally syndicated radio show and appearances on Fox News.

Along with Faulconer, other Republicans who have said they will run include Republican businessman John Cox, who was defeated by Newsom in 2018, former U.S. Rep. Doug Ose and reality TV personality and former Olympian Caitlyn Jenner.

The GOP field is expected to continue to grow: Candidates have until 59 days before election to file papers to declare their candidacy, or roughly about two weeks away.

In a recall election, voters would be asked two questions: First, should Newsom be removed, yes or no?

The second question would be a list of replacement candidates to choose from, if a majority of voters cast ballots to remove Newsom.

Tom Del Beccaro, a former head of the state Republican Party who chairs Rescue California, one of the groups promoting the recall, said Elder would help drive up support for the critical first question in his home Los Angeles area, the most populous in the state.

"Statewide races in California are often won or lost in L.A. county," said Del Beccaro, who is not aligned with any candidate. Elder "is going to bring a constituency that is going to help us get a 'yes' on the question No. 1."

Steve Frank, a longtime conservative activist serving as Elder's spokesman, said his entry into the race would become "a major game-changer." People across the political spectrum "know him, and many listen to his show."

Elder, a Black man, also would bring more diversity to the Republican ranks.

Claremont McKenna College political scientist Jack Pitney said Elder's entry into the race would be a setback for Cox because "Elder would appeal to the hard-core Republican, conservative base that would have been Cox's base." Faulconer is considered a GOP moderate.

Pitney doubted Elder's race would play a significant factor, with the Black vote typically running strongly Democratic. Elder "has a reputation for being a provocative conservative, not a champion of African-American interests," Pitney said.

Meanwhile Thursday, the state Finance Department released its final estimate for state and county costs to run the election: $276 million.

EXPLAINER: How could the indictment hurt Trump's company?

By BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The criminal tax fraud charges unsealed against Donald Trump's company Thursday are a blow to a business already reeling from canceled deals following the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on hotels and clubs.

The indictment may make it harder for Trump to strike new deals, get bank loans and bring in new money to his sprawling and indebted business.

The former president himself was not charged by prosecutors, but investigations are ongoing.

Here's a look at the company and the challenge it now faces:

WHAT IS THE TRUMP ORGANIZATION?

The company is a business entity encompassing hundreds of firms and partnerships that own or manage office buildings, hotels, residential towers, golf clubs, branding rights, licensing deals and other assets around the world.

Those various businesses share staff with the Trump Organization, including Trump's two adult sons, Donald Jr. and Eric, both executive vice presidents, and Allen Weisselberg, the indicted chief financial officer.

WHAT ARE THE ALLEGATIONS?

A grand jury indictment charged the Trump Organization with conspiring to help top executives cheat on their taxes by not reporting compensation like free use of apartments and cars, payments of school tuition or reimbursement for personal expenses.

The company pleaded not guilty, as has Weisselberg, one of Trump's most loyal and longest-serving employees.

The company says neither it nor Weisselberg did anything wrong and claimed the charges are politically motivated.

Weisselberg is also accused of cheating on his taxes by disguising that his full-time residence was in New York City, where he was subject to the city's income tax.

WHAT IS TRUMP'S CURRENT ROLE IN THE COMPANY?

Trump resigned from positions he held with hundreds of Trump Organization entities in over 20 countries before he took the presidential oath of office four years ago.

It was his attempt to allay fears he would use the presidency to help his business. At the time he set up trust to hold its assets and handed over day-to-day control of it his two adult sons and Weisselberg.

But Trump remained the sole owner or principal owner of those hundreds of businesses and could pull profits from them at any time. Recently, he's returned to his old offices at Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue, but it's not clear how much he has assumed his former role overseeing operations.

WILL THE CHARGES HURT THE COMPANY'S ABILITY TO DO BUSINESS?

If the Trump Organization is convicted, it would have to pay a fine of double the amount of unpaid taxes, or $250,000, whichever is larger. The company may also have to change the way it operates.

But even absent a conviction, the indictment could pose problems.

"Companies that are being indicted, whether they are private or public, big or small, face serious collateral consequences," said Daniel Horwitz, a white collar defense lawyer at McLaughlin and Stern and former prosecutor at the Manhattan district attorney's office.

"Companies in the financial services industry are reluctant to do business with them," Horwitz said. "Their access to capital is limited or cut off as is their ability to place their liquid assets with banks and brokerages."

WHAT HAPPENED TO OTHER COMPANIES THAT HAVE BEEN CRIMINALLY INDICTED?

The giant accounting firm Arthur Andersen started losing auditing business after criminal charges were filed in relation to its Enron work, and it eventually had to lay off tens of thousands of workers. In 2005, the Supreme Court overturned its obstruction of justice conviction but it was too late and the firm collapsed.

Other companies hit hard by criminal charges include the now-defunct 1980s junk bond giant Drexel Burnham Lambert, the once-massive hedge fund SAC Capital and oil company BP, which had to pay billions stemming from criminal charges for its role in a drilling rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico.

WHAT IS THE LIKELY HIT TO TRUMP'S COMPANY?

The Trump Organization could find it more difficult to strike deals to put the Trump name on buildings or products, attract tournaments to its golf courses and borrow money.

It may be able to withstand the blows. It is a sprawling company, but its operations are simple and behind the scenes: It runs golf clubs and hotels, collects checks from companies occupying offices it owns, and charges licensing fees to buildings and others using its name.

Although some companies have collapsed after criminal indictments, others have survived or even thrived, including Bank of America, which was convicted for reckless mortgage lending practices. Others that received what's called deferred criminal charges have done well afterward, including drug giant Bristol-Myers Squibb, which was accused of accounting fraud, and JPMorgan Chase & Co., which was caught up in connection with Bernard Madoff's massive fraud.

Stocks in all three companies are at or near all-time highs.

WHAT ARE THE FORMER PRESIDENT'S FUTURE BUSINESS PLANS?

He hasn't said, but there some obvious moves.

Experts on branding say that the company could still use Trump's fame to strike licensing deals around the world. In the years surrounding his runaway TV success, "The Apprentice," Trump struck deals to put his names on suits, ties, steaks and residential towers in Las Vegas, Chicago and New York.

The Trump brand has been damaged by his divisive rhetoric and stances. It's unclear how successful a new licensing effort would prove.

While he was in office, hotels and residential towers in several cities stripped his name off their buildings. His company had to scrap plans for new hotel chains because of a lack of interest by potential partners.

Most damaging of all were accusations Trump incited the bloody siege of the Capitol in January. Real estate brokers, lenders and other businesses cut ties shortly afterward.

The Associated Press reported earlier this year that condo prices in many buildings that have licensed the use of his name have fallen sharply, with brokers saying some potential buyers refuse to even look at apartments in buildings with Trump's name over the door.

Pelosi names GOP's Cheney to panel investigating Jan. 6 riot

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, ALAN FRAM and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Thursday named Republican Rep. Liz Cheney to a new select committee on the violent Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol, elevating the most unyielding GOP critic of former President Donald Trump to work alongside seven Democrats on the high-profile investigation.

