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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.



Successful opioid addiction treatment slow to catch on in South Dakota

Danielle Ferguson
South Dakota News Watch

South Dakotans battling addiction to opioids are increasingly relying on medication-assisted treatments to overcome their cravings for the dangerous drugs and to avoid potentially deadly overdoses.

However, access to the life-saving medications is limited in South Dakota and some physicians in the state are reluctant to prescribe the drugs that have shown great promise in overcoming opioid abuse. Meanwhile, addiction experts and some law enforcement officials are trying to break down barriers to wider use of the treatments.

Medication-assisted treatments for addiction use drugs approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to alleviate withdrawal symptoms and relieve cravings resulting from chemical imbalances in the body. As the prescription drug treatments take

effect, physical symptoms of addiction will ease, allowing patients to focus on work, relationships and their health. The medications can be taken on a short-term or long-term basis and are increasingly viewed as a successful method of improving the lives and health of people addicted to opioids.

Opioids are a class of addictive drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain relievers legally available by a prescription. Opioids, which have devastated thousands of lives in other states, are not the most widely misused drugs in South Dakota but they are responsible for a majority of fatal overdoses, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Nationally, 70% of all overdose deaths involve an opioid.

While the treatment has been available for decades, access to medication-assisted treatment has gained traction in South Dakota only within the past five years. More than 90,000 drug overdose deaths are estimated to have occurred in the United States from September 2019 to September 2020, the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a 12-month period according to the CDC. Opioid fatalities increased by 55% over the previous 12 months.

South Dakota experienced a more than 20% increase in all drug overdose deaths from 2019 to 2020,



Outpatient therapist Caroline Vernon, left, of the Carroll Institute, therapist Daniel Felix, director of behavioral health, and Dr. James Wilde, who leads the Center for Family Medicine addiction care team, meet with patients receiving medication-assisted treatment for opioid addiction either virtually or in person. Photo: Courtesy of South Dakota State University

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according to an emergency health alert from the CDC in December. About half of the 38 states that track synthetic opioid overdoses reported an increase of at least 50% in those overdose deaths from 2019 to 2020, according to the report. The largest increase in opioid abuse was seen in rural counties in western and midwestern states.

Medication-assisted treatment is considered the most effective way to treat addiction, known as opioid use disorder. Evidence has shown medically supervised withdrawal from opioid addiction is safer than the abstinence-only, or cold turkey approach, according to Avoid Opioid SD.

About 90% of patients who receive the treatment remain free from addiction for more than two years, according to the FDA. Nearly 100% of all people who solely go to traditional drug treatment or rehabilitation will relapse, and many overdose because of misjudged tolerance within six months of release.

"A lot of patients have told us it saves their life," said Dr. Dan Felix, a licensed mental health therapist and director of behavioral health at the Sioux Falls Family Medicine Residency program. "It prevents overdose and relapse. We take a de-stigmatized approach to treatment. Come and be the human that you are."

Janine Crowe, a 35-year-old resident of Sioux Falls, was addicted to opioids for more than a decade and could not shake her addiction until she began a treatment plan that included medications to ease her cravings for painkillers.

"It helps me stay sober," said Crowe. "It helped with my anxiety. It got me out of the mind frame of using drugs."

Medication-assisted treatment can be provided by physicians, physician assistants and nurse practitioners who undergo additional training to be certified with what is called an "X Waiver." Counseling and other care services are usually part of the overall treatment plan, but the medication itself is effective in curbing cravings, Felix said.

Methadone, an opioid, has been used to treat addiction to other opioids for more than 50 years, but it is potent and can only be taken through certified programs. The only facility in South Dakota that can dispense methadone is the Sioux Falls Treatment Center.

Buprenorphine is a more common, safer alternative. It partially activates opioid receptors in the brain, often reducing drug use and protecting patients from overdose by reducing cravings. Buprenorphine, which can be prescribed by a primary care physician, does not put patients in the euphoric and impaired state that makes opioids ripe for abuse.

Some critics of the treatment say it is simply "trading one addiction for another," creating a difficult-to-change negative stigma around addiction treatments that some patients and doctors still cling to, Felix said. That thought can keep patients from seeking help or keep doctors from providing the treatment.

"This is replacing one drug for another; it's replacing one that's going to kill you for one that's going to save your life," Felix said. "People are dying from this epidemic, and we have an amazing cure, yet people are stigmatizing it."

Over the past five years, millions of dollars in federal and state funds have been used to train more health care providers to prescribe appropriate levels of pain medication to avoid addiction. Prevention efforts have been made to educate the public and providers on the potential for opioid abuse.

Between June 2019 and May 2020, the Center for Family Medicine provided MAT education to 58 medical providers or medical students in South Dakota, 10 of whom eventually obtained waivers required to administer the opioid treatment medications. Each year, about 14 pharmacy students in the state receive the training.

As part of Avera Health's Project ECHO — Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes — the Center for Family Medicine has provided training to providers from 66 different health care facilities.

More than 950 people have begun a medication-assisted treatment program at one of the three MAT providers in South Dakota, including the Center for Family Medicine, Project Recovery and Lewis and Clark Behavioral Health, according to the 2020 annual report from the state-led Opioid Abuse Advisory Committee. The committee, formed in 2016, has used more than \$24 million in federal funding to expand education and prevention, increase access to treatment, improve data collection and decrease the overall

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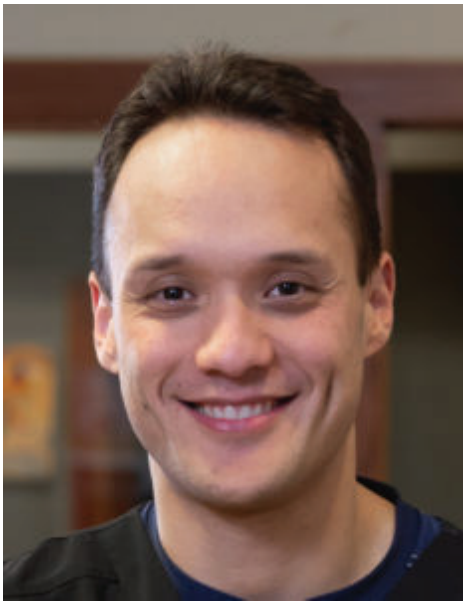
opioid supply across the state.

Even with these efforts, advocates say addiction care is still insufficient in South Dakota.

"South Dakota is kind of behind in its addiction care," said Dr. James Wilde, who leads the Center for Family Medicine addiction care team. "They don't treat the underlying reason for why people overdose."

Medication-assisted treatment was made more available last year during the pandemic when the Drug Enforcement Administration allowed providers to prescribe the medications to patients virtually. Normally, patients must be seen in person before being prescribed one of the medications to treat opioid addiction.

That flexibility will likely end when the State of Emergency surrounding the pandemic ends, reinstating a geographic hurdle for addiction patients in rural South Dakota, where care was and is still not as widely available.



Stephen Tamang

In 2016, only about 12 of South Dakota's 66 counties had at least one health care provider who could prescribe the most-used medication to treat opioid use disorder, buprenorphine, according to the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy. Nationally, fewer than 1 in 10 people have access to this type of care.

"MAT is the gold standard for opioid addiction treatment," said Dr. Stephen Tamang, a family physician for Monument Health and founder of Project Recovery in Rapid City. "When I started (practicing), there was a big dearth of access here. There were no significant services at all."

Project Recovery, the state's largest telehealth addiction recovery program, was founded in 2017. It has experienced rapid growth in service requests each month over the past year, Tamang said. Project Recovery can diagnose addiction and prescribe medication to patients via telemedicine and provides services to some tribal communities across the state, including those on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

The number of prescriptions doctors give for opioids as a painkiller has been on the decline since 2012, but use and overdoses have been on a steady increase, mostly because of illegal manufacturing and selling. Some drugs sold on the streets are laced with powdered fentanyl,

a substance up to 100 times more potent than morphine and usually mixed with other opioids to stretch supply. Humans can die from just 2 milligrams of fentanyl, equivalent to a few grains of salt, according to the DEA.

Law enforcement across South Dakota is seeing more fentanyl in illegal opioid sales. When someone seeking the opioids purchases pills illegally, they could be getting a more potent substance than they expect and accidentally overdose. Law enforcement seized 312 grams of fentanyl in South Dakota in 2020, according to the DEA. That equates to about 156,000 lethal doses.

"A lot of those overdose deaths are attributed to opioids, fentanyl," said Minnehaha County Sheriff Mike Milstead. "That has a huge impact on people's lives and families. A lot of the time, these people aren't trying to kill themselves. These are accidental overdose deaths. It really raises to the level of recognizing it's a serious problem."

The Minnehaha County Jail will soon become the first facility in the state to treat inmates with opioid addiction medications after they arrive. The jail has allowed inmates who are already on the treatment to continue it, and has long allowed pregnant women to start or continue the treatment. Previously, the Yankton County Jail was the only jail that allowed patients to continue on the treatment, according to the Center for Family Medicine.

"This is replacing one drug for another; it's replacing one that's going to kill you for one that's going to save your life. People are dying from this epidemic, and we have an amazing cure, yet people are stigmatizing it."

-- Dr. Dan Felix of the Sioux Falls Family Medicine Residency program



Click on photo for video (<https://youtu.be/oyAQB-P0kl0>): Minnehaha County Sheriff Mike Milstead hopes to be expand the use of medication-assisted treatment for opioid addiction at the county jail. Currently, the jail allows people who are already on the treatment regimen to continue the medication while in jail. Photo/video: Danielle Ferguson, South Dakota

News Watch

Everyone who gets booked into the Minnehaha County Jail is screened, said Warden Mike Mattson. There, health care providers can identify who is already on the treatment and who may qualify to start. Once someone is released, case managers will connect them to outside services in the community, Milstead said.

"They're not always Minnehaha County residents," Milstead said. "Fortunately, MAT is expanding the state so we can connect them with more [services] across the state."

Having the treatment in the jail is an opportunity to get help to people who don't normally have access to health care or other basic needs, and provide treatment when they are away from opioids, said Michelle Boyd, Minnehaha County programs and services coordinator.

"The best time to get you into a program and your brain healing is when you don't have access to the drugs," Boyd said. "Being able to get them started on treatment so they can start to feel healed gives them that little boost. Once their head clears and they want their family back, that's the best time that you can give them a good start."

Boyd said she has noticed a recent increase in the number of participants who use medication-assisted

treatment and expects that number to continue to rise.

Crowe, the Sioux Falls resident, is now in her last phase of drug court. She heard about medication-assisted treatment through other women who were also staying at the New Start treatment center.

"I said, 'I don't know if I can take this anymore,'" Crowe said. "They said, 'Why don't you try medication?' I said, 'There's medication?'"

Crowe's addiction to pain pills and methamphetamine started in 2008, after her husband was killed by a relative on the Crow Creek Indian Reservation. She sought mental-health care at an Indian Health Service clinic, but was not provided antidepressants, she said. She sought comfort at a relative's home. That relative gave her the opioid Darvocet to manage pain from an infected ingrown toenail and Crowe enjoyed the euphoria that came with the pain relief.

"One thing led to another," she said. She went on to try tramadol and eventually moved to oxycodone and methamphetamine.

"I craved them bad," she said. "I woke up and thought about them."

She completed six months of traditional treatment, but relapsed shortly after being released.

"My heart was in it, but I couldn't get the drugs off my mind," she said. "Everything you do is drug-related. The reason you get up is because you're going to look for a drug. Your body language, you're sweaty, you get shaky, kind of like the flu feeling if you don't get it."

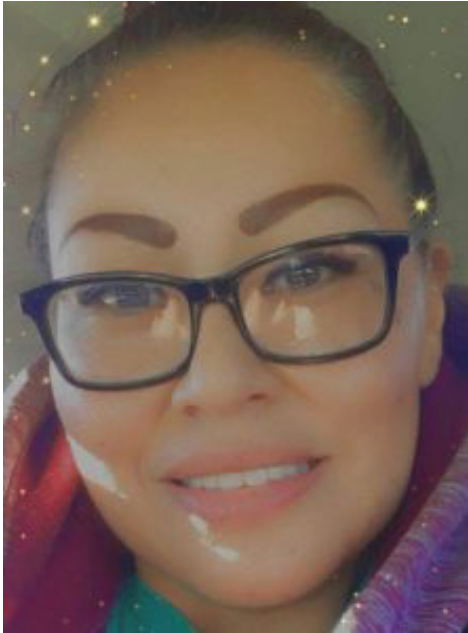
She was nervous to try the medication-assisted treatment, but she said it was her "last option."

She went to Falls Community Health and was given Suboxone in the form of a tablet that dissolves under the tongue. Within hours, she noticed her cravings cease and didn't feel the flu-like withdrawal symptoms she would normally feel if she went without using.

"I didn't want tramadol anymore," she said. "I didn't crave anything. A weight was lifted off my shoulders. It was a relief. I take one tablet three times a day."

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Janine Crowe

Crowe now has a job, an accomplishment she would have thought unobtainable two years ago.

"I used to be on the streets, never held a job," she said. "Now I work. I've been sober for almost two years now."

HOW TO FIND HELP FOR ADDICTION

Here are some options to find medication-assisted treatment and other addiction services in South Dakota.

Avoid Opioid SD: <https://www.avoidopioidsd.com/>

Lewis and Clark Behavioral Health, Yankton:

Phone: 605-665-4606 or toll free 1-800-765-3382

Website: <https://lewisclarkb.yankton.multisiteadmin.com/>

Center for Family Medicine, Sioux Falls:

Phone: 605-575-1637 to schedule with Cindy, substance use nurse case manager

Website: <https://centerforfamilymed.org/>

Project Recovery, Rapid City:

Phone: 605-340-1234

Website: <http://project-recovery.org/appointments/>

ABOUT

DANIELLE FERGUSON



Danielle Ferguson, Sioux Falls, S.D., is an investigative reporter for South Dakota News Watch. She grew up in Salem, S.D. and previously worked as a watchdog reporter at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

July 6, 2021 – 7:00pm

120 N Main Street

(NOTICE ADDRESS)

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. City Sewer Problems – Dale Ringgenberg and Jamie Rossow
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Special Event Alcoholic Beverage License Application for Stacy Mayou for a Celebration of Life for Sandra Mayou at the Groton City Park on 7/18/21
4. Minutes
5. Bills
6. Department Reports
7. Water Restrictions **8-4-12**
 - Start implementing fines for noncompliance (\$500 per violation)
 - Special permits to allow watering
8. Appoint Newspapers and Banks
9. Proclaim July 18, 2021 as “Kaitlin O’Neill Day”
10. Proclaim July 30th, 2021 as “Paul Karst Day”
11. First Reading of Ordinance #748 Appropriation Ordinance Schedule
12. Maguire Iron Application for Payment #8 – \$56,520
13. Groton City Hall & Wage Memorial Library Sign
14. Reminder: Lions Club is sponsoring the 5th Annual Summer Fest from 9am – 4pm on July 11, 2021 at the Groton City Park!
15. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
16. Hire Electric Utility Supervisor
17. Adjournment

Pro-Freedom Bills Take Effect on July 1

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, pro-freedom reforms promoted by Governor Kristi Noem will take effect in South Dakota. July 1 marks the start of the 2022 fiscal year and ushers in several changes to state law.

“Freedom’ isn’t just a buzzword for us in South Dakota. It’s our way of life. It guides everything that my administration does,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “I’m proud that we had the opportunity to advance freedom for South Dakotans this legislative session. And I look forward to continuing to work with the legislature to expand the freedoms of our people.”

The pro-freedom reforms that are becoming law include:

HB 1079 and SB 103, which protect the privacy rights of donors to charitable organizations, as well as the charitable organizations themselves. Today, the Supreme Court of the United States recognized that the First Amendment protects this same information in their landmark *AFP v. Bonta* decision;

HB 1094 simplifies city zoning regulations and eases the permitting process for homebuilders and homeowners in South Dakota. This will help the cost of living remain affordable for South Dakotans and will spur additional housing development in South Dakota communities;

HB 1111 protects property rights by strengthening due process protections in instances of seizures and forfeitures involving the Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP);

HB 1140 protects property rights of landowners and codifies GFP’s policies pertaining to open fields, which will strengthen relationships between conservation officers and landowners;

SB 55 authorizes certain innovative insurance products and services through insurance innovation waivers;

SB 100 continues the prohibition on the seizure of firearms and ammunitions; and

SB 177 expands freedom and parental choice in homeschooling.

Healthcare Reforms Take Effect on July 1

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, several healthcare reforms promoted by Governor Kristi Noem will take effect in South Dakota. July 1 marks the start of the 2022 fiscal year and ushers in several changes to state law.

“Over the last year, South Dakota adapted to challenges and found innovative new ways to deliver healthcare to our people,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “These flexibilities will increase healthcare options for South Dakotans, and I am excited that they are finally becoming law today.”

The healthcare reforms that are becoming law include:

HB 1077 recognizes out-of-state licenses for certain healthcare professions, which will help to address workforce shortages in healthcare;

SB 96 increases telehealth flexibilities, which proved so critical over the last year. This will particularly help with delivery of healthcare services to South Dakota’s rural communities;

HB 1263, which increases price transparency in health insurance, becomes law, starting the implementation timeline.

SB 32 adds Bethel Lutheran Home in Madison, Platte Healthcare in Platte, and Tekawitha in Sisseton to the Access Critical Nursing Facility Program. This gives families the assurance that their loved-ones have the opportunity to stay close to home;

HB 1131 authorizes direct primary care agreements and will lead to reduced overall healthcare costs.