Rep. Bennie Thompson, chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, will lead the panel, which will investigate what went wrong around the Capitol when hundreds of Trump supporters broke into the building. The rioters brutally beat police, hunted for lawmakers and interrupted the congressional certification of Democrat Joe Biden's election victory over Trump.

Standing with other members of the committee after a meeting together in Pelosi's office, Cheney said she was "honored" to serve on the committee and that her duty is to the Constitution.

"And that will always be above politics," Cheney said.

Her appointment came just hours after House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy threatened to strip Republicans of committee assignments if they accepted an appointment from Pelosi to the panel. McCarthy told a closed-door meeting of first-term House GOP members on Wednesday that he, not Pelosi, controls Republicans' committee assignments, according to a top GOP aide. The aide spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the private meeting.

After Pelosi's announcement, McCarthy demurred, saying at a news conference that "I'm not making any threats" about committee assignments. But he made clear he wasn't happy with Cheney.

"I was shocked that she would accept something from Speaker Pelosi," McCarthy said. "It would seem to me, since I didn't hear from her, maybe she's closer to her than us."

Asked if she had been informed she would lose her committee assignments, Cheney said she had not.

The Wyoming Republican's appointment to the panel, and the warning from McCarthy, underscores the sharp and growing differences between the two parties over the insurrection. Many Republicans remain loyal to Trump and are loath to spend time reviewing the attack by his supporters. GOP leaders are working to shape the narrative about the committee's work, complaining that it will be dominated by Democrats even though the Republicans scuttled an earlier attempt to form a bipartisan commission.

The House voted to form the 13-member panel Wednesday over the objections of 190 Republicans. Cheney, who was ousted from GOP leadership this year over her criticism of Trump, was one of only two Republicans who supported forming the committee. Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger was the other.

It is unclear when the other five members of the panel will be appointed. The resolution specifies that they will be named after Pelosi consults with McCarthy, and GOP leaders have not said whether Republicans will even participate.

In addition to Thompson, the other Democratic members of the panel will be House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff, House Administration Committee Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren, and Reps. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, Elaine Luria of Virginia, Stephanie Murphy of Florida and Pete Aguilar of California. Raskin led the House prosecution in Trump's second impeachment trial, which came in the weeks after the insurrection. The former president was eventually acquitted by the Senate.

Murphy, a moderate Democrat whose family fled Vietnam to come to the United States, said she is "acutely aware that democracy is fragile" and feels a responsibility to make sure the Jan. 6th insurrection doesn't happen again. She described hiding in an office near the Capitol's West Front on that day, listening to police officers battle the insurrectionists.

"We are committed to proceeding in a nonpartisan, a political way that honors our democracy," she said of the committee.

After the meeting with Pelosi, Thompson told reporters that they hoped to hold their first hearing with those officers who fought the protesters "as a positive statement to the men and women who put their lives on the line."

Thompson said he was staying in town as the committee sets up office space and hires staff, saying the investigations could unfold in public hearings or closed-door interviews. He did not rule out issuing subpoenas for testimony, if necessary, and made clear the committee's work would continue if Republicans choose not to participate.

Asked when the work would begin, he quipped, "about 30 minutes ago."

It's unclear whether the panel would call McCarthy to testify, or others who are publicly known to have spoken with Trump during the run-up to the siege and as the attack unfolded. He seemed to indicate Trump himself would not be called to testify.

"I think there's a lot of other things that we have to do," Thompson told reporters.

As one of only 10 Republicans — and the only member of GOP leadership — who voted for Trump's 2nd impeachment, Cheney has separated herself from most of her Republican colleagues in recent months by directly blaming the former president for the insurrection.

She accused Trump of betraying the Constitution by fomenting the attack, saying he "summoned this mob, assembled the mob, and lit the flame of this attack."

The impeachment resolution blamed Trump for the siege because of his falsehoods about the election and for his words to supporters ahead of the insurrection, including telling them to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat to Biden.

The gap between Cheney, the daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, and many of her Republican colleagues has grown only wider and more bitter in recent weeks. She withstood a February effort by conservatives to remove her from her No. 3 post, but was finally dumped in May in a voice vote of GOP lawmakers that underscored Trump's hold on the party.

Though she's had a lower profile since leaving her leadership post and her political future is unclear, Cheney has remained in Congress and continued speaking out against the former president.

McCarthy, meanwhile, is facing pressure to take the investigation seriously from the police officers who responded to the attack — dozens of whom suffered injuries that day. Several officers sat in the gallery and watched Wednesday's vote, and some expressed surprise afterward that so many Republicans opposed it.

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.

Judge orders release of Wisconsin woman in Slender Man case

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — A Wisconsin judge on Thursday ordered the release of a woman who has spent 3 1/2 years in a state mental health facility after being convicted of stabbing her classmate to please the Slender Man character.

Anissa Weier, 19, was sentenced to 25 years at the Winnebago Mental Health Institute in December 2017. She argued in a petition for conditional release that she's no longer a threat to anyone.

She won't be allowed to go free immediately, however. Waukesha County Judge Michael Bohren gave state officials 60 days to draw up a conditional release plan and sent Weier back to the mental hospital pending another hearing on Sept. 10.

In addition to the conditions of release, Weier will be assigned state Department of Health Services case managers to track her progress until she's 37 years old, the length of her commitment.

The May 2014 stabbing happened after Weier and friend Morgan Geyser lured classmate Payton Leutner into the woods at a Waukesha park following a sleepover. Geyser stabbed Leutner multiple times as Weier encouraged Geyser to inflict the injuries. All three girls were 12 years old at the time.

Weier and Geyser left Leutner for dead, but she crawled out of the woods and was found by a passing bicyclist. She suffered 19 stab wounds and barely survived.

Weier and Geyser told investigators they stabbed Leutner because they thought Slender Man was real. They said they thought attacking her would make them his servants and keep him from killing their families.

When Weier petitioned Bohren for conditional release in March, she said she had exhausted all her treatment options at Winnebago and she needed to rejoin society. She vowed she'd never let herself "become a weapon again" and promised to comply with whatever conditions Bohren imposed.

Prosecutors countered in court filings that Weier is still immature and susceptible to dangerous influences.

They said she attracts people with "myriad psychological issues of their own" and there's no guarantee she won't attack someone again.

But Bohren found prosecutors failed to prove Weier remains a threat and that nothing suggests she'll hurt people again, according to online court records documenting Thursday's hearing.

Asked via email for comment on Weier's reaction to the judge's decision, her attorney, Maura McMahon, said only that Weier was led out of the courtroom "pretty quickly."

Bohren sentenced Geyser in February 2018 to 40 years in a mental health facility. She has argued that her case should have been heard in juvenile court but has gotten no traction. An appellate court ruled last year that the case was properly heard in adult court. The state Supreme Court in January refused to review that decision.

'Waiting is unbearable': Biden consoles Surfside families

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — President Joe Biden drew on his own experiences with grief and loss to comfort families affected by the Florida condo collapse, telling them to "never give up hope" even as the search for survivors paused early Thursday, a week after the building came down.

Addressing some of the families touched by the tragedy, Biden spoke in deeply personal terms as he offered his prayers and support in the private meeting.

"I just wish there was something I could do to ease the pain," he said in a video posted on Instagram by Jacqueline Patoka, a woman who was close to a couple and their daughter who are still missing. .

Few public figures connect as powerfully on grief as Biden, who lost his first wife and baby daughter in a car collision and later an adult son to brain cancer. In the first months of his term, he has drawn on that empathy to console those who have lost loved ones, including the more than 600,000 who have died in the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a quiet voice freighted with emotion, Biden on Thursday described his own despair at having to wait to find out about how family fared after a crisis like the one experienced in Surfside. He spent more than three hours privately speaking with those grieving, addressing the group first and then moving family to family to listen to their stories. Biden spoke of wanting to switch places with a lost or missing loved one and lamented that "the waiting, the waiting, is unbearable."

"The people you may have lost — they're gonna be with you your whole life," he told the families. "A part of your soul, a part of who you are."

Biden told the families that it can be "harder to grieve in public than it is in private, so I know there's an extra burden on you all."

"But I promise you: I still believe in prayer," he said. "You're in my prayers."

The president, whose remarks were translated into Spanish, urged the families to "never give up hope," even as the search and rescue operation paused early due to structural concerns with the remaining portion of the building.

Attendees could be seen with tears in their eyes as Biden closed out his remarks, and he and wife, Jill, spent the next few hours visiting privately with the families. He later told reporters that he was amazed by the families' "resilience, their absolute commitment, their willingness to do whatever it took to find an answer" as to what happened.

He said the families asked him the most "gut-wrenching" questions, including whether there was any hope of finding survivors or whether they would be able to recover the bodies of loved ones.

Recalling the car accident that killed his wife and daughter and badly injured his two sons, Biden spoke about his boys' uncertain fate, saying "it's bad enough to lose somebody but the hard part, the really hard part, is to not know whether they'll survive or not"

Biden, responding to what appeared to be the deadliest single-day calamity of his young presidency, also met first responders hunting for survivors in the rubble in Surfside before the pause in the search. Later, he and the first lady stopped by a memorial wall covered in flowers and photos of the missing, placing a

bouquet next to a crayon drawing that read "I love you."

The Bidens arrived in Florida a week after the collapse of the 12-story Champlain Towers South beachfront condominium killed at least 18 people and left 145 missing. Hundreds of first responders and search-and-rescue personnel have been painstakingly searching the pancaked rubble for potential signs of life. No one has been rescued since the first hours after the collapse.

"This is life and death," Biden said at a briefing from officials about the collapse. "We can do it, just the simple act of everyone doing what needs to be done, makes a difference."

The president said he believed the federal government has "the power to pick up 100% of the cost" of the search and cleanup and urged local officials to turn to Washington for assistance.

"You all know it, because a lot of you have been through it as well," Biden said. "There's gonna be a lot of pain and anxiety and suffering and even the need for psychological help in the days and months that follow. And so, we're not going anywhere."

Biden was briefed on the situation with Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava, as well as the state's two Republican senators, Marco Rubio and Rick Scott. The mayor, a Democrat, saluted the efforts to cross party lines in an "unprecedented, devastating disaster" and said the unified government and community response "is what gives us hope."

DeSantis, a rumored Republican 2024 presidential candidate, told Biden the "cooperation has been great," declaring that the administration has "not only been supportive at the federal level, but we've had no bureaucracy."

As Biden pledged federal help and repeatedly pointed to the bipartisan nature of the response, he touched DeSantis' hand to underscore the point.

"You know what's good about this?" Biden asked. "It lets the nation know we can cooperate. That's really important."

Biden then met first responders who have worked around the clock on a rescue effort that has stretched into its second week in oppressive heat and humidity and frequent summer storms.

"What you're doing here is incredible, having to deal with the uncertainty," said Biden, as he offered profuse thanks to those who have been working at the site.

Biden said the cause of the sudden collapse remained under investigation. The National Institute of Standards and Technology, which sent a team of scientists and engineers to the site, launched an investigation.

And early Thursday, the White House said the Federal Emergency Management Agency deployed 60 staff members and an additional 400 personnel across five search and rescue teams at the request of local officials. FEMA also awarded $20 million to the state's Division of Emergency Management to help deal with unexpected emergency measures surrounding the collapse.

Biden's day was spent entirely in a hotel about a mile north of the building site. The White House emphasized that it was being careful to coordinate with officials on the ground to ensure that Biden's visit didn't do anything to distract from the search and rescue effort.

Still, not everyone welcomed Biden's visit.

"I think it was a terrible idea for Biden to come," said Soriya Cohen, whose husband, Dr. Brad Cohen, and his brother are missing. "I am sure he wanted to see it firsthand. I am sure he had pure intentions but it's a very, very congested road."

Cohen, who said she supported former President Donald Trump in last year's election, expressed concern that Biden's visit had "the attention taken away" from those still trapped in the rubble.

Cohen's daughter has been praying for her missing father's safety. When Biden heard her story he asked to see the daughter and gave her a hug.

NFL fines Washington $10M after misconduct investigation

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Sports Writer

The NFL has fined the Washington Football Team $10 million and owner Dan Snyder is stepping away from day-to-day operations for several months after an independent investigation found the organization's workplace "highly unprofessional," especially for women.

The team was not stripped of any draft picks and no formal suspensions were handed out as part of the league's discipline that was announced Thursday stemming from lawyer Beth Wilkinson's investigation that began last summer.

The investigation, commissioner by the club amid allegations from employees and taken over by the league, revealed that ownership and senior officials paid little attention to sexual harassment and other workplace issues. NFL special counsel for investigations Lisa Friel described it as a culture of fear.

"The culture at the club was very toxic, and it fell far short of the NFL's values and we hold ownership to a higher standard," Friel said.

Lawyers representing 40 former Washington employees slammed the NFL for choosing to protect Snyder and ignoring requests to make the report public, calling the fine "pocket change."

"This is truly outrageous and is a slap in the face to the hundreds of women and former employees who came forward in good faith and at great personal risk to report a culture of abuse at all levels of the team, including by Snyder himself," lawyers Lisa Banks and Debra Katz said in a statement.

"The NFL has effectively told survivors in this country and around the world that it does not care about them or credit their experiences."

The league said Wilkinson interviewed more than 150 people, including current and former employees. Friel said individual allegations were not made part of Wilkinson's findings because of confidentiality agreements requested by many people and that there was no written report, only an oral presentation.

Snyder said his wife Tanya will be in charge for the "next several months" while he focuses on efforts for a new stadium and other business ventures. Tanya Snyder was named co-CEO on Tuesday. The NFL made no mention of Snyder being formally suspended.