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GFP Stresses Safety During July 4 Holiday

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks (GFP) reminds those recreating to be safe this holiday weekend.

Fourth of July weekend is a busy time for lakes, rivers, campgrounds, and beaches.

Law enforcement officers will be on heightened alert for those in violation of boating under the influence laws as part of the annual Operation Dry Water weekend, July 2 – 4, 2021.

Operation Dry Water (ODW) is a year-round boating under the influence awareness and enforcement campaign focused on reducing the number of alcohol- and drug-related incidents and fatalities.

GFP wants to keep visitors safe on the water and on land. State Park visitors are asked to leave fireworks at home.

Discharging fireworks is not allowed on lands owned or leased by GFP. The restriction includes state parks, recreation areas, lakeside use areas, game production areas and nature areas. Discharging fireworks without a permit is also prohibited within the boundaries of the Black Hills Forest Fire Protection District, national forests and national parks in South Dakota.



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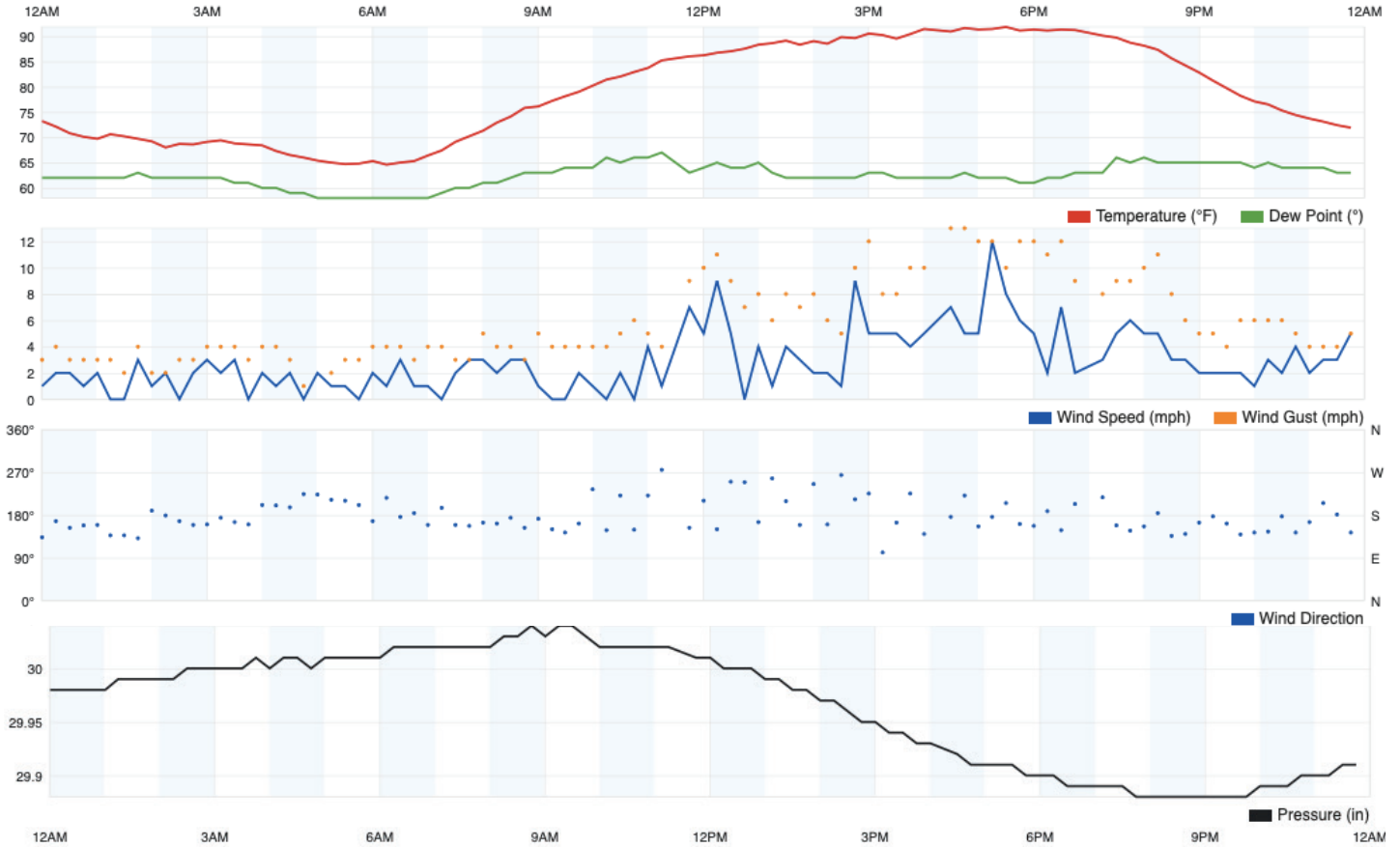
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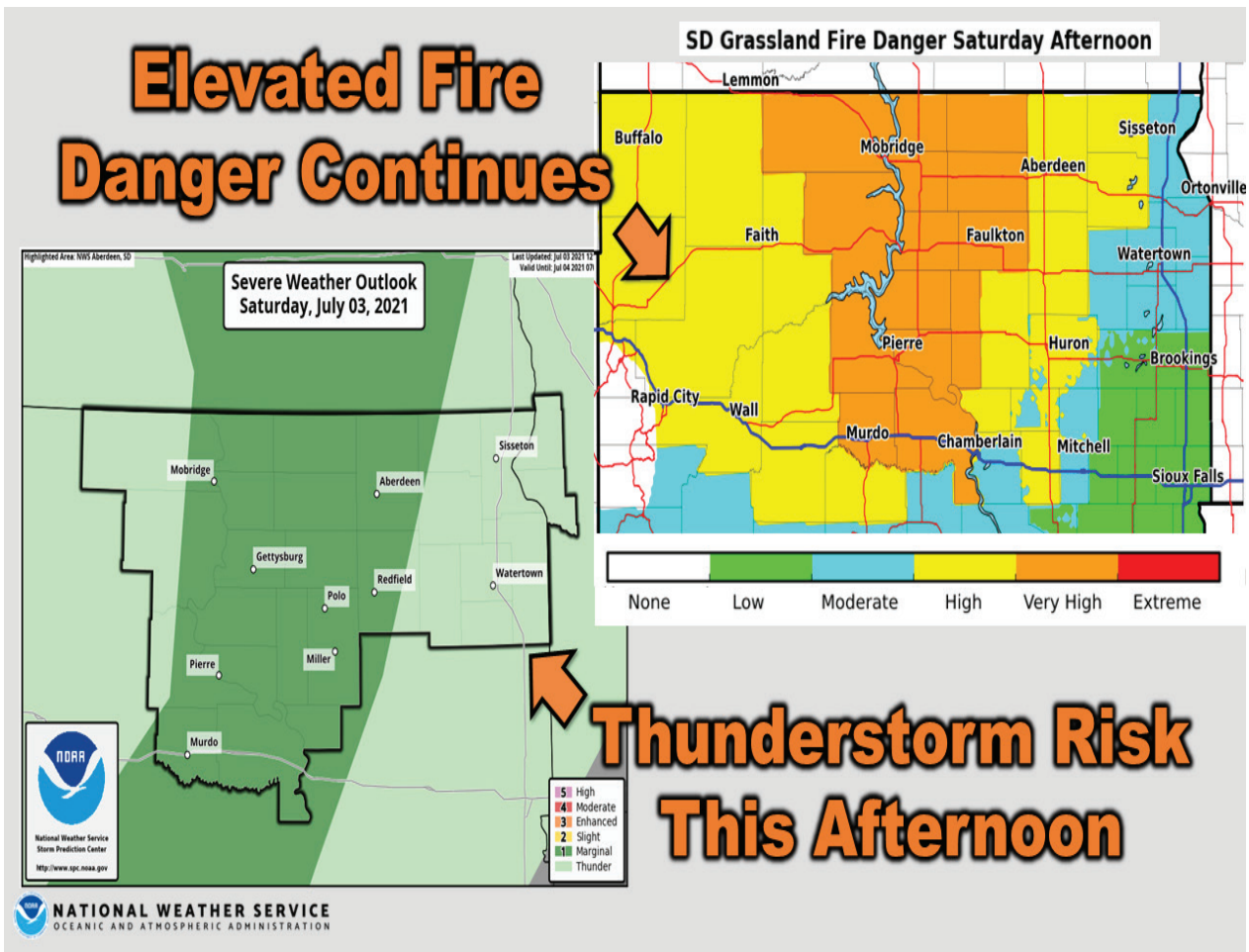
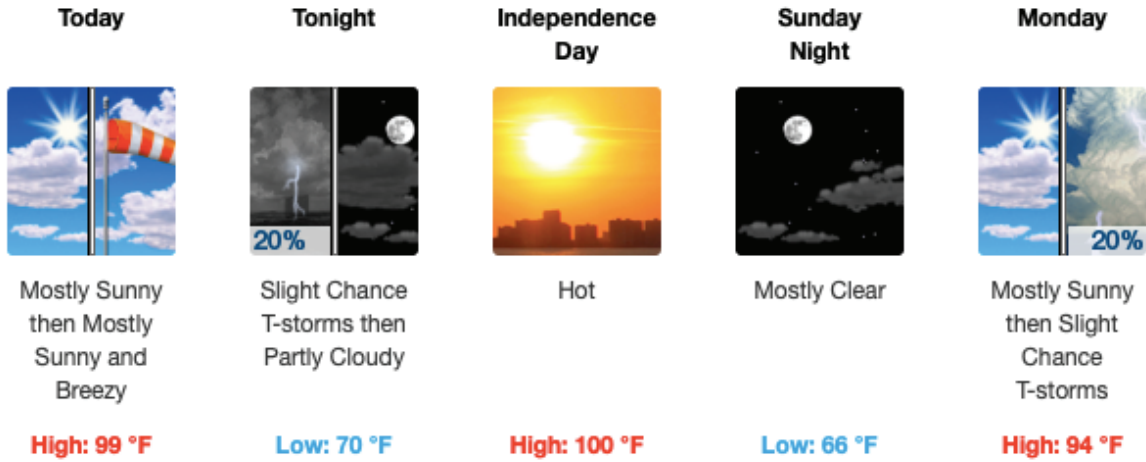
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Hot dry and breezy conditions are expected again today. A front will cross the area, helping to generate a few afternoon storms. Generally the risk for severe weather is low. Hot dry and breezy conditions are on tap for Sunday as well.

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June 2021 In Review

Most locations recorded their hottest June in over 30 years (1988). With average temperatures anywhere from 4 to 7 degrees above normal, June 2021 will go down as the 7th warmest on record at Wheaton, 6th warmest at Mobridge, the 5th warmest at Aberdeen and Kennebec, 4th at Watertown, Pierre and Timber Lake, and the 3rd at Sisseton. Many locations recorded 10 to 20 days with highs at or above 90 degrees, and up to 5 days at or above 100 (at least one 100 degree June day occurs on average every 2.5 years in Pierre, 5 years in Aberdeen and Mobridge, 12.5 years in Sisseton and 20 years in Watertown). Numerous record daily warm low and high temperatures were set as well, particularly from the 3-10th, including highs during 5 out of 6 days in Mobridge from the 3rd through the 8th.

The heat was in part a testament to just how dry it's been, both leading up to and also throughout the month. During times of drought, air holds less moisture, and is thus able to heat up faster and to a greater extent. The large-scale weather pattern involved a jet stream that was displaced further north than usual (more typical of July). This meant limited opportunities for quality or widespread storms and rainfall during a time of the year that is typically the wettest on average, climatologically speaking. Aside from fairly isolated pockets, the area ranged from 2 to 3.5 inches below normal for precipitation. This June will go down as the 6th driest on record in Sisseton, 5th driest in Aberdeen, 4th in Pierre, 3rd in Kennebec, and tied 2nd at both Watertown and Mobridge. Drought conditions worsened from the 1st to the 30th for the majority of central and northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota as a result. Fire weather became increasingly concerning as fuels further dried out.

The drought also meant a reduction in severe weather across the area. The NWS office in Aberdeen issued 35 severe thunderstorm warnings across our forecast area this June, and all from the 7-14th (the average since 1986 is 51). That said, there were a couple events of note. A complex of storms developed and back-built generally from southeastern North Dakota into north central South Dakota from June 7th into the 8th. Large hail, damaging winds, a couple tornadoes and flash flooding (10.35" of rain measured near Firesteel) resulted across north central South Dakota. Additionally, a line of intense thunderstorms raced across the area on the night of June 10th, leading to winds with gusts up to 80 mph. The result was uprooted trees, severe damage to barns and outbuildings, rolled trailers and more, particularly across portions of northern South Dakota.

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Today in Weather History

July 3, 1959: An estimated F2 tornado moved northeast after destroying a farm building at the western edge of Java, Walworth County. Elsewhere in the area, high straight line winds caused property damage while hail damaged crops. The largest hailstone was 2.75 inches in diameter and was observed 9 miles NNW of Timber Lake.

July 3, 2003: A supercell thunderstorm moved southeastward across western Jackson County and Bennett County. The storm dropped up to golf ball sized hail and produced an F2 tornado north of Tuthill in Bennett County. The tornado touched down about a mile north of the junction of highways 18 and 73, where it destroyed a garage. The tornado moved south-southeast and destroyed a mobile home just to the southeast of the highway intersection and then dissipated just north of Tuthill. No one was injured.

Also on this day, a line of severe thunderstorms with hail up to the size of golf balls and winds over 80 mph at times brought widespread property and crop damage to far northeast Brown, across Marshall and Roberts counties. The wind and hail caused the most damage to crops in a 20 mile to a 70-mile long area from north of Britton over to Sisseton and into west central Minnesota. Much of the plants were shredded to the ground. In fact, approximately 30 percent (70,000 acres) of Marshall County's 227,000 acres of crops were damaged or destroyed. Cities receiving the most damage from the line of storms were, Hecla, Andover, Britton, Kidder, Veblen, Roslyn, Langford, Lake City, Claire City, Sisseton, Waubay, Rosholt, and Wilmot. Storm damage mostly included trees and branches down, power lines and poles down, roof and siding damage from hail and fallen trees, some farm outbuildings damaged or destroyed, and many windows broke out of homes and vehicles. Also, many boats, docks, and campers received some damage in the path of the storms. An aerial crop spraying plane at the Sisseton airport was picked up and thrown 450 feet and landed upside down. In Claire City, a 55,000-bushel grain bin was blown off of its foundation and flattened. On a farm five miles north of Amherst, three large grain bins were blown over and damaged.

July 3, 2010: Severe thunderstorms brought damaging winds to parts of central South Dakota, especially to Lyman County. Eighty mph winds moved a building off the foundation at the Presho Municipal Airport. Eighty mph winds also destroyed or damaged many grain bins and caused damage to several other buildings in and around Presho. A large sign, twenty power poles, along with many trees were downed in Presho. There were also several broken houses and car windows from hail and high winds. Seventy mph winds tore a garage door loose, bent a flagpole over, and downed many large tree branches in Kennebec. The winds also caused some damage to homes, sheds, and grain bins in Kennebec.

1873: A tornado in Hancock County, in far west central Illinois, destroyed several farms. From a distance, witnesses initially thought the tornado was smoke from a fire. A child was killed after being carried 500 yards; 10 other people were injured. Click [HERE](#) for more information from Illinois Genealogy Trails.

1975: Up to 3 inches of rain caused flash flooding throughout Las Vegas, NV. The main damage occurred to vehicles at Caesars Palace with approximately 700 damaged or destroyed with several cars found miles away. North Las Vegas was hardest hit with \$3.5 million in damage. Two people drowned in the flood waters.

2000: There is a certain irony about one of the driest places getting the greatest rainfall, and yet that is what happened at usually rain-sparse Vanguard, Saskatchewan on July 3 when a carwash-like downpour flooded the community of 200 people, some 65 km southeast of Swift Current. As much as 375 mm (14.76") of rain fell in eight hours, the greatest storm for that duration on the Canadian Prairies and one of the most substantial rainfall intensities ever recorded in Canada.

The spectacular thunderstorm produced more cloud-to-ground lightning strikes than that part of southern Saskatchewan would expect in two years. A year's amount of rain left crops in the field drowning and rotting, and roads and rail lines under water. The force of the water crushed cars and farm implements swept away grain bins and soaked large bales. Stranded residents had to be rescued by boat, which rapidly became the carrier of choice on the main street in Vanguard. The flash flood also carried away herds of cattle and drowned dozens of deer and antelope. Some further irony, when millions of liters of contaminated water submerged the water-treatment plant and backed up into homes and businesses, officials had to ship in bottled water from Swift Current.

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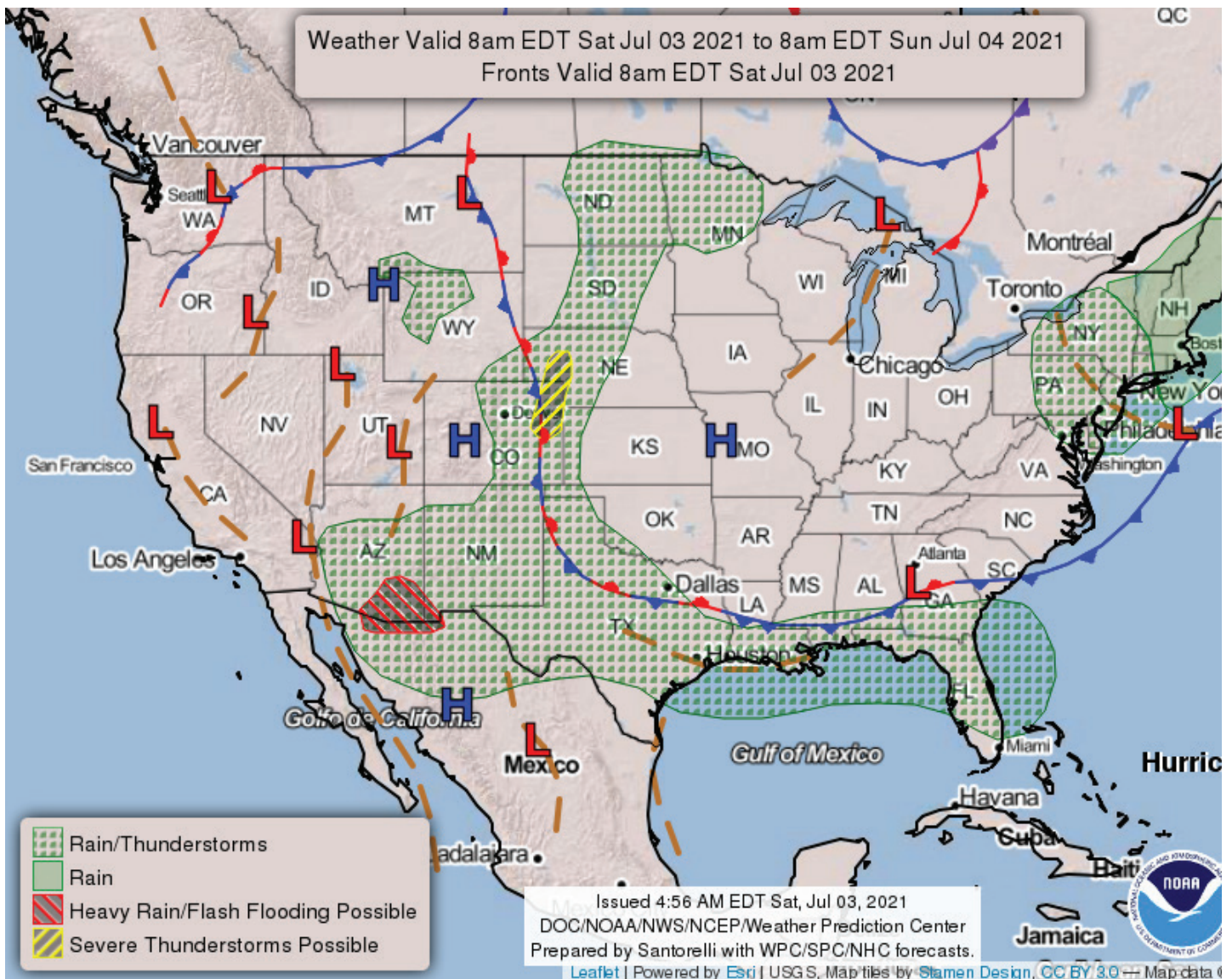
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 92 °F at 4:51 PM
Low Temp: 64 °F at 6:17 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 5:35 PM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 107° in 1949
Record Low: 39° in 1917
Average High: 84°F
Average Low: 59°F
Average Precip in July.: 0.23
Precip to date in July.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 11.24
Precip Year to Date: 4.75
Sunset Tonight: 9:25 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:51 a.m.



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LEGACIES THAT LIVE

What others have done in the past influences what we do today. What is done today will influence what goes on in the future. It's like dominoes: stand them on end and place them in a line – one after another – and if the one at the beginning or end of the line is pushed over, all of them will fall down.

We all leave legacies. And all legacies are different because everyone is different. Yet, we seldom realize that we actually leave two different types of legacies. Most of the time we think of leaving a legacy of valuables: money, stocks, property, insurance, vehicles, jewelry – things that have monetary value and can be exchanged for currency.

But we rarely think of the legacy we leave that has eternal value – a value that has moral and spiritual influence or impact on the lives of others. Whether or not we realize it or want to admit it, we cannot not influence or impact the lives of others.

The writer of Psalm 71 was very conscious of the spiritual values he would leave behind. "Even when I am old and grey," he wrote, "do not forsake me my God, till I declare Your power to the next generation, Your mighty acts to all who are to come."

In the preceding verses he recalled the goodness of God in his life: "You are my refuge, my rock, my fortress, my hope, my confidence, my teacher, my Savior." God had been with Him, had honored and protected him and made his life worthwhile. He wanted others to know this God and what He could do for them.

So, he asked God to spare him so he could share His faith and hope.

Prayer: Lord of our lives – may every day of our life be a witness to others and may we leave a legacy of Your love and a witness of Your grace and gifts. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come. Psalm 71:18

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2021 Community Events

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

News from the Associated Press

As pandemic wanes, consumers stay with local meat lockers

By LURA JOHNSON South Dakota Public Broadcasting

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Consumers turned to local lockers when meat was scarce at grocery stores during the pandemic. Now the pandemic is fading, but many consumers are still buying from local butchers. Coronavirus outbreaks caused shutdowns at big meatpacking plants last year. The workload trickled down to smaller lockers.

Scott Kleinschmit is the co-owner of Kleinschmit Locker in Yankton.

"With COVID and everything, I think people kind of panicked. So, I think they tried to book them out more," he said.

Kleinschmit said the increase in business has been great for him. He has been able to keep up with demand. Other lockers have been struggling for space, South Dakota Public Broadcasting reported.

The owner of Scotland Locker, James Dangel, said his freezers are filled to capacity.

"Oh man, we're booked out for two years and it's people that they come, and they've got appointments for two years out," he said. "They've got some for next year fall, the next fall, and that's the way I suppose it's going to be now for quite a while."

Dangel said many farmers and ranchers are butchering locally because consumers want locally sourced beef. Consumers also like the value they get from buying in bulk with a local butcher.

"I think more they just wanted to know where it came from and cost-wise, I mean if you do come get like a whole half of beef, your total per pound on the meat you take home is about usually about four to five dollars a pound," Dangel said.

"So, I mean you're paying a little extra for hamburger but you're taking home ribeye, T-bones, sirloin, roasts, and you're filling your freezer and you know where it came from."

A new \$5 million grant program in South Dakota aims to help meat lockers expand and improve efficiency.

Logan Powers is a co-owner of Avon Locker, which has received \$43,000 from the program.

"We'd really like to kind of expand our cut floor to just have a little more room to be able to process and just, you know, maybe add on another employee in time," he said. "We would like to be able to ramp up our production by almost being able to double."

Power and his business partner, Devin Cowdin, bought the Avon Locker in May of this year to keep it from shutting down.

Powers said the extra grant money will alleviate stresses his employees are feeling from the immense workload.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Friday:

Mega Millions

08-31-32-34-45, Mega Ball: 19, Megaplier: 2

(eight, thirty-one, thirty-two, thirty-four, forty-five; Mega Ball: nineteen; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$72 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$101 million

Soldiers return to Sioux Falls after long deployment

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The families of nearly 200 soldiers have welcomed their loved ones home in Sioux Falls following a long deployment in the Horn of Africa.

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Family members were reunited at Augustana University's Elmen Center Thursday afternoon.

The 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade was in Djbouti, Africa, for 10 months. And, a lot can happen in that time.

"It's great, I'm here with my daughter who I just met for the first time and my wife," 1st Lt. Andrew Hanson said. "My wonderful, beautiful wife."

Hanson wasn't the only one who met his child for the first time. A number of soldiers in the unit came home to babies born while they were overseas, KELO-TV reported.

"It's great, I get to meet my daughter for the first time," Chief Warrant Officer David Goodwin said.

"It's a relief, I'm happy. No better feeling," said Goodwin's wife, Beth.

The soldiers say they are looking forward to some down time to relax with their families.

"We're going to my father's on Saturday and then Sunday we'll probably just hang out at the house and enjoy each other and be, you know, be a family for the first time, you know," Hanson said.

Gov. Kristi Noem, U.S. Sen. John Thune and Sioux Falls Mayor Paul TenHaken were on hand for the welcome home ceremony.

Man arrested after Aberdeen park is locked down, searched

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — A North Dakota man is being held on possible charges of making terroristic threats after an incident that brought the bomb squad to an Aberdeen park this week.

Police were called to Wylie Park around noon Wednesday on reports that a man was talking about "blowing things up" and was burying things in the sand.

The park was locked down and the Highway Patrol's bomb-sniffing dog was brought to the scene. The state Division of Criminal Investigation's bomb squad responded and a large search of the park was done, KSFY-TV reported.

Police say no explosives were found. The 33-year-old man was arrested and taken to the Brown County Jail.

The search comes less than a week after a probable explosive device was discovered at the park. Authorities say there is nothing at this time to indicate the two incidents are connected.

Police plan to increase law enforcement presence in the area for the July Fourth weekend.

Jill Biden's travel shows breadth covered by first lady

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — After wrapping up a hectic, two-day swing through Dallas, Houston and Phoenix to promote COVID-19 vaccinations, Jill Biden didn't relax on the four-hour flight back to Washington.

She prepped for yet more travel in a week that by itself demonstrated the range of missions and emotions associated with the first lady's movements around the country.

Within the span of 36 hours this past week, Biden went from clinking cups of beer with Doug Emhoff, the husband of Vice President Kamala Harris, at an Astros baseball game in Houston to joining the president in Florida to comfort families whose loved ones were lost or missing after the Surfside condo collapse.

Along the way, she continued the juggling act that comes with being the first first lady to continue the career she had outside the White House. In Texas, she set aside an hour to Zoom into a book club meeting back in Virginia with women at the community college where she teaches English.

Jill Biden's pace of travel is on par with the president's.

The week before her stops in Texas and Arizona, she pushed vaccinations in Mississippi and Tennessee, and again days later in the Florida cities of Kissimmee and Tampa.

Her stop at the Astros game was designed to help showcase a vaccination push by Major League Baseball that features incentives like tickets to future games and a replica World Series ring.

"It's safe. It's effective. It's free," she declared of the COVID-19 vaccines.

Jill Biden is spending most of the Fourth of July weekend appearing in Maine, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania at events celebrating progress on fighting the coronavirus.

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"I think that we knew right from the start that she was going to be a more active first lady," said Myra Gutin, who studies first ladies at Rider University in New Jersey. "She just personally strikes me as somebody that wants to be busy and somebody that wants to help."

Jill Biden has said she doesn't want to waste a minute of her time as first lady. She is logging more miles than some of her predecessors did at this point in their husbands' administrations, Gutin said.

Laura Bush, a former elementary school teacher and librarian, spent her initial months as first lady planning an education summit she hosted at Georgetown University in July 2001 and on supporting the No Child Left Behind education law, the first major domestic policy initiative of the new administration.

Michelle Obama used her opening months to visit Cabinet departments and thank federal workers for their service. Melania Trump lived at Trump Tower in Manhattan until son Barron finished the school year and they joined President Donald Trump at the White House in June 2017.

Anita McBride, a first lady scholar at American University, said Jill Biden came to the role well-prepared after being in the public eye for most of her adult life. Joe Biden was already a U.S. senator when they got married, and he was in Congress for a total of 36 years, followed by eight years as vice president.

Unlike Michelle Obama or Melania Trump, Jill Biden, 70, has no young children to command her attention. The first lady also likes to travel and stay busy.

It isn't lost on the president just how busy his wife of 44 years is these days. He even suggested the stepped-up pace of White House life had cut into their "romantic time."

"She's been traveling all over the country. And doing major events for me ... and for the country," the president told Vogue magazine for a recent profile of his wife. "And so I'll find that I'm working on a hell of an important speech and I'm distracted. And then I may not be working on one and I want to go and hang out with her, and she's working on an important speech! Or grading papers."

"We have to figure out a way, and I mean this sincerely, to be able to steal time for one another," he said.

McBride, who was Laura Bush's chief of staff, said that while it's important for presidents to leave Washington and spend time among the people, they can catch criticism if they're seen as spending too much time traveling and not enough time taking care of the people's business.

"It's a balance for presidents to do both and a huge asset when the first lady can help," McBride said in an email.

To that end, Jill Biden has become a top promoter of her husband's policies as well as her own issues and causes, ranging from child tax credits and a proposal for free community college to support for military families and finding a cure for cancer.

By Sunday she will have taken 20 solo official plane or car trips outside of Washington, including a handful of overnights on the West Coast and in the Southwest. The count does not include her local stops in Washington or her trips with the president, such as last week's stop in Surfside, where she laid a large bouquet of white irises on the curb of a makeshift memorial near the site of the collapsed condo building.

Meanwhile, the president's trip to Michigan on Saturday will be his 21st aboard Air Force One for official business, including last month's trip to Europe. The count does not include Biden's weekends at his home in Wilmington, Delaware, or at the Camp David presidential retreat. It also does not include Biden's trip to Wilmington for a former staffer's wake, and a midweek getaway in June to his home in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, for the first lady's birthday.

The first lady said she'll keep traveling around the country to encourage people, especially young people, to get vaccinated to help ward off COVID-19.

In Texas and Arizona, the first lady tried to cut through misinformation about the vaccines, assuring people that the doses are safe, effective and had been thoroughly tested. She stressed that the jabs are free, that people can get free rides to clinics and that appointments aren't necessary. She also noted that the shot itself is so quick, it doesn't hurt, and that she was vaccinated even though she hates needles.

At a clinic in an area of Phoenix where the vaccination rate is lagging, she made small talk with a girl as an alcohol pad was rubbed on her arm in preparation for the COVID-19 shot.

Then the vaccinator pushed the needle into the girl's arm, and pulled it out.

"It's over," Biden exclaimed and applauded before she moved on.

]Indonesia caught between surge and slow vaccine rollout

By EDNA TARIGAN and VICTORIA MILKO Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Sri Dewi stood in the graveyard with her family, waiting their turn to bury her brother. He suffered a stroke and needed oxygen, but there wasn't any in a hospital overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients.

"We took him to this hospital, but there was no room for him," said Dewi. "The hospital was out of oxygen."

The family finally bought an oxygen tank at a shop and brought the brother home, but he died later that evening.

After a slow vaccination rollout, Indonesia is now racing to inoculate as many people as possible as it battles an explosion of COVID-19 cases that have strained its health care. But inadequate global supply, the complicated geography of the world's largest archipelago nation, and hesitancy among some Indonesians stand as major roadblocks.

Fueled by travel in May during the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr, and the spread of the delta variant of the coronavirus first found in India, the most recent spike has pushed some hospitals to the limits. Over the past two weeks, the seven-day rolling average of daily cases rose from over 8,655 to 20,690. Nearly half of those who are PCR tested return positive results.

Even those numbers are an undercount, with almost 75% of provinces reporting a testing rate below the recommended benchmark of 1 test per 1,000 people, according to the World Health Organization.

The impact is obvious across Java, Indonesia's most populated island. In mid-June, hospitals began to erect plastic tents to serve as makeshift intensive care units, and patients waited for days before being admitted. Oxygen tanks were rolled out on the sidewalk for those lucky enough to receive them, while others were told they would need to find their own supply.

Away from the hospitals, new land continues to be cleared for the dead. Families wait turns to bury their loved ones as gravediggers work late shifts. Last year, Indonesia's highest Islamic clerical body issued a decree that mass graves — normally forbidden in Islam — would be permitted during the pandemic crisis.

While the surge has largely been concentrated on Java, it's a matter of time before it hits other parts of the sprawling archipelago, where the underfunded and understaffed health facilities are even more fragile and could collapse, said Dicky Budiman, an epidemiologist at Griffith University in Australia.

The government has been resisting imposing tougher COVID-19 restrictions for fear of hurting the economy, Southeast Asia's largest, which last year recorded its first recession since 1998. This week the government announced its strictest measures of 2021 starting Saturday, including work from home, the closure of places of worship and malls as well as limiting restaurants to delivery only.

"We have agreed with the governors, mayors, to strictly enforce this emergency measures," said Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, who has been appointed to lead the pandemic response.

Some health experts doubt the measures will be enough, given the overall lax enforcement.

"Indonesia still doesn't have enough testing capacity, and isolation and quarantine strategies aren't effective ... there still isn't enough active case-finding," said Budiman. "The government should be concerned with three strategies: strengthening testing, quarantine and early treatment."

Without the willingness to enter a full lockdown, Indonesia's only way out is the vaccines.

Like many other countries, Indonesia has fallen short of the shots it needs. By June 30, it had received 118.7 million doses of the Sinovac and AstraZeneca vaccines — far short of the amount needed to vaccinate 181.5 million people, or 70% of the population. Millions of additional doses are scheduled to arrive in the coming months, but will still not be enough to reach the target.

The U.S. announced Friday it will donate 4 million Moderna vaccine doses through the U.N.-backed COVAX program as soon as possible. In addition, national security adviser Jake Sullivan and Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi discussed U.S. plans to increase assistance for Indonesia's broader COVID-19 response efforts, according to National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne.

Indonesia is also working on developing its own vaccine, but even if it passes clinical trials, it isn't expected to hit production until next year.

President Joko Widodo has set a goal of vaccinating 1 million people a day, turning stadiums, community centers, police stations and neighborhood clinics into mass vaccination sites. The government aims to double the daily rate starting in August. So far, only about 5% of the population have been vaccinated.

Siti Nadia Tarmizi, a spokesperson for Indonesia's vaccination program, said that the regions with more cases will be a priority.