Janet Nova, the league's deputy general counsel for media and business affairs, said Dan Snyder stepping away for this period of time — through the fall — was "voluntary" and not a mandate. Tanya Snyder will represent Washington at all league functions.

Banks and Katz called Tanya Snyder's promotion a "shallow attempt to show progress without making any meaningful changes to the organization."

Wilkinson recommended establishing protocols for reporting harassment, a disciplinary action plan and regular training for employees. She also said the cheerleading team — which is now a co-ed dance team as part of an organizational overhaul of game-day entertainment — needed to be protected.

The league praised Snyder for hiring Ron Rivera as coach in early 2020 and Jason Wright as team president last summer among those changes to improve the organization's culture.

"Over the past 18 months, Dan and Tanya have recognized the need for change and have undertaken important steps to make the workplace comfortable and dignified for all employees," Commissioner Roger Goodell said in a statement. "Those changes, if sustained and built upon, should allow the club to achieve its goal of having a truly first-tier workplace."

Friel said Wilkinson was not tasked with making any recommendations about Dan Snyder selling the team or being suspended.

"I was addressing the accountability as we relayed it in the release that the Commissioner has imposed and which he feels is the best way to address the findings that were communicated to us from the investigation and part of that is to ensure that the cultural changes that have happened over the last 18 months are sustained going forward," Friel said.

Snyder said in a statement he agrees with the commissioner's decisions and is "committed to implementing his investigation's important recommendations."

"I have learned a lot in the past few months about how my club operated, and the kind of workplace that we had. It is now clear that the culture was not what it should be, but I did not realize the extent of the problems, or my role in allowing that culture to develop and continue," Snyder said. "I know that as the owner I am ultimately responsible for the workplace."

Among Iraqis, the name Rumsfeld evokes nation's destruction

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — When he heard on the news that Donald Rumsfeld had died, Ali Ridha al-Tamimi and his wife sat down with their four children and told them: "This is the person who ruined our country."

"He destroyed many families. And did it under the cover of liberation," Tamimi later told The Associated Press. "I will never forgive him for the pain he caused us."

The heated emotions are shared by many in Iraq, where the name Rumsfeld is synonymous with the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein — and deaths, arrests and torture that followed. The dark chapter in Iraq's history still echoes in the daily lives of Iraqis today.

Rumsfeld, the defense secretary for President George W. Bush, was one of the architects of the invasion that ousted Saddam on what turned out to be baseless accusations he was hiding weapons of mass destruction.

Americans and their allies failed to plan much for what came next, and disbanded Iraqi security forces as one of their first steps — leading Iraqis to hold Rumsfeld and other American leaders responsible for years of unremitting sectarian bloodletting, extremist attacks and endless car bombings.

Rumsfeld is also linked to the abuse and torture of detainees in U.S. custody in the infamous Abu Ghraib prison west of Baghdad — an episode Rumsfeld later referred to as his darkest hour as defense secretary.

The prison was known during Saddam's rule as one of the main facilities for jailing and executing his opponents. After Saddam, Abu Ghraib became notorious once again, for the 2004 scandal over shocking abuses of detainees by American guards.

When news broke of Rumsfeld's death in the United States on Wednesday at 88, many Iraqis took to social media to express lingering anger and bitterness. They aired memories of the dark era in Iraq that Bush and Rumsfeld represent.

Some tweeted: "Rot in Hell." Others described Rumsfeld as a war criminal.

Al-Tamimi said he holds Rumsfeld personally responsible for his own detention in 2006, on suspicion of undertaking in anti-U.S. activities, including, he said, allegations of inciting against the U.S. presence in Iraq. Speaking to the AP over the phone on Thursday, he would not elaborate.

He was held in Camp Bucca prison in southern Iraq for two years without a conviction. His son was just over a month old when he was detained. "He killed me while I was alive," al-Tamimi said of Rumsfeld.

Al-Tamimi's son was growing up for those two years "not knowing he had a father or where he was," he said. Al-Tamimi was later found innocent by an Iraqi court and freed in 2008.

On social media, Iraqis shared stories of what Americans called a war of liberation gone horribly wrong for their country.

Muntader al-Zaidi, an Iraqi journalist known for throwing his shoes at Bush during a 2008 news conference to vent his outrage at the U.S.-led invasion, tweeted: "He is gone and Baghdad remains."

In Washington, Rumsfeld's former colleagues remembered him as simultaneously smart and combative, patriotic and politically cunning, with a career under four presidents that was tainted by the disastrous invasion of Iraq, for which Rumsfeld served as one of the most visible and vocal supporters.

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

But the memories of those whose lives and nation were changed by the U.S. administration's actions could not have been more different.

"Rumsfeld was a black mark on the history of Iraq. He brought the corrupt politicians that now control Iraq," said Ihsan Alshamary, an Iraqi researcher in political affairs. He said Rumsfeld is responsible not just for the U.S. occupation of Iraq, but for decisions that had calamitous effects on Iraq's future.

"As an Iraqi, I am relieved that one of the people responsible for the deaths of thousands, if not tens of thousands of Iraqis, is now dead. He will face his maker and have to answer for his transgressions in this life," said Jawad al-Tai, a 45-year-old living in Baghdad.

"He didn't liberate us. This is a myth. He killed us and told us to thank him for it," al-Tai said.

In the wake of the invasion, many Iraqis were grateful to have Saddam removed by the Americans, and initially hopeful for their country's future.

But that changed as it became clear that the Americans were unsure how to proceed after gutting the Iraqi government and security forces — or how to deal with the violent Sunni extremist groups, militants and and Shiite militias, some backed by neighboring Iran, that sprang up in the resulting security vacuum.

Sajad al-Rikabi, a 38-year-old Iraqi activist who participated in mass protests against government corruption in 2019, said he holds the U.S. responsible for the broken country that is Iraq today, and the post-war political class that now rules the land.

"The only way I will say "Rest in Peace" for him, is if the U.S. comes in and dismantles the system he created," al-Rikabi said of Rumsfeld. "All that we are protesting now came because of his policies."

What's in a tag? Twitter revamps misinformation labels

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

Last May, as Twitter was testing warning labels for false and misleading tweets, it tried out the word "disputed" with a small focus group. It didn't go over well.

"People were like, well, who's disputing it?" said Anita Butler, a San Francisco-based design director at Twitter who has been working on the labels since December 2019. The word "disputed," it turns out, had the opposite effect of what Twitter intended, which was to "increase clarity and transparency," she said.

The labels are an update from those Twitter used for election misinformation before and after the 2020 presidential contest. Those labels drew criticism for not doing enough to keep people from spreading obvious falsehoods. Now, Twitter is overhauling them in an attempt to make them more useful and easier to notice, among other things. Beginning Thursday, the company will start testing the redesigns with some U.S. users on the desktop version of its app.