Geography poses massive challenges in a country whose thousands of islands stretch across an area about as wide as the continental United States, and transportation and infrastructure are limited in many places.

Government officials have said there are preparations in place such as training staff and working to secure a stable cold supply chain that's required for transporting vaccines.

Hesitancy and misinformation has hampered previous vaccination campaigns. Indonesia has had vaccination rates as low as 10% for routine shots for measles and rubella.

"Vaccine hesitancy will really impact vaccination efforts," Budiman said. "Indonesia still doesn't have a strong communication strategy ... and some people still don't think this pandemic exists."

He said the government needs to make "good and strong decisions based on science or I fear we will find ourselves in a similar situation to what happened in India."

At least 19 missing as mudslide west of Tokyo hits houses

By MARI YAMAGUCHI and YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — A powerful mudslide carrying a deluge of black water and debris crashed into rows of houses in a town west of Tokyo following heavy rains on Saturday, leaving at least 19 people missing, officials said.

As many as 80 homes in Atami were completely buried, according to an official with the Fire and Disaster Management Agency.

The official said more people, possibly 100, could still be missing under the mudslides but warned that details were not immediately clear. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity as is often policy at Japanese bureaucracies, stressed that aggressive rescue operations were underway to find survivors.

Public broadcaster NHK earlier gave the number of missing people at 20, but Shizuoka prefecture spokesman Takamichi Sugiyama said the prefecture confirmed at least 19, although he said the number may grow.

Torrential rains have slammed parts of Japan starting earlier this week. Experts said dirt had been loosened, increasing landslide risks in a country filled with valleys and mountains.

The landslides appeared to have struck multiple times, about as fast as a car. Footage showed a powerful, black mudslide slither down a mountain, knocking over and crushing houses and sweeping away cars in its path. Helpless neighbors watched in horror, some recording on their phones.

NHK TV footage showed a part of a bridge had collapsed.

Shizuoka Gov. Heita Kawakatsu told reporters that the Coast Guard had discovered two people who had been washed into the sea by a mudslide. Their hearts had stopped, but their deaths were not yet officially declared, he said. Other details of their identity were not released.

"I offer my deepest condolences to everyone who has suffered," he said, adding that utmost efforts will be made to rescue lives.

Kawakatsu and other officials said it had been raining hard in the area all morning. Self-defense forces have joined firefighters and police in the rescue operation, and officials from the national government have also arrived, they said.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga called an emergency meeting for his Cabinet, and instructed the task force to push ahead with rescue operations while guarding against more such disasters.

Evacuation warnings were issued for a wide area, including the so-called "Level 5," which is the highest possible alert, affecting more than 35,000 people.

Atami is a quaint seaside resort area in Shizuoka prefecture, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) southwest of Tokyo. The area that was hit by the mudslide, Izusan, includes hot springs, residential areas, shopping streets and a famous shrine.

French far-right chief under fire for her mainstream turn

By ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French far-right leader Marine Le Pen is facing stinging criticism for making her party too mainstream, dulling its extremist edge, and ignoring grassroots members, with voices from inside and outside warning this could cost her votes in next year's presidential race.

The rumblings grew louder after the National Rally's failure a week ago in regional elections, and come just ahead of this weekend's party congress.

Le Pen is the anti-immigration party's unquestioned boss, and her fortunes aren't expected to change at the two-day event in the southwestern town of Perpignan, hosted by local Mayor Louis Aliot — Le Pen's former companion and, above all, the party's top performer in last year's municipal elections. But there could be an uncomfortable reckoning, just as Le Pen is trying to inject new dynamism into the National Rally.

Critics say Le Pen has erased her party's anti-establishment signature by trying to make it more palatable to the mainstream right. As part of the strategy, she softened the edges and strove to remove the stigma of racism and antisemitism that clung to the party after decades under her now-ostracized father, Jean-Marie Le Pen. She even changed the name from National Front, as it was called under her father, who co-founded the party in 1972 and led it for four decades.

"The policy of adapting, of rapprochement with power, even with the ordinary right, was severely sanctioned," said Jean-Marie Le Pen. "(That) was a political error and translates into an electoral failure, and perhaps electoral failures," he added, referring to the regional election result and the 2022 presidential vote.

The defiant patriarch, now 93, was expelled in the effort to boost the party's respectability, but his criticism reflects that of more moderate members who say his daughter has muddled the message.

Her goal is to reach the runoff in the presidential race in 10 months with greater success than in 2017, when she reached the final round but lost to centrist Emmanuel Macron.

National Rally candidates — including several who originally hailed from the mainstream right — failed in all 12 French regions during elections last Sunday marked by record-high abstention with only one in three voters casting ballots. Polls had suggested the party, which has never headed a region, would be victorious in at least one. Instead, it lost nearly a third of its regional councilors, in voting regarded as critical to planting local roots needed for the presidential race — a task that some say has been neglected.

"It's local elections that are the launch pad for the rocket" that could take Marine Le Pen to the presidential palace, Romain Lopez, mayor of the small southwest town of Moissac, said in an interview. "Today, we look like eternal seconds. That can ... demobilize the National Rally electorate for the presidential elections."

Some local representatives have resigned in disgust since the regional elections defeat, among them the delegate for the southern Hérault area, Bruno Lerognon.

In a bitter letter to Le Pen, posted on Facebook, Lerognon blasted his boss' strategy to lure voters from other parties as "absurd." He said members of the party's local federation were "odiously treated" — removed from running in the regional elections in favor of outsiders. Cronyism, had "rotted" the local far-right scene, he wrote, alluding to long-standing criticism of power clans within the National Rally whose voices are decisive. Le Pen replaced him a day later.

In western France, all four members of a small local federation resigned between rounds of the regional elections. None of the four was represented on local electoral lists — "pushed aside," as they claimed, by higher-ups elsewhere. They bemoaned a "losing strategy" born at the Lille party congress in 2018, when Le Pen first proposed changing the party's name and severed remaining ties with her father.

A party figure with a national reputation, European Parliament lawmaker Gilbert Collard, has criticized the strategy of opening up as "a trap." He said he won't attend the congress.

Lopez, the mayor of Moissac, will be there, hoping that he and others with complaints will be heard.

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Lopez, 31, is a proponent of Le Pen's outreach to other parties, and credits his own broad appeal to voters for his election last year, in an upset for the previously leftist town.

But the party hierarchy is disconnected from its scarce, albeit vital local bases, Lopez said. National officials treat local representatives like children "and impose everything, how to communicate, build a local campaign," Lopez said. "And by imposing everything from the top, you have a national strategy ... disconnected from the reality of each town or region."

He is unsure whether the party will give local officials like himself speaking time, beyond his five minutes at a roundtable, but hopes to be heard.

"When you're in self-satisfaction, when you refuse to look at imperfections, you go straight into the wall," he said.

Europe in vaccination race against COVID-19's delta variant

By BARRY HATTON Associated Press

LISBON, Portugal (AP) — Countries across Europe are scrambling to accelerate coronavirus vaccinations and outpace the spread of the more infectious delta variant, in a high-stakes race to prevent hospital wards from filling up again with patients fighting for their lives.

The urgency coincides with Europe's summer holiday months, with fair weather bringing more social gatherings and governments reluctant to clamp down on them. Social distancing is commonly neglected, especially among the young, and some countries are scrapping the requirement to wear masks outdoors.

Incentives for people to get shots include free groceries, travel and entertainment vouchers, and prize drawings. The president of Cyprus even appealed to a sense of patriotism.

The risk of infection from the delta variant is "high to very high" for partially or unvaccinated communities, according to the European Centre for Disease Control, which monitors 30 countries on the continent. It estimates that by the end of August, the variant will account for 90% of cases in the European Union.

"It is very important to progress with the vaccine rollout at a very high pace," the ECDC warned.

The World Health Organization is also concerned. The variant makes transmission growth "exponential," according to Maria Van Kerkhove, its technical lead on COVID-19.

Daily new case numbers are already climbing sharply in countries like the United Kingdom, Portugal and Russia.

In the U.K., cases of the delta variant have increased fourfold in less than a month, with confirmed cases Friday up 46% on the previous week.

Portuguese health authorities this week reported a "vertiginous" rise in the prevalence of the delta variant, which accounted for only 4% of cases in May but almost 56% in June. The country is reporting its highest number of daily cases since February, and the number of COVID-19 patients in hospitals has surpassed 500 for the first time since early April.

Reports of new infections in Russia more than doubled in June, topping 20,000 per day this week, and deaths hit 679 on Friday, the fourth day in a row that the death toll set a daily record.

Still, "no one wants any lockdowns," said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov at a briefing, although he admitted that the virus situation in a number of Russian regions is "tense."

In some countries, the virus is spreading much faster among younger people. In Spain, the national 14-day case notification rate per 100,000 people rose to 152 on Friday. But for the 20-29 age group, it shot up to 449.

Those numbers have triggered alarm across the continent.

The Dutch government is extending its vaccination program to those aged 12-17 to help head off a feared new surge. Greece is offering young adults 150 euros (\$177) in credit after their first jab. Rome authorities are mulling the use of vans to vaccinate people at the beach. And Poland last week launched a lottery open only to adults who are fully vaccinated, with new cars among the prizes.

Portuguese authorities have extended the hours of vaccination centers, created new walk-in clinics, called up armed forces personnel to help run operations, and reduced the period between taking the two doses

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of the AstraZeneca vaccine from 12 weeks to eight weeks.

"We're in a race against the clock," Cabinet Minister Mariana Vieira da Silva said.

In the fight against vaccine hesitancy across Europe, the appearance of variants has fed public uncertainty about how effective the shots are.

In Madrid this week, Claudia Aguilar, a 58-year-old archaeologist, got her second Pfizer-BioNTech jab at an auditorium that is expanding its working hours overnight.

Nevertheless, she said she is "not sure I'll really be immune" against future variants.

"I mean, I'm a bit skeptical that this is going to do any good," Aguilar said.

Bartender Yevgeniya Chernyshkova was lined up Thursday for a shot at Moscow's GUM department store just off Red Square after the government required vaccinations for workers in some sectors.

"Now, it's becoming mandatory and we all understand why — because the third wave of the pandemic has started here," she said.

Fifteen months after WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic, some governments appear more minded to reward public patience while thinking twice about bringing back restrictions.

Some 40,000 fans went to England's European Championship soccer match against Germany at London's Wembley Stadium last week. In Portugal, new restrictions have been half-hearted, such as limiting restaurant opening hours on weekend nights.

In Moscow, however, restaurants, bars and cafes on Monday began admitting only customers who have been vaccinated, have recovered from COVID-19 in the past six months or can provide a negative test in the previous 72 hours.

France lifted the last of its major restrictions Wednesday, allowing unlimited crowds in restaurants, at weddings and most cultural events despite fast-rising cases of the delta variant.

Tiago Correia, an associate professor at Lisbon's Institute of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, detects a mood of public impatience, especially among young people keen to enjoy warm summer nights.

"People want to return to normal more quickly than the vaccination rollout is happening," he said.

The emerging variants have shone a light on the unprecedented scale of the immunization programs. The ECDC says that in the countries it surveys, 61% of people over 18 have had one shot and 40% are completely vaccinated.

But Dr. Hans Kluge, the head of the WHO's Europe office, cautioned this week that the delta variant is poised to become dominant by August in the 53-country region his office covers. And he notes that some 63% of people in that region haven't had a first jab.

"The three conditions for a new wave of excess hospitalizations and deaths before the (fall) are therefore in place: New variants, deficit in vaccine uptake, increased social mixing," Kluge said.

Another building evacuated; search goes on at collapse site

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

NORTH MIAMI BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Residents of a Miami-area high-rise loaded clothes and valuables into suitcases, laundry baskets and wagons and wheeled them to waiting cars after they were forced to evacuate the building when it was found to be unsafe in a review prompted by the deadly collapse of a building just a few miles away.

An audit prompted by the collapse of Champlain Towers South in nearby Surfside found that the 156-unit Crestview Towers in North Miami Beach, about 5 miles (8 kilometers) away, had been deemed structurally and electrically unsafe in January, the city said in a news release. Friday afternoon law enforcement authorities cordoned off the area and went door-to-door in the apartment building, telling residents they had to leave the 49-year-old structure.

Harold Dauphin was on his way home from picking up his son at camp Friday when he noticed a helicopter buzzing around his apartment and a heightened police presence. He wondered whether there had been a shooting nearby but then came home to find out that his building was being evacuated.

"They said the building is unsafe to live and it's an immediate evacuation," Dauphin said, speaking outside

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after he'd cleared out. He and his son live on the second floor. He said he hadn't previously heard anything about the problems that the city mentioned in their news release. He grabbed what he could — clothes, his work uniform and some electronic devices — and the two left.

"It's unfortunate, but I understand. Knowing what happened in Surfside, you know, it's understandable," he said.

It is the first building to be evacuated since municipal officials in South Florida, and statewide, began scrutinizing older high-rises in the wake of the Surfside collapse to ensure that substantial structural problems are not being ignored.

Meanwhile, authorities in Surfside said four more bodies had been found in the rubble, including the 7-year-old daughter of a Miami firefighter, bringing the confirmed death toll to 22.

But there was also relief. Closer inspection of the missing persons list reduced the number from 145 to 126 after duplicate names were eliminated and some residents reported missing turned up safe, officials said.

"So this is very, very good news," Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said. She said the numbers were expected to keep changing because detectives are continually reviewing the list and verifying reports.

The discovery of the girl's remains was especially hard on rescuers, Levine Cava said.

"It was truly different and more difficult for our first responders. These men and woman are paying an enormous human toll each and every day, and I ask that all of you please keep them in your thoughts and prayers," she said at a news conference.

The mayor also said she signed an emergency order to demolish the remaining part of the building once engineers have signed off on it. She said the order was signed now so that the demolition can move quickly once a date is set. It will likely be weeks before the demolition is scheduled, officials said.

No one has been rescued since the first hours after the June 24 collapse. Authorities are also preparing in case Hurricane Elsa — now in the eastern Caribbean — brings strong winds to South Florida. Search efforts have already been stopped briefly several times because of inclement weather.

"We will try to go as long as we can, but you can see from different periods of inclement weather we've had, we have stopped," Miami-Dade Fire Chief Alan Cominsky said.

Officials did not immediately release details about the structural problems that prompted Friday's evacuation in North Miami Beach, but Crestview Towers had reported millions of dollars in damage from 2017's Hurricane Irma.

A letter posted less than two weeks ago on the community's website said some repairs were underway or expected to begin soon on the building, after repeated delays. Plans included installing a new roof, replacing a generator that was over 40 years old, changing the entire building's lighting system, and more.

"Last year has been a different year due to the pandemic and many things have been postponed for countless reasons, but this year we have started to work hard," the letter said.

The building's condo association could not be immediately reached for comment on the delay between Friday's evacuation and the January recertification report that revealed unsafe conditions.

Darwin Reyes said he lived in the building during Hurricane Irma and a chunk of the balcony above his fell onto his balcony during the storm. He listed multiple other complaints about the building, including elevators that often didn't work and pipes that didn't drain well. He said he had been planning to move after living there for five years.

On Friday, Reyes had just woken up from a nap as he prepared for a night shift at a hotel he works at. He checked his Instagram feed and saw that a notice had just been posted that said his building was being evacuated. He looked into the hallway and saw people scurrying back and forth, phones to their ears, with bags and suitcases.

He and his wife packed what they could into multiple suitcases. She went down in the elevator, and he took the stairs from the 9th floor. In the scramble, one of their suitcases went missing, and as darkness fell Friday they were still trying to locate it.

"Right now I'm officially homeless," he said, adding that he would probably go stay with a relative.

Afghan pullout has US spies reorienting in terrorism fight

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The two-decade war in Afghanistan has given U.S. spies a perch for keeping tabs on terrorist groups that might once again use the beleaguered nation to plan attacks against the U.S. homeland. But that will end soon.

The withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan is leaving intelligence agencies scrambling for other ways to monitor and stop terrorists. They'll have to depend more on technology and their allies in the Afghan government — even as it faces an increasingly uncertain future once U.S. and NATO forces depart.

"You may not be blind, but you're going to be legally blind," said Rep. Mike Waltz, a Florida Republican and Green Beret who served in Afghanistan. Waltz said in an interview that while he believed American forces would still be able to detect threats, they would have to respond with lesser intelligence and more complex operations from bases outside the country.

The Afghanistan withdrawal was ordered by President Joe Biden. He has said it's time to end America's longest war after two decades of a conflict that killed 2,200 U.S. troops and 38,000 Afghan civilians, with a cost as much as \$1 trillion.

But that withdrawal comes with many uncertainties as a resurgent Taliban captures ground and fears mount that the country could soon fall into civil war. The U.S. is still working on agreements to base counterterrorism forces in the region and evacuate thousands of interpreters and other Afghans who helped the American war effort.

CIA Director William Burns testified in April that fighters from al-Qaida and the Islamic State group are still operating in Afghanistan and "remain intent on recovering the ability to attack U.S. targets."

"When the time comes for the U.S. military to withdraw, the U.S. government's ability to collect and act on threats will diminish. That's simply a fact," Burns said. He added that the CIA and other U.S. agencies "retain a suite of capabilities" to monitor and stop threats.

Burns made a secret visit to Afghanistan in April and reassured Afghan officials that the U.S. would remain engaged in counterterrorism efforts, according to two officials familiar with the visit.

The CIA and Office of the Director of National Intelligence declined to comment for this story.