Experts say such labels — used by Facebook as well — can be helpful to users. But they can also allow social media platforms to sidestep the more difficult work of content moderation — that is, deciding whether or not to remove posts, photos and videos that spread conspiracies and falsehoods.

"It's the best of both worlds" for the companies, said Lisa Fazio, a Vanderbilt University psychology professor who studies how false claims spread online. "It's seen as doing something about misinformation without making content decisions."

While there is some evidence that labels can be effective, she added, social media companies don't make public enough data for outside researchers to study how well they work. Twitter only labels three types of misinformation: "manipulated media," such as videos and audio that have been deceptively altered in ways that could cause real-world harm; election and voting-related misinformation and false or misleading tweets related to COVID-19.

One thing that's clear, though, is that they need to be noticeable in a way that prevents eyes from glossing over them in a phone scroll. It's a problem similar to the one faced by designers of cigarette warning labels. Twitter's election labels, for instance, were blue, which is also the platform's regular color scheme. So they tended to blend in.

The proposed designs added orange and red so they stand out more. While this can help, Twitter says its tests also showed that if a label is too eye-catching, it leads to more people to retweet and reply to the original tweet. Not what you want with misinformation.

Then there's the wording. When "disputed" didn't go over well, Twitter went with "stay informed." In the current test, tweets that get this label will get an orange icon and people will still be able to reply or retweet them. Such a label might go on a tweet containing an untruth that could be, but isn't necessarily immediately harmful.

More serious misinformation — for instance, a tweet claiming that vaccines cause autism — would likely get a stronger label, with the word "misleading" and a red exclamation point. It won't be possible to reply to, like or retweet these messages.

"One of the things we learned was that words that build trust were important and also words that that were not judgmental, non-confrontational, friendly," Butler said.

This makes sense from Twitter's perspective, Fazio said. After all, "a lot of people don't like to see the

platforms have a heavy hand," she added.

As a result, she said, it's hard to tell if Twitter's main goal is to avoid making people angry and alienating them from Twitter instead of simply helping them understand "what is and isn't misinformation."

Princes William, Harry unveil Princess Diana's statue

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Princes William and Harry put aside their differences Thursday to unveil a statue of Princess Diana, cementing their late mother's place in royal history on what would have been her 60th birthday.

Diana's three siblings joined the brothers for the private ceremony in the Sunken Garden at London's Kensington Palace, a place the princess once found solace. It was only the second time the brothers have appeared together in public since Harry stepped aside from royal duties over a year ago.

The statue, which shows a larger-than-life Diana surrounded by three children, was commissioned by the brothers in 2017. The style of her dress is meant to evoke the final period of her life, when she gained confidence in her humanitarian work.

"Today, on what would have been our mother's 60th birthday, we remember her love, strength and character – qualities that made her a force for good around the world, changing countless lives for the better," William and Harry said in a joint statement. "Every day, we wish she were still with us, and our hope is that this statue will be seen forever as a symbol of her life and her legacy."

The statue is "immensely significant" because it underscores the brothers' effort to portray Diana as someone who connected with the people and modernized the monarchy, said Robert Lacey, a historian and author of "Battle of Brothers: William, Harry and the Inside Story of a Family in Tumult." Traditionalists had criticized her as having undermined centuries of tradition.

"Statues are not popular or fashionable or even even politically correct things these days," Lacey said. "So the fact that Diana, once a rebel, the royal outcast, is being elevated with her own plinth and position … says a great deal about the way the British monarchy is moving on and will be moving on."

Royal watchers who hoped the unveiling ceremony would provide insight into the state of William and Harry's strained relationship were likely to have been disappointed. Video released after the event showed the brothers entering the garden together before talking with family members and then pulling two ropes to remove the cover from the statue.

In their only other recent appearance together the pair seemed to chat amiably after the funeral for their grandfather, Prince Philip. But later reports indicated there was little progress in easing the rift.

Links between the brothers have been painfully strained in recent months, with William defending the royal family from allegations of racism and insensitivity made by Harry and his wife, Meghan, from their new home in Southern California.

Harry stepped back from royal duties last year and moved his family to the U.S. in search of a more peaceful existence that he could better control. William has pressed on with royal life and the never-ending demands that accompany his role as second-in-line to the throne.

The relationship became more tense in March when Harry and Meghan gave an interview to U.S. talk show host Oprah Winfrey.

Harry confirmed rumors that he and his brother had been growing apart, saying "the relationship is 'space' at the moment" — though he added that "time heals all things, hopefully." Harry also told Winfrey that his father, Prince Charles, didn't accept his calls for a time.

The couple revealed that before the birth of their first child, an unidentified member of the royal family had expressed concern about how dark his skin might be. Days after the broadcast, William responded to questions called out by reporters, stating that his was "very much not a racist family."

But Diana's memory is something that continues to unite the princes.

Both William and Harry seek to control the way their mother is portrayed, highlighting her philanthropy and common touch while discounting the controversies, said historian Ed Owens, author of "The Family

Firm: Monarchy, Mass Media and the British Public 1932-1953," which examines the royal family's public relations strategy.

"I think that they both share a ... common view of Diana, which they both seek to promote," Owens said. "The re-imagining of Diana that is taking place via the princes at the moment is entirely complementary. And I think for the sake of Thursday, bygones will be bygones."

Those touched by the life of the preschool teacher turned princess have been remembering her ahead of birthday, recalling the complicated royal rebel who left an enduring imprint on the House of Windsor.

Not far away from the new statue, Diana fan Abdul Daoud has enshrined the memory of the princess at his Café Diana, which opened in 1989.

The café's walls groan with pictures of Diana. There she is meeting Mother Teresa. Or holding flowers. Or in a tiara.

Daoud wants people to remember the beauty and kindness of the princess, who would come in for cappuccino.

Aware that Diana liked lilies, Daoud would send her flowers to mark her birthday. One of his proudest possessions is a letter of thanks she once sent him.

These days he marks her birthday in his own way, going to Kensington Palace to lay lilies at the gates of her former home.

"This is my duty — my duty always to carry on her legacy," Daoud said of her good works and kindness. "I want to help people remember her ... the best way —like I remembered her."

At Communist Party centenary, Xi says China won't be bullied

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 polices, 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 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 Shaocheng, 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.

Meghan McCain says she's quitting 'The View' in late July

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Meghan McCain, whose outspoken conservative views have frequently led to verbal fireworks and compelling television on ABC's "The View," said Thursday that she is quitting the daytime talk show after four years.

McCain, daughter of the late Arizona Sen. John McCain, announced on the air that she would leave after the show's season ends in late July.

"I will be here another month, so if you still want to fight a little more, we have four more weeks," Mc-

Cain said.

The 36-year-old commentator is usually the only conservative voice among the cast of five women, and not afraid to mix it up when she disagrees with them. In the past two months, for example, she's had contentious exchanges with lead host Whoopi Goldberg and frequent foil Joy Behar.

The show, invented more than two decades ago by Barbara Walters, has done well in the ratings with a mix of celebrity guests and, most prominently, the combustible "hot topics" session where they kick around the day's news.