The CIA has had a role in Afghanistan for more than 30 years, dating back to aiding rebels fighting the Soviet Union from 1979 to 1989. During the U.S. war, it is said to have carried out strikes against terror targets and trained Afghan fighters in groups known as Counter Terrorism Pursuit Teams. Those teams are feared by many Afghans and have been implicated in extrajudicial killings of civilians.

The Associated Press reported in April that the CIA was preparing to turn over control of those teams in six provinces to the Afghan intelligence service, known as the National Directorate of Security. The closure of posts near Afghanistan's borders with Iran and Pakistan will make it harder to monitor hostile groups operating in those areas, and the withdrawal of Americans from Afghan agencies could worsen already troubling problems with corruption, experts said.

Washington has long struggled to gather intelligence even from its allies in Afghanistan. In the early years of the conflict, the U.S. was drawn into rivalries that resulted in targets that were driven by score-settling among factions in the country.

Retired Lt. Gen. Robert Ashley, who led the Defense Intelligence Agency from 2017 to 2020, said U.S. authorities may be able to replace some of their lost footprint with intercepted communications as well as publicly available information posted online, particularly with the growth of cellphone networks compared with the 1990s. And while Afghan forces have faltered against the Taliban, they can also provide valuable information, Ashley said.

"We shouldn't discount their ability to understand their ground truth," said Ashley, now an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security. "It's their nature, it's their culture, it's their language."

Former intelligence officials and experts noted that the CIA and other agencies already have to work without a military presence in other countries where militant groups threaten Americans.

Rep. Jason Crow, a Colorado Democrat and former Army Ranger who served in Afghanistan, said human sources in Afghanistan were already limited and the U.S. has monitoring capabilities today that it didn't

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have two decades ago.

"It's still going to be very robust," Crow said. "When you don't have boots on the ground, it's certainly more challenging, but we have capabilities and things that allow us to meet that challenge. It just becomes a little more difficult."

Crow and Waltz are among a bipartisan group of lawmakers who have pushed the White House to quickly process visas for thousands of interpreters and other Afghans who helped American forces. More than 18,000 applications are pending. Senior U.S. officials have said the administration plans to carry out an evacuation later this summer but has not settled on a country or countries for what would likely be a temporary relocation.

Failing to protect Afghans waiting for visas could have "a huge chilling effect on people working with us going forward," Waltz said.

Analysts differ on what to expect from the Taliban if it were to consolidate control over the country. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence reported in May that the Taliban's "desires for foreign aid and legitimacy might marginally moderate its conduct over time," driven in part by international attention and the proliferation of phones.

But Colin Clarke, director of policy and research at the Soufan Group, said he expected the Taliban to continue harboring al-Qaida and worried of a possible insurgency that could embolden extremists and become a regional conflict similar to what happened in Iraq after the American withdrawal there.

"I want us to pull out of Afghanistan in theory and be safe," he said. "That's just not from my analysis what's going to happen."

As condo crashed down, they escaped through smoke and ruin

By KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Alfredo Lopez and his wife Marian were asleep when the first thundering blast jolted them awake. Moments later, a second boom, much louder than the first, shook the bed on the sixth floor of their Miami apartment.

Alfredo rushed to wake his 24-year-old son Michael, urging him to get dressed, before running to the balcony window.

"All I could see was just white dust, very thick. I could barely see the balcony railing."

The lights cut out and the emergency alarm came on, warning the residents of Champlain Towers South to evacuate. Lopez thought about sneakers, but his hands were shaking so badly he knew he couldn't tie the laces and settled on sandals with straps.

Marian Lopez was disoriented. The 67-year-old fumbled for shoes as her husband pressed her impatiently.

The Lopez family has lived for two decades on the street side of the condo that's still partially intact. Alfredo used to joke to his wife she'd have to bury him there.

When he opened the front door that night, half of the building was gone. A jagged five-foot chunk of flooring barely left enough room to escape.

"There was no hallway, no ceiling, no apartments, no walls, nothing."

The 61-year-old froze in terror, unable to move.

"I was petrified. I really thought, 'This is it. We are going to die.'"

Sometimes, the line between life and death is as seemingly random as an ocean or street view, an odd or even unit. While 126 residents, mostly from the oceanside units, are among the missing nine days later, many others barely escaped. With the elevator collapsed, the survivors descended the cracked stairwell that had separated from the wall, along the way helping neighbors they met for the first time and others they'd known for years, all "joined through this tragedy for forever now," says Albert Aguero, who helped an 88-year-old stranger to safety.

While their escape felt agonizingly long, it all unfolded in mere minutes. In those perilous seconds, before the world knew of the more than the 22 who perished and the many missing, they were fighting to survive.

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"When I opened the staircase door and half the staircase was missing, at that point I know we're racing against time to all get out as a family," Aguero said.

Down on the first floor, recent college graduate Gabriel Nir had just finished a late night workout and was in the kitchen cooking salmon. The rest of the family would normally be asleep, but his 15-year-old sister had just returned from babysitting and was in the shower, his dad was out of town and his mom had just come home from an event.

They all heard the first thunderous rumble. They knew the building was undergoing construction and had been irritated by the incessant noise, but this felt different.

Sara Nir, their mother, ran to the lobby, asking the security guard if she'd seen anything.

Back in the kitchen, thick, concrete dust came rushing into their apartment from the patio windows near the pool. The ground was shaking as 25-year-old Gabriel ran to the bathroom.

"We have to go now!" he screamed to his sister. They ran to the lobby, where their mother urged the security guard to call 911. The guard couldn't remember the address so Gabriel phoned.

"Please hurry, please hurry," he begged.

Outside, he noticed the car deck had caved into the parking garage. Car alarms were blaring, emergency lights were flashing and water was rapidly filling the garage where pipes had burst.

He ran back to the lobby, where the choking dust cloud was making it difficult to see. Residents from upstairs were running out the door screaming, many still in pajamas, one man pushing a baby stroller.

It was getting harder to breathe. The rumbling intensified, as he pushed his mom and sister safely into the street.

"Run, run," he ordered.

Tiny rocks and bits of debris pelted his head as he turned back to face the image that still haunts him.

"I saw the building turning into a white dust," he says. "I heard people screaming."

"I have to go back. I have to make sure everyone's OK," he said.

But he knew it was too late.

Up on the 11th floor, Albert Aguero stared in disbelief at the gaping holes in the elevator shaft.

Half of the neighboring apartment was sheared off. The power was out. Aguero wondered if it had been struck by lightning. The fit 42-year-old former college athlete was vacationing from New Jersey with his wife Janette, 14-year-old daughter Athena and his 22-year-old son Justin Willis, a college baseball player.

His son thought a plane had crashed into the building, but there was little time to talk as they rushed into the stairwell, wondering if there was enough time to descend 11 painstaking floors. No one panicked or cried.

"There was no time to react. Just make your move."

Each time they descended another level, they yelled out the floor number, a small victory of survival, one floor closer to freedom.

There wasn't enough time to look back; instead they frequently called out to each other.

"Justin, are you still there?"

"Babe, are you ok?"

When they reached the fifth floor, Janette heard banging on the staircase. She wrenched open the frozen door and a few more joined them on the stairs, including a younger woman who was clutching an elderly woman.

She asked Aguero and his son to help the elderly woman as they continued their descent. There were some cracks and gaps down the stairwell, but nothing unpassable.

Still, the pace was too much for the woman.

"Don't worry about me. I'm 88. I've had a good life," she said, trying to wave them on without her.

But Aguero was determined. They were all going to make it out alive. They moved carefully and quickly, no pushing or trampling.

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"You're going to be fine," he reassured her. "We're going to make sure you make it to 89."

On the ninth floor, Raysa Rodriguez and her neighbor Yadira Santos huddled in the hallway, along with Santos' 10-year-old son Kai and their Maltese puppy. They'd already seen that the other half of the building was gone and assumed the stairwells were, too.

She thought their only escape was to wait on a balcony until fire trucks arrived. In the chaos, her brother Fred called — he had rushed to the building and was standing outside. He kept repeating the same urgent warning.

"Get out of there, get out," he pleaded.

She argued, saying there was no way out, the stairs were gone.

A firefighter grabbed Fred's phone and uttered a chilling command.

"You need to find a way out."

They decided to try the stairwell again. When they reached the eighth floor, they found 84-year-old Ada Lopez waiting with her walker. Santos had called to warn her.

Rodriguez rushed ahead to see if there was a way out as the others helped the elderly Lopez down the stairwell, bumping into the Aguero family and Albert Lopez's clan along the way.

But when Rodriguez reached the flooded parking garage, she turned around.

"I knew being electrocuted was a possibility," Rodriguez feared.

They rushed back upstairs to the second floor where someone had left their apartment doors open. Outside from the balcony, they flagged down rescue teams outside and a cherry picker brought them to safety.

Back in the stairwell, Alfredo Lopez was panicked. There were no hugs or emotional words. He was miffed that his wife had chosen to wear slippers to navigate their doomsday nightmare.

"What were you thinking," he yelled.

When they reached the second or third floor, Susana Alvarez from 1006 was knocking on the stairwell door, her 88-year-old neighbor Esther Gorfinkel beside her.

As Alvarez fled her apartment, she'd banged on her neighbors' doors one last time, using her cellphone flashlight in the darkness. From the wrecked side of the building, she heard screams.

"Help me, help me," she heard a woman crying.

"There were people alive in there," she says quietly.

The 62-year-old Alvarez had just had brought her beloved cat Mia to the building a week ago. In a few days, she was planning to move her mother into the condo. Alvarez is the only family member left to care for her mother, who has advanced Alzheimer's.

As she and Gorfinkel made their way down, Alvarez paused, thinking of Hilda Noriega on the sixth floor. She was like family. They'd spent many holidays together. Noriega and her mother had been best friends since their days in Cuba.

"Can I rescue her, can I go get her?" she thought frantically. "But I had already seen the building, so I kept going."

Gorfinkel complained they were moving too fast, her knee was giving her terrible pains. Without thinking, Lopez threw her over his shoulder and pressed on.

"The five of us became like a caravan," he said.

Alvarez couldn't stop talking about the cat.

"Forget about the cat," Lopez screamed in a moment of frustration. "We've got to get going."

When they got to the flooded parking garage, one car was on top of another, crushed by a giant slab of concrete.

Alvarez panicked. She was wearing slippers, just like Lopez's wife. It was too high to climb the rubble onto the pool deck. The Aguero family had just made it onto the pool deck ahead of them, with father and son hoisting Gorfinkel up the rubble.

"I cannot make it," she thought. Her hands were covered with blood, but she had no scratches, and no

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idea where it came from.

Days later, Gorfinkel called The Agueros to thank them for saving her life. Alvarez, too, is adamant she wouldn't have survived without the Lopez family.

"Thanks to him and his son we were able to climb that rubble."

Days later, the Agueros, the Nir and Lopez family and their little ragtag team are all safe. They embrace their children and siblings tighter, knowing many of their neighbors will never return, never hug their loved ones again.

They have no homes. It's all gone. Clothes, computers, cars, even prescriptions. It's inconvenient, they say, but it doesn't really matter. They are alive.

At night, they still hear the screams, and it all comes rushing back.

"The first few days, I had horrible survivor's guilt," said Lopez, a deeply religious man.

Gabriel Nir finds it difficult to sleep. He tries to stay busy, to push away the what-ifs.

"It's like a virus. it just never goes away," he says regretfully. "I wish I could have done more ... these people that are missing, they aren't coming back."

His family is crammed into a nearby donated hotel room. His voice is filled with adrenaline, days later, he's talks as if on fast-forward, clipped and frantic, just like his escape.

"Check on your loved ones ... it's only one life," he said. "You don't know what's going to happen, today, tomorrow, the next hour."

Alvarez too is filled with grief. Hilda Noriega, her mother's best friend, is among the dead.

She hasn't been in a bed since that night, can't bring herself to crawl under the covers, instead sleeping in a chair.

"The people in the rubble, I could hear them. Some were yelling 'Help,'" she says.

"That will haunt me forever. I will never forget that."

Hurricane Elsa races toward Haiti amid fears of landslides

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Hurricane Elsa raced toward Haiti and the Dominican Republic on Saturday, where it threatened to unleash flooding and landslides before taking aim at Cuba and Florida.

The Category 1 storm was located about 395 miles (635 kilometers) east-southeast of Isla Beata, Dominican Republic and was moving west-northwest at 29 mph (46 kph). It had maximum sustained winds of 80 mph (130 kph), with the hurricane expected to become a tropical storm after hitting Cuba, according to the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

The long-term forecast track showed it heading toward Florida as a tropical storm by Tuesday morning, but some models would carry it into the Gulf or up the Atlantic Coast.

In Haiti, authorities used social media to alert people about the hurricane and urged them to evacuate if they lived near water or mountain flanks.

"The whole country is threatened by this hurricane," the Civil Protection Agency said in a statement. "Make every effort to escape before it's too late."

Haiti is especially vulnerable to floods and landslides because of widespread erosion and deforestation.

A hurricane warning was issued for for Jamaica and from the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince to Punta Palenque in the Dominican Republic. A hurricane watch was in effect for the Cuban provinces of Camaguey, Granma, Guantanamo, Holguin, Las Tunas, and Santiago de Cuba. Some of those provinces have reported a high number of COVID-19 infections, raising concerns that the storm could force large groups of people to seek shelter together.

In the neighboring Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, authorities opened more than 2,400 shelters as forecasters warned of heavy rains starting Saturday before dawn.

Elsa is forecast to brush past the southernmost point of Hispaniola by early Saturday afternoon and then take aim at communities in southern Haiti. The storm already ripped off roofs, destroyed crops and

downed trees and power lines in the eastern Caribbean on Friday, with damage reported in Barbados, St. Lucia and in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, which are struggling to recover from massive volcanic eruptions that began in April.

Elsa is the first hurricane of the Atlantic season and the earliest fifth-named storm on record. It is forecast to drop 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) of rain with maximum totals of 15 inches (38 centimeters) across portions of southern Hispaniola and Jamaica.

Firefighters make progress against California forest fires

By TERRY CHEA and JOHN ANTCZAK Associated Press

REDDING, Calif. (AP) — Firefighters were making progress Friday against Northern California forest fires that burned several homes and forced thousands to flee communities even as authorities prepared for a hot, crowded Fourth of July weekend that could bring the threat of new blazes.

Three wildfires near the towering Mount Shasta volcano an hour's drive from the Oregon border have burned around 60 square miles (155 square kilometers) of brush and timber.

Property damage was evident at the Salt Fire, which broke out Wednesday near Interstate 5 and prompted evacuations for some roads in Lakehead, an unincorporated community of around 700 people north of the city of Redding.

About a dozen destroyed buildings could be seen in just one area of the community.

The Salt Fire covered nearly 8 square miles (21 square kilometers), and was 5% contained, said Adrienne Freeman, a spokeswoman for Shasta-Trinity National Forest. She said official damage assessments will be made by local authorities.

To the northeast, the Tennant Fire in the Klamath National Forest had burned five buildings, including two homes, and threatened several hundred more. It grew slightly to more than 15 square miles (40 square kilometers) but progress was also reported there. Mop-up began on the western flank while the east side remained active. Evacuation orders and warnings continued in nearby areas.

To the north, the Lava Fire burning partly on the flanks of Mount Shasta covered more than 37 square miles (96 square kilometers) but was 27% contained. Several thousand residents of Lake Shastina were allowed to return home late Thursday.

The blazes erupted during an extreme heat wave in the U.S. West. The heat has since moderated but temperatures in the Mount Shasta area were still expected to reach nearly 100 degrees (38 Celsius) over the weekend.

Arizona, New Mexico and Utah have been forced to battle wildfires and California is bracing for what some experts fear will be one of its worst fire seasons yet.

Last year, California wildfires scorched more than 6,562 square miles (17,000 square kilometers) of land, the most in its recorded history. And just three years ago, a fire in Butte County in Northern California killed 85 people and largely destroyed the town of Paradise.

This year, many of California's national parks have restrictions on campfires, cooking and smoking because of fire risks in the hot, dry summer. The parks are bracing for large crowds over the holiday weekend.

Fire authorities throughout California also have stepped up campaigns urging people not to use fireworks to celebrate the Fourth of July, citing both the explosive dangers and the threat of wildfires in the withering conditions.

Death toll from Northwest heat wave expected to keep rising

By MANUEL VALDES Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Each day, more deaths are being linked to the heat wave that struck the Pacific Northwest this past week, with medical staff who treated people overwhelmed by temperatures well above 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 Celsius) saying the toll from the extreme weather will keep creeping up.

Hundreds of deaths were being investigated as heat related in Oregon, Washington state and British

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Columbia. The dangerous heat began June 25 and only began to subside in some areas on Tuesday.

The death toll in Oregon alone has reached at least 95, the state medical examiner said on Friday, with most occurring in Multnomah County, which encompasses Portland. The deaths include an Guatemalan immigrant who collapsed as he worked at a plant nursery in a rural Oregon town during the soaring heat.

In Canada, British Columbia's chief coroner, Lisa Lapointe, said Friday that 719 sudden and unexpected deaths have been reported in the province during the heat wave, and that number over a seven-day period is unprecedented. LaPointe said the number of deaths is three times more than what would normally occur during the same period.

The intense temperatures are believed to be a significant contributing factor in the jump, but the number is expected to increase as more information is compiled, LaPointe said.

Washington state authorities have linked about 30 deaths to the heat, with more reports coming in each day this week.