Like many television shows during the COVID-19 pandemic, the hosts have been appearing remotely instead of meeting in a New York studio. McCain, married to conservative commentator Ben Domenech and mother of a baby daughter, said she didn't want to leave her life in the Washington area to commute again to work.

"This was not an easy decision," she said. "It took a lot of thought and counsel and prayer."

ABC News said in a statement that it respected and understood her decision, and thanked McCain for her "fierce determination and vast political knowledge and experience."

As the conservative voice on "The View," McCain filled a role where producers had trouble finding the right person after Elisabeth Hasselbeck left in 2013. McCain has said she was going to turn down an offer to join "The View," but her father said it was too good an opportunity to pass up.

Like her father, she's no big fan of former President Donald Trump. But her job often compelled her to explain to her co-hosts what people who supported Trump were thinking.

"This is no shade at women who have been here before, but I knew going in that I couldn't be intimidated by the others and their strong opinions," she told The Associated Press after her first season. "These are all smart, strong women. I had to stay true to my convictions and my politics and not let the physical audience in front of me, which is normally very liberal, or the audience on social media impact my politics. Because a lot of things I say are unpopular."

She rarely backed down, and the words between the hosts frequently became sharp.

That was evident June 17, when McCain criticized President Joe Biden's treatment of CNN reporter Kaitlan Collins at a news conference, for which the president later apologized. Goldberg noted that Biden's predecessor — she refuses to say Trump's name — never apologized, and that lit a fuse igniting a schoolyard brawl. Both hosts later apologized to each other.

In May, Behar took exception when McCain said she didn't hear enough criticism of the spate of antisemitic hate crimes.

"I've been talking about antisemitism on this show for 25 freakin' years," Behar said. "Don't tell me what I'm supposed to be saying, Meghan, OK? You do your thing, we do ours."

Behar noted after McCain's announcement that they've had their fights but also some interesting drinking sessions.

"I have really, really appreciated the fact that you were a formidable opponent in many ways and that you spoke your mind," Behar said. "You're no snowflake, missy."

On her way out, McCain criticized media coverage of "The View," saying the show was covered with deep misogyny and sexism. She said if the show's hosts were five men instead of women, they'd have Pulitzer Prizes.

Does new Alzheimer's drug work? Answers may miss 2030 target

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — When a controversial Alzheimer's drug won U.S. approval, surprise over the decision quickly turned to shock at how long it might take to find out if it really works — nine years.

Drugmaker Biogen has until 2030 to complete a study confirming whether its new drug Aduhelm truly slows the brain-destroying disease. That's under the terms of the Food and Drug Administration's conditional approva l of the drug, a decision that has been praised by patients as overdue and condemned by the agency's own outside experts.

But both camps agree: 2030 is far too long to wait for answers on the $56,000-a-year drug.

"We think nine years is unacceptable and our expectation is that it will happen in a much shorter time frame," said Maria Carrillo of the Alzheimer's Association, an advocacy group that pushed for approval but now wants the FDA to set a quicker deadline.

Other experts warn that the 2030 timeline could slip if patients balk at enrolling in a new study for a drug that's already available. And the focus on Aduhelm — the first new Alzheimer's drug in 18 years — could steer volunteers away from testing of other promising treatments.

"If someone can go to their physician and get the FDA-approved drug, why would they go into a trial where they risk getting a placebo?" said Donna Wilcock, an Alzheimer's researcher at the University of Kentucky.

To establish a new drug's safety and effectiveness, researchers compare results in people who get the treatment to a similar group of people who don't. That generally means half of the volunteers are randomly assigned to get a fake treatment instead of the real thing.

Biogen already conducted two such large studies of its drug, which requires monthly IVs. The studies took about four years to run and followed participants for about 1 1/2 years. Both were stopped early when it seemed the drug wasn't working, and the results were so mired by flaws and inconsistencies that the FDA deemed them too weak to support approval on the basis of slowing the disease.

Instead, the agency took another approach and gave the drug conditional approval based on a promising sign: its success in getting rid of a buildup of sticky plaque in the brain that is thought to play a role in Alzheimer's disease.

Under its so-called accelerated approval program, the FDA is requiring Biogen to conduct a new study definitively answering whether Aduhelm's effect on plaque truly slows mental decline in patients. Other Alzheimer's drugs on the market only temporarily ease symptoms.

The FDA has not detailed how the 2030 target came about, or why such a distant deadline was granted for a drug that could be given to millions of patients in the coming years, adding billions to the nation's health care bill.

"Alzheimer's trials take time to complete," the FDA said in a statement responding to questions about the study. The agency added that it might be possible to answer key questions about Aduhelm before the study's completion and that Biogen is expected to submit results "as soon as feasible."

But the agency's critics point out that nine years is among the longest follow-up periods the agency grants drugmakers. Drugs approved under similar circumstances typically get six years. And, if anything, those studies tend to run behind schedule, not finish early. If follow-up studies don't have positive results, the FDA can withdraw approval, though it rarely does so.

"Just because it says nine years doesn't mean the evidence will be available in nine years," said Joshua Wallach, a medical researcher at Yale's School of Public Health. "There's all of this back and forth discussion that can happen with FDA that can delay completion."

Biogen isn't scheduled to submit its initial proposal for the study to FDA until October. The Massachusetts-based company said in a statement that large Alzheimer's trials often take six or seven years and that FDA-mandated studies can take even longer.

"We are working with urgency and putting resources and plans in place," to complete the trial ahead of schedule, the company stated.

Meanwhile, Alzheimer's specialists like Dr. Samuel Gandy are seeing patients in other drug studies ask about dropping out so they can get Aduhelm.

"They've all said, 'You know, I can't stand the idea of being on placebo,'" said Gandy, who has heard from more than 20 families interested in the drug at New York's Mount Sinai hospital.

After he explained the drug's unknown benefits and potential side effects — including brain swelling and bleeding — several decided against it. But other patients remain interested.

Post-approval studies have become an increasingly common FDA requirement since the 1990s, as regulators have accelerated their reviews of drugs for HIV, cancer and other deadly diseases. But the agency's

mixed record of tracking those requirements and penalizing companies that don't meet them has been chronicled in government and academic studies.

The case of a widely debated drug for muscular dystrophy illustrates how the system can go awry.

In 2016, the FDA approved the first-of-a-kind drug from Sarepta Therapeutics based on preliminary results that it might help treat the degenerative disease by boosting a muscle-building protein.

As with Aduhelm, the approval was opposed by FDA's outside advisers who said there was scant evidence the drug actually improved patient health or quality of life. But the FDA granted approval on the condition that Sarepta complete a confirmatory study by May 2021.

The trial, though, is still getting underway after "multiple challenges in the overall planning and startup," according to the FDA's website. The new target date is 2026, a decade after the drug was allowed on the market.

A Sarepta spokeswoman said the company spent years negotiating study details with the FDA, which required testing a higher dose.