"I think, over time, we will understand that the numbers are only going to climb," said Dr. Steve Mitchell, director of Harborview Medical Center's Emergency Medicine Department in Seattle. "I know, in my experience, that I'm expecting to see much larger numbers than what we are currently able to report because of talking to EMS colleagues who were experiencing twice as many calls for help that day."

There were 1,792 emergency room visits for suspected heat-related illness since June 25, the Washington state Department of Health said Thursday. Of those visits, 21% required people to be admitted to the hospital.

Monday had the most emergency room visits, with 702, the health department said. It was the hottest day of the heat wave in many areas, with Seattle, Portland, Oregon, and other cities smashing all-time heat records. It reached 108 F (42 C) in Seattle, and 116 F (47) in Oregon's largest city.

"With this latest heat emergency, when we were dealing with it, the only thing comparable at Harborview and in the region that we've experienced recently was actually the early days of COVID," Mitchell said.

Forecasters blamed the temperatures that spiked more than 30 degrees above normal on a "heat dome" that parked a strong high pressure system over the region. Temperatures cooled considerably in western Washington and Oregon by Tuesday, though a heat warning was still in effect for parts of the interior Northwest and Canada.

Experts say the hot weather is a harbinger of things to come as climate change affects global weather patterns.

The extraordinary heat wave stretched into the upper reaches of California, where several wildfires erupted in the hot, dry conditions, making it difficult for firefighters trying to beat back the flames that have driven thousands from their homes in mountain communities and burned several residences.

Pilot minutes before ocean crash: 'It doesn't look good'

By CALEB JONES, DAVID KOENIG and MICHELLE A. MONROE Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Two pilots told air traffic controllers that their engine had cut out and they needed help moments before crashing their cargo plane into the Pacific Ocean off Hawaii on Friday.

"It doesn't look good out here," one of the pilots said before the Boeing 737 broke apart as it entered the water.

Both pilots, the only people aboard, were seriously injured but survived the crash. An hour later, rescuers found the two clinging to packages and parts of the plane in about 150 feet (46 meters) of water several miles off Oahu, authorities said.

"One was on the tail and the other clinging to packages," Coast Guard Lt. Commander Karin Evelyn wrote in an email to The Associated Press. As an agency helicopter got close, "the airplane began to sink putting the individual on the tail in the water. The crews hoisted them safely on the aircraft. The rescue swimmer then assisted the other individual."

The pilots of Transair Flight 810 heading from Honolulu to Maui reported engine trouble and were trying to return to Honolulu, the Federal Aviation Administration said in a statement.

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"We've lost No. 1 engine, and we're coming straight to the airport," one of the pilots said in air traffic control communications. "We're going to need the fire department. There's a chance we're going to lose the other engine, too, it's running very hot. We're very low on speed."

The pilot said they weren't carrying hazardous materials and had two hours' worth of fuel. They asked the tower to advise the Coast Guard, then asked if there was a closer airport than Honolulu.

After a stretch of silence, the controller asks if the pilot is still there. There was no response.

"Looks like they went down in the water," the tower says.

Later, a rescuer aboard a Coast Guard helicopter sent to search for the pilots tells air traffic control: "We do have an aircraft in the water ... we're currently overhead (the) debris field."

Minutes later: "We have zero, two souls in sight in the water."

The tower responded, "OK, so you have both guys, both souls in sight?"

"Both souls in sight, yes, sir," the rescuers responded.

The pilots, whose identities were not immediately released, were taken to a hospital. Officials at Queen's Medical Center said a 58-year-old was in critical condition, Hawaii News Now reported. The other pilot, a 50-year-old, was in serious condition with a head injury and multiple lacerations, the TV station reported.

The Coast Guard reported flying over the crash site off Oahu to evaluate for pollution after the sun came up in the morning. Debris and fuel remained in the water.

The FAA and the National Transportation Safety Board will investigate. The NTSB said in a tweet that it will send a team of 10 investigators.

The plane is a 46-year-old Boeing 737-200, a much earlier version of the 737 than the Max, and one that U.S. airlines no longer use for passenger flights. There are fewer than 60 737-200s still flying worldwide, according to aviation-data researcher Cirium.

The Boeing 737 first flew in the late 1960s and is the most popular airline plane still in production. Boeing has delivered more than 10,500 of them and has unfilled orders for about 4,000 more, almost all of those for the latest version of the plane, the 737 Max.

Over the years, about 200 737s have been destroyed in crashes and several hundred others have been involved in less serious accidents and incidents, according to the Aviation Safety Network database.

"For a jet that has been in production for so long and is being used so extensively, 203 hull-loss accidents can be considered a very good safety record," said Harro Ranter, who runs the database.

He said the plane's accident rate improved dramatically from the first models to more recent ones that preceded the Max.

Boeing said in a statement: "We are aware of the reports out of Honolulu, Hawaii and are closely monitoring the situation. We are in contact with the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board and are working to gather more information."

There have been some water landings over the years in which people survived, the most famous being the 2009 crash of a US Airways flight in New York's Hudson River where all 155 people on board survived.

All four people on board survived a cargo plane crash into water short of a runway in Gabon in 2011.

In other cases, some passengers and crew survived but some died, including a hijacked Ethiopian Airlines plane that ran out of fuel and crashed into the Indian Ocean in 1996, a Tunisian airliner that went down off the coast of Sicily in 2005, and an Indonesian airliner that landed in a river during a thunderstorm in 2002.

Ransomware hits hundreds of US companies, security firm says

By FRANK BAJAK, ERIC TUCKER and MATT O'BRIEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A ransomware attack paralyzed the networks of at least 200 U.S. companies on Friday, according to a cybersecurity researcher whose company was responding to the incident.

The REvil gang, a major Russian-speaking ransomware syndicate, appears to be behind the attack, said John Hammond of the security firm Huntress Labs. He said the criminals targeted a software supplier called Kaseya, using its network-management package as a conduit to spread the ransomware through cloud-service providers. Other researchers agreed with Hammond's assessment.

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"Kaseya handles large enterprise all the way to small businesses globally, so ultimately, (this) has the potential to spread to any size or scale business," Hammond said in a direct message on Twitter. "This is a colossal and devastating supply chain attack."

Such cyberattacks typically infiltrate widely used software and spread malware as it updates automatically. It was not immediately clear how many Kaseya customers might be affected or who they might be. Kaseya urged customers in a statement on its website to immediately shut down servers running the affected software. It said the attack was limited to a "small number" of its customers.

Brett Callow, a ransomware expert at the cybersecurity firm Emsisoft, said he was unaware of any previous ransomware supply-chain attack on this scale. There have been others, but they were fairly minor, he said. "This is SolarWinds with ransomware," he said. He was referring to a Russian cyberespionage hacking campaign discovered in December that spread by infecting network management software to infiltrate U.S. federal agencies and scores of corporations.

Cybersecurity researcher Jake Williams, president of Rendition Infosec, said he was already working with six companies hit by the ransomware. It's no accident that this happened before the Fourth of July weekend, when IT staffing is generally thin, he added.

"There's zero doubt in my mind that the timing here was intentional," he said.

Hammond of Huntress said he was aware of four managed-services providers — companies that host IT infrastructure for multiple customers — being hit by the ransomware, which encrypts networks until the victims pay off attackers. He said thousand of computers were hit.

"We currently have three Huntress partners who are impacted with roughly 200 businesses that have been encrypted," Hammond said.

Hammond wrote on Twitter: "Based on everything we are seeing right now, we strongly believe this (is) REvil/Sodinikibi." The FBI linked the same ransomware provider to a May attack on JBS SA, a major global meat processor.

The federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency said in a statement late Friday that it is closely monitoring the situation and working with the FBI to collect more information about its impact.

CISA urged anyone who might be affected to "follow Kaseya's guidance to shut down VSA servers immediately." Kaseya runs what's called a virtual system administrator, or VSA, that's used to remotely manage and monitor a customer's network.

The privately held Kaseya says it is based in Dublin, Ireland, with a U.S. headquarters in Miami. The Miami Herald recently described it as "one of Miami's oldest tech companies" in a report about its plans to hire as many as 500 workers by 2022 to staff a recently acquired cybersecurity platform.

Brian Honan, an Irish cybersecurity consultant, said by email Friday that "this is a classic supply chain attack where the criminals have compromised a trusted supplier of companies and have abused that trust to attack their customers."

He said it can be difficult for smaller businesses to defend against this type of attack because they "rely on the security of their suppliers and the software those suppliers are using."

The only good news, said Williams, of Rendition Infosec, is that "a lot of our customers don't have Kaseya on every machine in their network," making it harder for attackers to move across an organization's computer systems.

That makes for an easier recovery, he said.

Active since April 2019, the group known as REvil provides ransomware-as-a-service, meaning it develops the network-paralyzing software and leases it to so-called affiliates who infect targets and earn the lion's share of ransoms.

REvil is among ransomware gangs that steal data from targets before activating the ransomware, strengthening their extortion efforts. The average ransom payment to the group was about half a million dollars last year, said the Palo Alto Networks cybersecurity firm in a recent report.

Some cybersecurity experts predicted that it might be hard for the gang to handle the ransom negotiations, given the large number of victims — though the long U.S. holiday weekend might give it more time to start working through the list.

Fewer people missing in collapse; nearby tower is evacuated

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — The number of people missing in the Florida condominium collapse fell Friday following a new review, but fears of another potentially catastrophic failure deepened after engineers found unsafe conditions in a different tower and ordered the entire building evacuated.

The nearby city of North Miami Beach announced that an audit prompted by the deadly collapse of Champlain Towers found the 156-unit Crestview Towers building structurally and electrically unsafe.

"In an abundance of caution, the City ordered the building closed immediately and the residents evacuated for their protection, while a full structural assessment is conducted and next steps are determined," City Manager Arthur H. Sorey III said a news release.

The evacuation comes as municipal officials in South Florida and statewide are scrutinizing older high-rises in the wake of the collapse to ensure that serious structural problems are not being ignored.

Crestview Towers residents could be seen Friday evening hauling suitcases and packing items into cars outside the building, which was constructed in 1972. City officials were trying to help residents find places to go.

Meanwhile, authorities in Surfside said four more bodies had emerged from the rubble, including the 7-year-old daughter of a Miami firefighter, bringing the confirmed death toll to 22.

But there was also relief. Closer inspection of missing persons list reduced the number from 145 to 126 after duplicate names were eliminated and some residents reported missing turned up safe, officials said.

"So this is very, very good news," Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said. She said the numbers were expected to keep changing because detectives are continually reviewing the list and verifying reports.

In some cases, when detectives were able to contact people who had been reported as potentially missing, they found that not only were they safe, but other members of their families were safe too. That pushed the list of people who have been accounted for up to 188 and cut the number of missing, she said.

Detectives have worked around the clock to contact relatives and others. In some cases, English and Hebrew names have been offered for the same missing relative, officials have said.

The 7-year-old who perished in the collapse was "a member of our fire family," Miami Mayor Francis Suarez said.

The discovery of the girl's remains was especially hard on rescuers, Levine Cava said.

"It was truly different and more difficult for our first responders. These men and woman are paying an enormous human toll each and every day, and I ask that all of you please keep them in your thoughts and prayers," she said at a news conference.

The mayor also said she signed an emergency order to demolish the remaining part of the building once engineers have signed off on it. She said the order was signed now so that the demolition can move quickly once a date is set. It will likely be weeks before the demolition is scheduled, officials said.

"Our top priority is search and rescue. We will take no action that will jeopardize our search-and-rescue efforts," Levine Cava said. "The building poses a threat to public health and safety."

No one has been rescued since the first hours after the June 24 collapse.

During a meeting Friday with relatives of the missing, Miami-Dade Assistant Fire Chief Raide Jadallah said that only one voice has been heard during the entire search. A woman's voice was detected until about 10 a.m. or 11 a.m. on the morning of the collapse, which happened around 1:30 a.m. Rescuers were unable to reach her, and he said no other voices or human sounds have been heard since.

"Most of the victims have been deceased in their bedroom indicating they were asleep," he said.

Jadallah also prepared the families for a possible suspension of the search if Hurricane Elsa — now in the eastern Caribbean — brings strong winds to South Florida that would make the work too dangerous. Search efforts have been stopped briefly several times because of inclement weather.

"We will try to go as long as we can, but you can see from different periods of inclement weather we've had, we have stopped," Miami-Dade Fire Chief Alan Cominsky said.

Some rescue workers who are now staying in tents will be moved to cruise ships, which can stay safe during a tropical storm, Jadallah said.

About 600 first responders will stay on the Royal Caribbean ship Explorer of the Seas, the cruise line said. The ship, which can accommodate more than 3,000 passengers, began housing rescue teams Thursday and likely will continue for the next month.

Friday's announcements came the day after concerns about the structure's instability prompted a 15-hour halt to the search for survivors. Crews noticed widening cracks and up to a foot of movement in a large column.

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.

Migrant kids play, watch TV in what US calls 'model' shelter

By AMY TAXIN and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

POMONA, Calif. (AP) — Teenage boys chased down soccer balls on grassy fields. Dormitory beds were organized into small pods with a TV in each section. Some kids laid on the cots reading, while others played cards nearby with caseworkers.

The Biden administration on Friday gave a rare look inside an emergency shelter it opened to house migrant children who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border alone, calling the California facility a model among its large-scale sites.

Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra, whose agency is in charge of caring for migrant children, was joined by elected officials as he toured the shelter housing nearly 1,400 children at the Los Angeles County fairgrounds in the city of Pomona. Two journalists from The Associated Press were allowed to accompany them and shared notes and photos of the tour with other news outlets as part of a pool arrangement.

The facility was a sharp contrast to conditions reported at other emergency shelters, where children have complained of foul-smelling food, little outdoor recreational space and having to spend their days sleeping with little to do and no knowledge of when they would be released to relatives in the United States.

"We consider this a model," Becerra told reporters after touring the Pomona facility, which has a 30,000-square-foot (2,787-square-meter) air-conditioned room with foosball and ping pong tables, wooden blocks and other games. Large signs in Spanish above the room's entryway read "welcome," "hope," and "love."

In a room filled with caseworkers, Becerra spoke to the kids in Spanish about when they would be reunited with their families.

"We are trying to do this as soon as possible, but in a safe manner," he said.

Within four hours of arriving at the shelter, each child can use the call center, a room with brightly colored paintings of butterflies and sea creatures. After that, they can call their families twice a week.

Next to the call area, scores of blue, pink and silver stars with names nearly covered a wall. An official said staffers post a star with a child's name when they are discharged from the facility.

"You're running out of space," Becerra noted.

Staff at the shelter roam the dorms and outdoor spaces to be on alert for any emergencies. Teachers from the Pomona Unified School District provide 90-minute classes twice a week to each child, with half the time spent developing their English skills.

With its existing buildings and green spaces, the Pomona site had some advantages over places like

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Fort Bliss Army base near El Paso, Texas, where the government's largest shelter was erected as a tent camp from scratch, Becerra said. Advocates have said Fort Bliss, which Becerra visited days ago without allowing media to accompany him, has been particularly problematic.

"It is not easy to stand something up like this quickly, and do it right, but I think you can see that this is a place where kids can be healthy and safe," Becerra said of the Pomona facility.

The government set up the temporary shelters this spring as tens of thousands of children crossed the border alone. Of the 14 centers that opened, two have been shuttered because they did not meet government standards; others have been closing as more children are released to family in the U.S. or to facilities with higher levels of care.

While the emergency shelters are widely considered an improvement over border holding facilities packed with kids, the Biden administration is facing increasing pressure to address concerns that migrant children have been languishing in the unlicensed centers rather than being quickly reunited with their families in the United States, causing anxiety and panic attacks.

Republicans say the administration was caught flat-footed by the situation at the border and that President Joe Biden's immigration policies have encouraged unaccompanied children to come. Nearly 19,000 children traveling alone were picked up along the border in March, by far the highest month on record.

Advocates say no shelter can replace a family or licensed facility in terms of providing care for children. They say the emergency sites were meant to be a safe place to house children for a couple of weeks to give the government time to contact and vet their relatives. Those without family in the U.S. are supposed to be sent to a state-licensed facility.

As of this week, the average stay at temporary shelters was 37 days, with the network of facilities filled at just over half its capacity, according to Health and Human Services data obtained by the AP.

More than half of the 5,300 children at emergency shelters have close family in the U.S. such as a parent or grandparent. No such contact was identified for a third of the youth at those sites, the data showed.

Immigration attorney Karina Ramos of Immigrant Defenders Law Center in California visits the Pomona shelter twice a week. Of the 2,605 children who have come there, more than half have been reunited with their families, Becerra's agency said.

"The number one question is: 'When am I going home?'" Ramos said, which is "obviously understandable."

But Ramos said the children generally don't have complaints. Most at the Pomona facility are teenage boys, with fewer than 300 children under 12. Most are from Guatemala and Honduras.

"This is definitely not Fort Bliss," Ramos said. "Children are generally active, and they're happy, and they come talk to us."

In transcripts of interviews done by attorneys from March to early June and filed in federal court in Los Angeles, more than a dozen migrant children described their desperation to get out of the emergency facilities. In one account, a teenage girl said she had been at Fort Bliss for nearly 60 days and had resorted to eating only popsicles and juice because the food was foul.

Becerra said conditions have improved in recent weeks with additional spiritual, recreational, educational and mental health services. The Fort Bliss shelter also was being reconfigured to a more child-friendly pod system with single cots instead of doubles. More caseworkers have been added, speeding up family reunifications.