In the meantime, Sarepta has won approval for two other dystrophy drugs based on similar results that also require follow-up trials, which the company says are already well underway.

"The FDA took a risk with Sarepta and I think they're being burned by it now," said Dr. Joseph Ross of Yale.

Ross and his colleagues have shown that at least a quarter of follow-up results never get published, leaving questions for physicians and patients.

The results from Biogen's two Aduhelm studies have yet to appear in a medical journal. The company says it is "working diligently to publish our data."

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 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 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.

Spokesperson Christina Freundlich said McAuliffe has made no new investments in Carlyle since 2008, although he was invested in the company through 2016. She described him as a passive investor with no role in crafting the deals, noting 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 opened 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.

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

VIRUS DIARY: The unfinished business of a funeral deferred

By SCOTT STROUD Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — It dawned on me recently at the Nashville airport that the pandemic wouldn't end at the same time for everybody. I had expected a trickle of travelers, but the airport was jammed. Most people had masks, but social distancing wasn't a thing.

I was flying to check on my mother. Still, in my mind it would be awhile before we could settle into whatever "normal" is going to look like going forward.

There is a lot of unfinished business in the world: graduations, anniversaries, and so on. Pent-up demand has driven airfares higher. People travel for different reasons, but many have been moving around freely for months now, vaccinated or not.

And there will be funerals. Closure comes hard when you are not able to say goodbye in person. That's the unfinished business for my family.

My wife's father, Bernard Francis Lyons Jr., died of COVID just before Christmas. His life ended in the company of nurses at a long-term care facility near our house. We last spoke to him by video chat.

My wife and her sister chose not to try to pull off a virtual memorial, which seemed both logistically challenging and somehow not enough. I'm sure we're not alone in feeling that a life as significant as Bernie's deserved better than to be remembered as one of more than a half-million Americans whose lives were

taken by this terrible affliction.

And so, later this year, we will drive to his native New England to honor him.

Bernie Lyons was a working-class Irish-American from Rhode Island who earned a doctorate in psychology and spent his adult life healing troubled children in Knoxville, Tennessee.

He was an elaborate storyteller, prone to exaggerating the accomplishments of the people he cared about. His stories grew more spectacular with each telling. They arose from the accomplishments of his two daughters, from his love of opera, or from whatever eclectic field of study he happened to be reading about, from the sex lives of jellyfish to weather patterns in Antarctica.

His wife, Anne, died six years earlier, and Bernie spent his last years in long-term care in Nashville as his memory slipped. But his gentle nature remained, and we'd often find him with another resident or a staff member, chatting amiably. Some of the female residents were sweet on him.

My wife and her sister will remember Bernie most vividly at the beach at Weekapaug, Rhode Island. He and Anne spent their summers there in the Dunes Trailer Park, a humble enclave tucked between beach houses and resorts.

That beach was a magical place for my wife's cousins, who descended every time we made the trip. We'd bodysurf the waves together, play touch football on the beach, and have dinner under the awning beside their trailer. Bernie presided over all of it, regaling us with stories, music and laughter. Sometimes we'd play "Stump Uncle Bernie," dreaming up the most preposterous questions we could. He always had an answer, though it wasn't necessarily correct.

It will feel good to be together after all this time, and the memorial will be more celebration than mourning. At some point, most likely at dusk, we'll go down to the beach together.

It will be cool there in the fall, but I like to think the spirits of Bernie and Anne will be there, too. It will take no feat of imagination to see them huddled on the wind-weathered lifeguard stand, smoking and talking quietly.

Bernie might pause for a moment when he sees us. He might even marvel at how much we all loved him. And then he will turn back to Anne, telling stories that may or may not be true.

Almost all of them will be things she has heard before. And yet they will still make her smile.

Amsterdam mayor apologizes for city fathers' role in slavery

By ALEKSANDAR FURTULA and MIKE CORDER Associated Press

AMSTERDAM (AP) — The mayor of Amsterdam apologized Thursday for the extensive involvement of the Dutch capital's former governors in the global slave trade, saying the moment had come for the city to confront its grim history.

Debate about the role of Amsterdam's city fathers in the slave trade has been going on for years, but it has gained more attention amid the global reckoning with racial injustice that followed the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

"It is time to engrave the great injustice of colonial slavery into our city's identity. With big-hearted and unconditional recognition," Mayor Femke Halsema said. "Because we want to be a government for those for whom the past is painful and its legacy a burden."

While apologizing, she also stressed that "not a single Amsterdammer alive today is to blame for the past."

The Dutch government has in the past expressed deep regret for the nation's historic role in slavery, but has stopped short of a formal apology. Prime Minister Mark Rutte said last year that such an apology could polarize society.

An independent commission that discussed the issue in recent months issued a report Thursday advising the central government to apologize, saying it would "help heal historic suffering."

Interior Minister Kajsa Ollongren attended the ceremony in Amsterdam but did not comment directly on the call for a government apology.

Black activist and actor Patrick Mathurin said some in the Netherlands try to ignore the country's colonial past, "but through our activism, we forced them to look at it. And also what happened, of course, with

George Floyd made it all ... evolve faster."

Halsema said history casts a shadow that reaches into the present day.

"The city officials and the ruling elite who, in their hunger for profit and power, participated in the trade in enslaved people, in doing so entrenched a system of oppression based on skin color and race," she said. "The past from which our city still draws its distinctive commercial spirit is therefore indivisible from the persistent racism that still festers."

She closed her speech with the words: "On behalf of the College of Mayor and Alderpersons, I apologize." Cheers and applause erupted from the small group of invited guests sitting on socially distanced white chairs.

The apology came during an annual ceremony marking the abolition of slavery in Dutch colonies in Suriname and the Dutch Antilles on July 1, 1863. The anniversary is now known as Keti Koti, which means Chains Broken.

Activists say many people who had been enslaved were forced to work without pay for their former masters for a further decade.

Research into the involvement of Amsterdam's city fathers in the slave trade and slavery was commissioned by the municipality in 2019.

Halsema said it showed that "from the end of the 16th century until well into the 19th century, Amsterdam's involvement was direct, worldwide, large-scale, multifaceted and protracted."

Amsterdam municipality is not alone in apologizing for its role in slavery. In 2007, then-London Mayor Ken Livingstone made an emotional speech apologizing for the city's involvement. And a year ago the Bank of England apologized for the links some of its past governors had with slavery.

Halsema doesn't have to leave her official residence on one of Amsterdam's mansion-lined canals to be reminded of the city's deeply rooted ties to slavery.

The residence was formerly the home of Paulus Godin, who was a board member of the West-India Company and director of the Society of Suriname that were both heavily involved in slavery in the 17th century.

A stone plaque outside the house recalls that history and calls the slave trade and slavery crimes against humanity.

Amsterdam municipality says that former city fathers in the time that slavery was rife in Dutch colonies were deeply involved in the trade.

"Mayors were also owners of plantations or traded in people. They helped, through their public office, to maintain slavery because they profited from it," the city says on its website.

The Dutch national museum, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, is currently staging a major exhibition entitled simply "Slavery" examining the country's role in the global slave trade.

Thursday's anniversary is the Dutch equivalent of Juneteenth in the United States, which President Joe Biden made a federal holiday earlier this month. There are calls to make the Dutch day of commemoration a national holiday.

The U.S. federal government has not apologized for slavery. The U.S. House and Senate both have passed resolutions apologizing for slavery and racial segregation laws.

During a press conference in 2007, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said he was sorry for Britain's role in slavery, which he called "entirely unacceptable." But eight years later during a trip to Jamaica, Prime Minister David Cameron sidestepped calls for an apology and ruled out paying reparations.

Rebuilding in COVID's awful wake: One small step at a time

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 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.

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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."

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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 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."

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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."

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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."

US jobless claims fall to 364,000, a new pandemic low

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment aid fell again last week to the lowest level since the pandemic struck last year, further evidence that the job market and the broader economy are rebounding rapidly from the coronavirus recession.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that jobless claims dropped by 51,000 to 364,000. Applications for unemployment benefits have fallen more or less steadily since the year began. The rollout of vaccines has sharply reduced new COVID-19 cases, giving consumers the confidence to shop, travel, eat out and attend public events as the economy recovers.

Last week's drop in jobless claims was steeper than economists had expected. Applications for unemployment benefits have now fallen in 10 of the past 12 weeks.

"As life normalizes and the service sector continues to gain momentum, we expect initial jobless claims to remain in a downtrend," said Joshua Shapiro, chief U.S. economist at the consulting firm Maria Fiorini Ramirez.

All that pent-up spending has generated such demand for workers, notably at restaurants and tourism businesses, that many employers have been struggling to fill jobs just as the number of posted openings has reached a record high. But many economists expect hiring to catch up with demand in the coming months, especially as federal unemployment aid programs end and more people pursue jobs.

On Friday, according to the data provider FactSet, the government is expected to report that employers added 675,000 jobs in June. That would be a substantial number but still not at a pace that would allow the economy to quickly regain its pre-pandemic level of employment. The job market remains nearly 7 million jobs short of that level.

Some businesses have complained that expanded federal aid to the unemployed — especially a $300-a-week supplemental benefit, intended to cushion the economic blow from the pandemic — has discouraged

some people from looking for a job.

But other factors, too, are believed to have contributed to the shortage of people seeking work again: Difficulty arranging or affording child care, lingering fears of COVID-19, early retirements by older workers, a slowdown in immigration and a decision by some people to seek new careers rather than return to their old jobs.

Responding to the criticism about the duration of expanded jobless benefits, dozens of states began dropping the expanded federal aid starting last month: Roughly half the states will end the $300 payments. Most of those will also cut off unemployment assistance to the self-employed, gig workers and people who have been out of work for more than six months. Nationally, the $300-a-week federal benefit will end Sept. 6.

The data firm Homebase reported that employment has actually grown more slowly in the states that had dropped the federal benefits than in those that kept it.

The job market's improvement comes against the backdrop of a fast-rebounding economy. Growth for the just-ended April-June quarter is believed to have reached an annual pace of roughly 10%. And according to an index produced by the Conference Board, a private research group, consumer confidence nearly regained its pre-pandemic level in May.

With consumers feeling more confident about spending, the rate of jobless claims, which generally reflects the pace of layoffs, has dwindled over the past several months. The weekly figure had topped 900,000 back in January, when the economy was still struggling to emerge from the recession and employers were retrenching.

Despite the significant improvement since then, claims remain high by historic standards. Before the pandemic flattened the economy in March 2020, the weekly figure typically numbered around 220,000.

All told, 3.47 million people were receiving traditional state unemployment benefits in the week of June 19, up from 3.41 million a week earlier. If you include the federal benefits, 14.7 million were receiving some type of unemployment assistance during the week of June 12, down from 32.1 million a year earlier.

Pandemic tourism: Thailand launches Phuket 'sandbox' plan

By TASSANEE VEJPONGSA and DAVID RISING Associated Press

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.

Navy ditches futuristic railgun, eyes hypersonic missiles

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

BATH, Maine (AP) — The U.S. Navy pulled the plug, for now, on a futuristic weapon that fires projectiles at up to seven times the speed of sound using electricity.

The Navy spent more than a decade developing the electromagnetic railgun and once considered putting them on the stealthy new Zumwalt-class destroyers built at Maine's Bath Iron Works.

But the Defense Department is turning its attention to hypersonic missiles to keep up with China and Russia, and the Navy cut funding for railgun research from its latest budget proposal.

"The railgun is, for the moment, dead," said Matthew Caris, a defense analyst at Avascent Group, a consulting firm.

The removal of funding suggests the Navy saw both challenges in implementing the technology as well as shortcomings in the projectiles' range compared to hypersonic missiles, he said.

The Navy's decision to pause research at year's end frees up resources for hypersonic missiles, directed-energy systems like lasers and electronic warfare systems, said Lt. Courtney Callaghan, a Navy spokesperson.

Information gleaned during testing will be retained in the event the Office of Naval Research wants to pick up where it left off in the future, she said.

All told, the Navy spent about $500 million on research and development, according to Bryan Clark, an analyst at the Hudson Institute.

The technology was close to making the leap from science fiction to reality in the 21st century with the testing of prototypes.

The concept held the possibility of providing an effective weapon at pennies on the dollars compared to smart bombs and missiles.

That's because railguns use electricity instead of gunpowder, or jet or rocket engines, to accelerate a projectile at six or seven times the speed of sound. That creates enough kinetic energy to destroy targets.

But there were a number of problems. Those included the range of about 110 miles in testing. A Navy vessel could not employ the gun without putting itself within range of a barrage of enemy missiles. And its usefulness for missile defense was also limited by range and rate of fire, Clark said.

The idea dates back to the 1940s. But there have always been major hurdles because the parallel rails, or conductors, are subjected to massive electric current and magnetic forces that can cause damage after a few shots, said defense analyst Norman Friedman.

A big question was always whether the gun could stay together during continuous firing, Friedman said.

A normal gun can be fired about 600 times before the barrel has to be refurbished, but the barrel on the railgun prototype had to be replaced after about a dozen or two dozen shots were fired, Clark said.

A few years ago, the Navy was talking about putting the gun on the future USS Lyndon B. Johnson, the last of three stealthy destroyers. It's nearing completion and builder trials at Bath Iron Works.

The 600-foot-long (180-meter-long) warship uses marine turbines similar to those that propel the Boeing 777 to help produce up to 78 megawatts of electricity for use in propulsion, weapons and sensors.

That's more than enough electricity for the railgun, and the ship has space following the cancellation of the advanced gun system, leaving the ship with no conventional cannon-based weapon.

Instead, the Navy is pursuing an offshoot of the railgun, a hypervelocity projectile, that can be fired from existing gun systems.