Because of the progress, Becerra said the number of children his agency is caring for has dropped from a high of more than 22,000 to just over 14,400, with more than half at licensed shelters. His agency said it will close four emergency facilities this summer, with Pomona and Fort Bliss staying open.

Records show pressure by Trump, allies on Arizona officials

PHOENIX (AP) — Newly released records show the top Republicans in Arizona's largest county dodged calls from Donald Trump and his allies in the aftermath of the 2020 election, as the then-president sought to prevent the certification of Joe Biden's victory in key battleground states.

The records — including voicemails and text messages — shed light on another state where Trump, his

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attorneys and others mounted a behind-the-scenes pressure campaign on Republican officials overseeing elections. Days before Congress certified Biden's win on Jan. 6, Trump pressed Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to find enough votes to overturn Biden's win there.

Trump tried to reach Clint Hickman, then the chairman of the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors, on Jan. 3, shortly before midnight in Washington and hours after news broke of Trump's call with Raffensperger.

"Hello, sir. This is the White House operator I was calling to let you know that the president's available to take your call if you're free," the White House operator said in a voicemail. "If you could please give us a call back, sir, that'd be great. You have a good evening."

Hickman told The Arizona Republic, which first received the records from Maricopa County, that he did not return the phone call. He said he presumed Trump would try to pressure him to change election results or discuss election conspiracies as he had done with Raffensperger.

"I'm not going to tape a president, so I'm not going to talk to a president. ... I didn't want to have a very rough call to my home on a Sunday night," Hickman told the Republic.

Hickman and the rest of the Board of Supervisors, which is controlled 4-1 by Republicans, have aggressively defended the vote count in Maricopa County, which includes Phoenix and 60% of Arizona's voters. They have maintained the outcome was not affected by fraud or irregularities.

State Senate Republicans used their subpoena power to take control of all 2.1 million ballots and the machines that counted them. A firm led by a Trump supporter who has shared far-fetched conspiracy theories is overseeing an audit for the Senate GOP.

The most aggressive pressure came from Arizona Republican Party Chairwoman Kelli Ward, who tried to convince Republicans on the board to question the election results, even as the officials tried to instill confidence in the them. At one point, she texted Hickman, "We need you to stop the counting."

She tried to convince Hickman and Supervisors Steve Chucri and Bill Gates to call Trump attorney Sidney Powell, who filed lawsuits around the country alleging the election conspiracies. The lawsuits were all thrown out.

Early Nov. 20, when the board was scheduled to certify Maricopa County's election results, Ward texted Gates, "Can we talk today now that the lawsuit is over? There are so many abnormalities that must be adjudicated. I know the Republican board doesn't want to be remembered as the entity who led the charge to certify a fraudulent election."

After sending information alleging fraud — and shortly before the board voted to accept the election results — she texted him, "Sounds like your fellow Repubs are throwing in the towel. Very sad. And un-American."

She texted Chucri, "Seems you're playing for the wrong team and people will remember. WRONG team."

The records also include voicemails from Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani trying to reach several of the GOP supervisors. Chucri met with Giuliani when he was in Phoenix to air Trump's baseless fraud theories.

"If you get a chance, would you please give me a call," Giuliani said in a message to Gates. "I have a few things I'd like to talk over with you. Maybe we can get this thing fixed up. You know, I really think it's a shame that Republicans sort of are both in this kind of situation. And I think there may be a nice way to resolve this for everybody."

Boy Scouts bankruptcy plans anger some, welcomed by others.

By DAVID CRARY and RANDALL CHASE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — An \$850 million agreement by the Boy Scouts of America to compensate sex-abuse victims prompted outrage Friday from some survivors and their advocates, while others were encouraged and saw it as the best outcome that could be achieved under the circumstances.

The agreement, filed in court late Thursday as a step toward resolving a complex bankruptcy case, includes the BSA national leadership, abuse victims, local Boy Scout councils and lawyers appointed to represent victims who might file future claims.

Lawyer Tim Kosnoff, whose Abused in Scouting legal team says it's representing thousands of clients,

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called it "a lousy deal — a sellout of tens of thousands of brave men" because it did not press local councils to contribute the bulk of their unrestricted assets.

Chris Anderson, an accountant from southern California who says he was abused by a Boy Scout troop leader for more than three years in the 1970s, complained about a lack of detail regarding council finances. "It's a farce," he told The Associated Press. "There's no certainty for the victims at all."

However, some lawyers representing survivors welcomed the agreement as the best that could be gotten. They noted that negotiations remain to be resolved with the Boy Scouts' insurers, who potentially could be required to contribute billions of dollars to the compensation fund.

"This is the tip of the iceberg," said lawyer Ken Rothweiler, whose firm says it's representing more than 16,000 survivors. "Now we go after the next step and see what happens with the insurers."

The BSA sought bankruptcy protection in February 2020, moving to halt thousands of lawsuits by men who were molested as youngsters decades ago by scoutmasters or other leaders. The filing was intended to try to reach a global resolution of abuse claims and create a compensation fund.

Richard Mason, an attorney and chairman of an ad hoc committee representing local councils in the case, said this week's restructuring agreement is the result of hard-fought negotiations and plaintiffs' attorneys "pushed very hard."

Mason, who is also president of the Greater New York Councils of the BSA, said the councils are contributing "the most that is achievable."

Irwin Zalkin, whose law firm represents about 150 survivors, warned against reading too much into the agreement, given that many questions remain unanswered.

Those include what percentage of their worth local councils will contribute; what, if anything, local sponsoring organizations such as churches and civic groups might contribute; and how much will be set aside to cover future claims.

"I think it's a disservice to the victims to put out a media release saying they've reached an agreement for \$850 million, especially the way they're taking a victory dance about it," he said. "To me, I find it just reprehensible."

Lawyer Paul Mones, who represents hundreds of abuse victims and supports the restructuring agreement, said plaintiffs' attorneys pushed the BSA and local councils as far as they could.

"We believe this is the best that could have been done," he said, while acknowledging that abuse survivors could still vote to reject the agreement.

Zalkin and other critics note that the councils have more than \$1.8 billion in unrestricted assets but are contributing only \$600 million to the victims' fund. Mones pointed out, however, that many council properties have land-use or donor restrictions making them unavailable to compensate abuse victims.

Regardless of how much the BSA and the local councils contribute or how much insurance companies might be forced to pay, no amount can compensate the abuse victims for their suffering, Mones said.

"This is not a victory for anybody," he said. "We are dealing in the aftermath of a disaster in these peoples' lives, and we are trying to build things back with whatever raw materials we have left."

The Associated Press contacted numerous local scout councils across the U.S. on Friday. Most of the leaders who responded said they did not yet know the amount they'd be asked to contribute and were hopeful they would not have to sell off cherished properties, such as camps.

Doug Stone of the Indian Waters Council in South Carolina said it would not have to sell its camp or any other assets.

"We own Camp Barstow outright," he said. "We're not going to put a mortgage on it. We're not going to sell it. It's going to stay."

However, the BSA's president and CEO, Roger Mosby, told the AP earlier this week that some councils would face "a difficult and often emotional decision" regarding camp sales.

Some councils have already taken steps in that direction.

The Greater Hudson Valley Council, which serves several counties near New York City, placed three of its camps up for sale earlier this year as part of its obligation to the fund. The largest is the Durland Scout

Reservation, a 1,385-acre property in Putnam Valley that includes two lakes.

Another is Camp Bullowa in Stony Point, where a local official has inquired as to whether the town could purchase it and maintain it for scouting and other recreation.

In Maine, the Pine Tree Council has proposed selling two camps to raise money for the fund, according to the Kennebec Journal. The council did not immediately reply to emails and phone messages Friday seeking an update.

The BSA, in a statement Friday, praised the agreement and said it would help local councils contribute "without additional drain on their assets."

"There is still much to be done to obtain approval from the Court to solicit survivors to vote for the BSA's amended Plan of Reorganization," it said. "Our intention is to seek confirmation of the Plan this summer and emerge from bankruptcy late this year."

Membership in the BSA has declined sharply since 2019, from more than 1.9 million scouts in its two flagship programs to less than 770,000.

Canada hunts for survivors of fire that destroyed small town

By JIM MORRIS Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — Officials on Friday hunted for any missing residents of a British Columbia town destroyed by wildfire as the Canadian province's chief coroner said reports suggest two people have died as a result of blaze.

Lisa Lapointe told a news conference Friday that a team is standing by to conduct an investigation in order to confirm the deaths, but it's not yet safe to enter the area.

The roughly 1,000 residents of Lytton had to abandon their homes with just a few minutes notice Wednesday evening after suffering the previous day under a record high of 121.2 Fahrenheit (49.6 Celsius).

Officials said it was unclear whether anyone remained in the village 95 miles (150 kilometers) northeast of Vancouver due to a lack of cell service and because it wasn't safe to enter most of the area.

"We do know there are some people who are unaccounted for," said Mike Farnworth, the province's public safety minister, though he said the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Red Cross were working to locate people.

Those who escaped the fire scattered to evacuation centers across the province.

Tony Sam said it was "chaotic" driving through thick smoke to Meritt, B.C., about 36 miles (58 kilometers) southeast of Lytton.

"You could barely see driving through the smoke," he told Global TV.

Both his house and his mother's home were destroyed.

"It's gone," he said. "Nothing left of it."

Noeleen McQuary-Budde didn't even have time to grab her shoes before piling into a truck with her husband and 11 other people to escape the flames.

"The whole village of Lytton went up in I would say 10 minutes," she said. "We were watching it burn and just thanking Creator that we got out."

In Ottawa, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau pledged that the federal government will "help rebuild and help people come through this."

Trudeau said he had spoken with British Columbia Premier John Horgan and John Haugen, acting chief of the of Lytton First Nation and planned to convene an emergency response group.

Another wildfire threat at Kamloops, 220 miles (355 kilometers) northeast of Vancouver, forced an evacuation of about 200 people Thursday night, but officials said they could return Friday.

Kamloops also recorded a record high temperature this week of 117 Fahrenheit, (47.3 Celsius) but it had cooled down to around 90 (32) on Friday.

"I can't imagine what the firefighters are going through working in these conditions," said Noelle Kekula, a fire information officer for the British Columbia Wildfire Service. "We are up for a real battle."

The Wildfire Service said at least 106 fires were burning across the province, including dozens that started within just the past two days.

Proposal would ban mink farming to stem coronavirus mutation

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A bipartisan proposal in the U.S. House would ban the farming of mink fur in the United States in an effort to stem possible mutations of the coronavirus, something researchers have said can be accelerated when the virus spreads among animals.

The bill introduced this week is an effort from Reps. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., and Nancy Mace, R-S.C. It would prohibit the import, export, transport, sale or purchase of mink in the United States.

Researchers have said that spread of COVID-19 among animals could speed up the number of mutations in the virus before it potentially jumps back to people.

Last year, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control issued new guidance to curb the spread of the coronavirus between minks and humans. The agency warned that when COVID-19 starts spreading on a mink farm, the large numbers of animal infections means “the virus can accumulate mutations more quickly in minks and spread back into the human population.”

Denmark reported last year that 12 people had been sickened by a variant of the coronavirus that had distinct genetic changes also seen in mink.

“What we want to do is ban the inhumane practice of farming mink for fur,” Mace said Friday during an interview with The Associated Press. “At the same time, it’s also a public health crisis, so it helps fix both of those situations.”

“Knowing that there are variants, and being someone who cares about the humane treatment of animals, this is sort of a win-win for folks,” she added. “And I believe that you’ll see Republicans and Democrats on both sides of the aisle work on this together.”

According to Fur Commission USA, a nonprofit representing U.S. mink farmers, there are approximately 275 mink farms in 23 states across the United States, producing about 3 million pelts per year. That amounts to an annual value of more than \$300 million, according to the commission.

There have been several mink-related coronavirus cases in the U.S. In December, a mink caught outside an Oregon farm tested positive for low-levels of the coronavirus. State officials said they believed the animal had escaped from a small farm already under quarantine because of a coronavirus outbreak among mink and humans.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a mink on a Michigan farm “and a small number of people” were infected with a coronavirus “that contained mink-related mutations,” something officials said suggested that mink-to-human spread may have occurred.

While mink-to-human spread is possible, CDC officials said “there is no evidence that mink are playing a significant role in the spread of SARS-CoV-2 to people.”

Liberty: Lots of travelers expected on freer Fourth of July

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO and TOM MURPHY Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) — Americans enjoying newfound liberty are expected to travel and gather for cookouts, fireworks, concerts and beach outings over the Fourth of July weekend in numbers not seen since pre-pandemic days.

Yet lingering restrictions, worker shortages and significant numbers of unvaccinated people mean some may not be as free as they would like to be.

And there are fears that the mixing of large numbers of vaccinated and unvaccinated Americans at a time when the highly contagious delta variant is spreading rapidly could undo some of the progress made against the scourge.

Nashville is expecting as many as 400,000 people to stream into the city for its July Fourth celebration featuring country star Brad Paisley. In Massachusetts, the Boston Pops’ Independence Day concert is back, but the show that usually draws hundreds of thousands to the Charles River esplanade in Boston will be held 100 miles away at the Tanglewood music center.

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Beaches and lakefronts are expected to be packed as well. In Southern California, Huntington Beach is planning one of the biggest celebrations on the West Coast, a three-day festival that could bring in a half-million people.

Elizabeth Driscoll plans to enjoy the festivities in Cheboygan, Michigan, including a parade down Main Street, a trip to a farmers market and a family party on a lake, all ahead of the fireworks display over the Straits of Mackinac. Last year, the parade and fireworks were canceled.

"You can feel it all over town, just an influx of people on the tourism side, and people who live here are out and about," she said. "There's good energy."

At the same time, airlines have been struggling to get enough crew members to fly their planes. Pools and beaches have been hit with a shortage of lifeguards. And restaurants and bars in tourist destinations have had to scale back hours because of a lack of help.

President Joe Biden has welcomed the holiday as a historic moment in the nation's recovery from a crisis that has killed over 600,000 Americans and led to months of restrictions that are now almost gone. He plans to host more than 1,000 people at the White House — first responders, essential workers and troops — for a cookout and fireworks to mark what the administration is calling a "summer of freedom."

"I'm going to celebrate it," Biden said Friday ahead of the holiday. "There's great things happening. ... All across America, people are going to ballgames, doing good things." But he also warned that "lives will be lost" because of people who didn't get vaccinated.

The U.S. is averaging about 12,000 new cases and 250 deaths a day thanks to vaccines that have been administered to two-thirds of the nation's adults. But that is short of the goal of 70% by July 4 that Biden set. Vaccine hesitancy remains stubborn, especially in the Deep South and West, allowing the delta variant to spread throughout the country.

AAA forecasts that more than 47 million people will travel by car or plane this weekend in the U.S., a return to 2019 levels and 40% higher than last year. That includes 3.5 million airline passengers.

At the Newark, New Jersey, airport, travelers waited in long check-in lines Wednesday and encountered flight delays that tested their patience. Some were just happy to get on a plane after vacation plans were disrupted last year by COVID-19 restrictions.

Rhetta Williams, a 54-year-old manager at a pharmaceutical company, was traveling to Charleston, South Carolina, for a family reunion with about 50 relatives that was postponed a year ago because of the virus.

"And we're not going to be practicing any social distancing," she said, laughing.

Zach Carothers, a 21-year-old computer science student, flew from South Carolina to Newark for a weekend at the Jersey Shore, where people have been flocking back.

"It's nice to get back to it after quarantining for so long," Carothers said, adding that he is looking forward to a vacation that will "definitely have celebratory beers."

While masks have been shed around the country even in indoor spaces, the Transportation Security Administration emphasizes that they are still required at airports and on planes — a restriction not everyone is accepting gracefully. Airlines are reporting increasing cases of disruptive passengers refusing to wear masks.

Fireworks are likely to draw some of the biggest crowds many communities have seen in months.

"Outdoor stuff remains, I think, pretty safe for unvaccinated or vaccinated people," said Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of Brown University's School of Public Health. "Probably a packed outdoor concert is not ideal, but short of that, outdoor activity is safe for people. Watching fireworks is fine."

Moving the party indoors is considered less safe, at a time when some states have less than half their population fully vaccinated.

"I'm concerned about most of the country," said Dr. Lynn Goldman, dean of George Washington University's school of public health. "I think it's premature to declare it over, especially because of what we see in other parts of the world."

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

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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 at least 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.

The Pentagon 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.

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 envisions using commercially chartered aircraft and 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. On Friday, the Pentagon said it now plans to complete the pullout by the end of August. The Army general in charge in Kabul, Scott Miller, has essentially finished it already, with nearly all military equipment gone and few troops left.

The Pentagon said Miller is expected to remain in command for a couple more weeks. But will his departure this month 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.

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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.

Bragg's opponent concedes in primary for Manhattan DA

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Alvin Bragg, a former top deputy to New York's attorney general, was poised to become Manhattan's first Black district attorney and to take over the investigation of former President Donald Trump after his closest opponent conceded in the Democratic primary.

The candidate trailing him by several thousand votes in the race, former federal prosecutor Tali Farhadian Weinstein, said in a statement Friday that after several days of absentee votes being counted, "it is clear we cannot overcome the vote margin."

New York City's Board of Election has not publicly released updates on the count of absentee ballots. As a result, The Associated Press has been unable to call a winner.

"This has been a long journey that started in Harlem," Bragg said in a statement, referring to the Manhattan neighborhood where he grew up. "And today, that 15-year old boy who was stopped numerous times at gunpoint by the police is the Democratic nominee to be Manhattan District Attorney."

Bragg led Farhadian Weinstein by about 3 percentage points when voting ended June 22.

With a win, Bragg would be virtually guaranteed to succeed District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr., who has

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been leading an investigation of Trump and his company and is retiring at the end of the year.

The Republican candidate in the general election will be Thomas Kenniff, a defense attorney, former prosecutor and Army Judge Advocate General. Democrats outnumber Republicans heavily in Manhattan.

A former federal prosecutor who now teaches at New York Law School, Bragg worked as a civil rights lawyer before entering government service. He currently represents the mother of Eric Garner in a judicial inquiry into his 2014 death after being placed in a police chokehold.

Bragg said he was drawn to a career in law after having a gun pointed at him six times as a youth — three times by police. In one encounter, amid the crack cocaine epidemic of the 1980s, Bragg said an officer stuck a gun in his face and wrongly accused him of being a drug dealer as he walked to get groceries for his father.

Bragg, 47, defeated a big field of candidates that also included three former assistants in the district attorney's office, Lucy Lang, Liz Crotty and Diana Florence, and three candidates who have never been prosecutors — public defender Eliza Orlins, civil rights lawyer Tahanie Aboushi and state Assembly member Dan Quart.

Farhadian Weinstein said that while she had disagreements with Bragg, she supported his "commitment to justice." She also said she heard a "demand for more women in political leadership" while campaigning and hoped other would heed that call.

Manhattan has never had a woman district attorney.

The Manhattan district attorney's office has spent two years looking at Trump's business dealings.

A special grand jury this week indicted the Trump Organization and its chief financial officer, Allen Weisselberg. They were charged with helping Weisselberg and other top executives evade taxes he should have paid on apartments, cars and tuition aid given him by the company.

Trump himself was not charged in the case, but the investigation is not over.

Vance, the Democrat who brought the charges, will lead the Trump probe until he leaves office.

All of the Democrats running for the office had said they weren't afraid of taking on Trump, but they were also cautious not to appear as if they were prejudging the case or making the matter a campaign issue.

Bragg has investigated Trump before as the state's chief deputy attorney general in 2018. He helped oversee a lawsuit that led to the closure of Trump's charitable foundation over allegations he used the nonprofit to further his political and business interests.

Prior to that, Bragg led a unit of the state attorney general's office that investigates killings by police.

Campaigning for district attorney, Bragg pledged a culture change in the district attorney's office, prioritizing public safety and police accountability while declining to pursue many low-level offenses and de-emphasizing conviction rates.

Bragg said he'd use data to spot racial disparities in the criminal justice system. In deciding which cases to pursue, Bragg said he'd want prosecutors to ask: "Does this case make us safer?"

Manhattan district attorney is one of the most high-profile prosecution jobs in the U.S., dramatized on TV's "Law and Order" and "Blue Bloods."

The office has a staff of 500 lawyers and a \$125 million annual budget.

A separate forfeiture fund bankrolled by Wall Street settlements and worth more than \$800 million is used for grants to criminal justice and community organizations and big initiatives, such as testing backlogged rape kits.

Vance will have been in office for 12 years when he steps side. His successor will be just the fourth elected district attorney in Manhattan in the last 80 years. Frank Hogan served for 31 years. Robert Morgenthau was in office for 34 years, until he was 90.

]**Tax law experts see 'strong' case against Trump Org. CFO**

By KEN SWEET, MICHAEL R. SISAK and ERIC TUCKER The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Companies give perks to their employees all the time. Many top executives at Fortune 500 companies have access to a corporate jet for personal use, a company apartment, or an expense

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account for fancy meals. Even lower-level employees regularly get access to perks like tuition reimbursement or cash to join a gym.

But the extravagant perks prosecutors say the Trump Organization lavished onto its CFO Allen Weisselberg — apartments, cars, cash for holiday tips, tuition for his grandchildren to name a few — are well beyond the level of compensating a valued employee, some tax law experts said.

And the case against Weisselberg appears to be much stronger than was originally expected by those watching the progress of the Manhattan District Attorney's investigation of the Trump Organization, its employees and its namesake leader.

"This is an overwhelmingly strong case," said Daniel Hemel, a law professor at the University of Chicago.

According to the indictment unsealed Thursday, Weisselberg cheated tax authorities by taking a hefty chunk of his annual compensation in fringe benefits. They say that over 15 years these off-the-books perks were worth nearly \$1.8 million.

Weisselberg alone was accused of defrauding the federal government, state and city out of more than \$900,000 in unpaid taxes and undeserved refunds. He is pleading not guilty.

"Mr. Weisselberg intends to plead not guilty and he will fight these charges in court," Weisselberg's lawyers, Mary Mulligan and Bryan Skarlatos, said in a statement.

Meanwhile, former President Donald Trump and his allies have tried to frame the indictment against Weisselberg and the Trump Organization as a "witch hunt" by Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. and New York Attorney General Letitia James, both Democrats. They have said the perks involved were standard for successful American companies.

But the case against Weisselberg is not necessarily unusual. Some compared the indictment to a tax fraud case involving another real estate tycoon from 30 years ago: Leona Helmsley, the so-called "Queen of Mean" who tried to get her real estate empire to pay for a \$3 million home renovation in the 1980s.

Trump himself called Helmsley a "disgrace to humanity" for fraudulently avoiding taxes all those years ago.

"The dollar figures and the charges are more serious than what we had thought over the last few days with the little information we had," said Daniel R. Alonso, a former chief assistant district attorney in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. "In particular, the tax loss alleged is \$900,000. That is a fraud amount that is definitely in the jail range for typical cases of that magnitude."

Melissa Jampol, who as a former assistant district attorney in Manhattan specialized in prosecuting white-collar crimes, said the indictment's allegations stretched far beyond the allegations of fringe benefit abuse that some had presumed would be the crux of the case.

"I think the major takeaway is that there's a lot more going on here that's alleged in the indictment than people were aware of previously," said Jampol, an attorney at the law firm of Epstein Becker Green.

The indictment alleges that this wasn't just a matter of Weisselberg failing to report his pay properly. It says the Trump Organization, as a company, was complicit.

The company kept internal records that tracked employee compensation, and in those records, Weisselberg's rent, the tuition payments for his grandchildren, his cars and other things were all listed as part of his compensation package. The company even reduced Weisselberg's payroll checks to account for the indirect compensation he was getting in free rent, the indictment said.

But that compensation was recorded differently in the company's general ledger and none of it was reported to tax authorities, according to prosecutors.

"There's the set that was the formal ledger and there's the set that was Weisselberg's compensation calculations," Jampol said.

Smaller cases involving similar practices pop up not infrequently. A Queens-based plumbing contractor was sentenced to 20 months in prison just last month. Sergei Denko was found to have cashed \$5 million in checks to fund an off-the-books payroll system, avoiding paying roughly \$732,000 in employment taxes. Out on Long Island, a diner owner was convicted in September of avoiding \$130,000 in employment taxes as well.

Thomas M. Cryan, Jr., a Washington tax lawyer, said prosecutions over fringe benefits issued to employ-

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ees are rare, but an unusually large volume of perks and an intent to conceal them as income could tip a civil matter into a criminal case.

Often cases involving fringe benefit violations remain between the company and the Internal Revenue Service, and may just result in an audit or back taxes with a penalty being paid.

But some of the allegations against Weisselberg go well beyond the abuse of fringe benefits. Weisselberg's son Barry — who managed a Trump-operated ice rink in Central Park — paid no reported rent while living in a Trump-owned apartment in 2018, and he was charged just \$1,000 per month — far below typical Manhattan prices — while living in a Trump apartment from 2005 to 2012, the indictment said.

Allen Weisselberg himself, an intensely private man who lived for years in a modest home on Long Island, continued to claim residency there despite spending a majority of his time in a company-paid Manhattan apartment, prosecutors said. By doing so, Weisselberg concealed that he was a New York City resident, and he avoided paying the city's income tax.

Though some standalone tax offenses can be handled civilly or administratively, the allegations of other misconduct — including grand larceny — help explain why prosecutors would treat this scheme as deserving of criminal prosecution, Jampol said.

But that doesn't mean the allegations, which will require proof of willfulness, will be easy to establish in court.

"That's really going to be the burden that the DA's office is going to have to prove is that there was a scheme here, and that it wasn't just a series of mistakes or misunderstandings," she added.

Water crisis reaches boiling point on Oregon-California line

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

TULELAKE, Calif. (AP) — Ben DuVal knelt in a barren field near the California-Oregon state line 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 (407-kilometer) long river that flows from the lake to the Pacific Ocean 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 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

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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

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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."

Ex-officer pleads guilty to manslaughter; family blasts deal

By JONATHAN MATTISE and KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The mother of a Black man fatally shot by a white former Nashville officer sobbed, screamed and knocked over a courtroom lectern Friday as she begged a judge not to accept a plea deal she says was struck in secret without her knowledge, a chaotic scene that briefly delayed the hearing before the judge accepted the agreement.

Former officer Andrew Delke pleaded guilty to manslaughter over the death of Daniel Hambrick, 25, in 2018 as part of an agreement with prosecutors.

Delke will serve a three-year prison sentence. As part of the agreement, he won't pursue parole or appeal the case. However, Delke's defense team said he will likely serve a year and a half in jail with standard credits.

The hearing turned volatile as Hambrick's mother, Vickie, gave a lengthy statement as family members and others applauded. Other supporters, outside the courtroom in the hallway, banged on the door in support. Delke's family sat on the other side of the courtroom with security guards.

"I hate you," Vickie Hambrick screamed over and over again, while also yelling out profanities, directing some at Delke and prosecutors.

In a particularly chaotic moment, the mother knocked over the lectern and a computer monitor and family members rushed to her side. Delke and Judge Monte Watkins were briefly ushered out of the courtroom.

Delke was about to face trial for a first-degree murder charge, but on Thursday, his attorney announced he had agreed to plead guilty to voluntary manslaughter.

"I hope this case can contribute positively about the much needed discussion about how police officers are trained and how we as a community want police officers to interact with citizens. I am deeply sorry for the harm my actions caused," Delke said shortly after entering his plea, his voice cracking at times.

A group of roughly two dozen protesters gathered outside the courthouse, chanting "no racist police" to show their opposition to Delke's plea deal. Others wore shirts noting that police officers and white people receive lighter penalties for committing the same crimes as Black and brown people.

Hambrick's family said they were not contacted or consulted and did not know about the plea deal until after it was done.

"I have contempt for this system. I have contempt for this plea. I have contempt for the (Fraternal Order of Police). And I have a special contempt for Andrew Delke. May you all rot in hell," said attorney Joy Kimbrough, who read the statement of Vickie Hambrick as she wept behind her.

District Attorney Glenn Funk told reporters afterward that he informed Hambrick's family attorney of the deal Wednesday and met with Vickie Hambrick on Thursday. He said has been in contact with them for three years, knew Vickie Hambrick wanted Delke to be convicted of murder and sentenced to prison for life, and he had to decide what was in the best interest for the state.

He said there was a "very large percentage" chance that the case would have ended in a hung jury, which he said would have meant the emotion seen in the courtroom Friday "would have been played out 100-fold." Funk also called it "significant progress" that "tonight will be the first night Nashville has had a police officer in jail for shooting a Black man on duty."

"I was not willing to risk not having a felony conviction, not having him off the force, not having him incarcerated, not having him be able to make a guilty plea where he conceded that he did in fact use deadly force that was not reasonably necessary," Funk said.

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Delke, 27, submitted his resignation Thursday. He had been decommissioned, which means he had to turn over his gun but was able to work a desk job and still get paid.

After COVID-19 delays and pretrial back-and-forth, jury selection was slated to start next week. The trial was going to center on a handgun Hambrick was holding that Delke claims was pointed at him for a moment, which prosecutors dispute and video footage does not show.

Prosecutors focused on surveillance footage that captured the shooting, in which Delke stops chasing and shoots the fleeing man. Defense attorneys have contended there was a 36-foot (11-meter) blindspot and plenty could have happened there. There were dozens of cameras, and defense attorneys contended that it was possible that more footage was caught of that blindspot, but wasn't reviewed by investigators before it was automatically overwritten on the system.

The month after the shooting, Funk released surveillance footage of the shooting publicly, sparking wider attention and outcry. Delke was charged in September 2018, and the shooting caused enough backlash that voters that November installed a community oversight board for Nashville's police department.

Since 2005, there have been 143 nonfederal sworn law enforcement officers with arrest powers arrested for murder or manslaughter resulting from an on-duty shooting throughout the U.S., with only 45 convicted of a crime resulting from the on-duty shooting, according to a tally by Bowling Green State University criminal justice professor Philip Stinson before Delke's plea. Another 45 of the cases are still pending, according to the findings.

Delke's attorneys argued the officer followed his training and Tennessee law in response to "an armed suspect who ignored repeated orders to drop his gun." Funk argued Delke had other alternatives, adding that the officer could have stopped, sought cover and called for help.

Nashville's Metro Council has approved a \$2.25 million settlement to resolve a lawsuit by Hambrick's family. For Vickie Hambrick, who is legally blind, the loss of her only child will forever haunt her.

"My son was my eyes," Kimbrough said, reading Vickie Hambrick's statement. "Since he's been gone, things have not been the same and they never will be."

Trudeau denounces church burnings, vandalism in Canada

By JIM MORRIS Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Friday denounced the burning and vandalism of Catholic churches that has followed discovery of unmarked graves and former schools for Indigenous children.

Several Catholic churches have recently been vandalized or damaged in fires following the discovery of more than 1,100 unmarked graves at the sites of three former residential schools run by the church in British Columbia and Saskatchewan that generations of Indigenous children had been forced to attend.

The nation also saw a series of attacks Thursday — Canada Day — on statues of Queen Victoria, Queen Elizabeth and other historical figures.

Trudeau, himself a Catholic, said he understands the anger many people feel toward the federal government and Catholic church. The government has apologized for the schools and Trudeau has called on Pope Francis, too, to make a formal apology.

"It's real and it is fully understandable given the shameful history we are all become more aware of," he told a news conference.

"I can't help but think that burning down churches is actually depriving people who are in need of grieving and healing and mourning from places where they can grieve and reflect and look for support."

On Thursday, statues of Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth on the grounds of the Manitoba legislature were tied with ropes and pulled down by a crowd.

The statue of Queen Victoria was covered in red paint and its base had red handprints on it. On the steps behind the statue were hundreds of tiny shoes, placed there to recognize the children who went to residential schools.

Arlen Dumas, grand chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, was at a separate event at the time but

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said he was shocked at what happened.

“I personally wouldn’t have participated in that,” he said, though he added, “Mind you, it has been a very triggering time over the past few weeks.”

“It’s unfortunate that they chose to express themselves the way that they did. But it’s actually a symbol of the fact that there is a lot of hurt and that there’s a lot of frustration and anger with just how things have happened,” Dumas said.

Premier Brian Pallister called the vandalism “a major setback for those who are working toward real reconciliation.”

“Those who commit acts of violence will be pursued actively in the courts. All leaders in Manitoba must strongly condemn acts of violence and vandalism, and at the same time, we must come together to meaningfully advance reconciliation,” he said in a statement.

In other incidents on Canada Day, a statue of Queen Victoria in Kitchener, Ontario, was doused in red paint.

In Victoria, British Columbia, a statue of Captain James Cook was dismantled and thrown into the harbor. The statue was replaced with a wooden cutout of a red dress — a symbol representing murdered and missing Indigenous women — and its base was smeared with red handprints.

In St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador, two prominent buildings and a statue dedicated to the local police force were vandalized with bright red paint.

Earlier this week, a First Nations group in British Columbia said it had used ground-penetrating radar to find 182 human remains in unmarked graves at a site close to a former residential near Cranbrook, 525 miles (845 kilometers) east of Vancouver.

That followed reports of similar massive findings at two other such church-run schools, one of more than 600 unmarked graves in southern Saskatchewan and another of 215 bodies in British Columbia.

Some 150,000 Indigenous children were forced to attend residential schools, which operated for more than 120 years in Canada. More than 60% of the schools were run by the Catholic Church.

Girl’s prayer at collapse site leads to meeting with Biden

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — Gazing at the mountain of rubble that had buried her father, uncle and dozens of others, a 12-year-old girl moved away from her relatives, sat down by herself and pulled out her phone. She opened a collection of Psalms and began to pray.

Elisheva Cohen’s moment of reflection at the site of the Florida condominium collapse captivated the Surfside mayor and led to an introduction to President Joe Biden, who asked to meet her Thursday when he arrived to console families affected by the disaster.

For days, families were kept away from the collapse site, which had been deemed unsafe. Then earlier this week, relatives were taken there briefly. Some shouted the names of loved ones and friends, hoping to hear their cries for help. Others cried.

Elisheva sat down alone, away from her mother and brother, and began to read prayers.

Surfside Mayor Charles Burkett soon noticed her. He knelt down beside her to ask if she was OK.

“Yes” the girl told him.

“And that really brought it home to me,” Burkett said. “She wasn’t crying. She was just lost. She didn’t know what to do, what to say, who to talk to.”

Only six months ago, Elisheva celebrated her bat mitzvah with her mother and father, Dr. Brad Cohen, one of about 120 people missing under the rubble. The year that precedes the religious ceremony involves intensive study of Hebrew, the Bible and history.

That night, Dr. Cohen was proud. His youngest daughter was growing up and reaffirming her Jewish identity. Her father instilled a love for the teaching in both Elisheva and her teenage brother.

Before Dr. Cohen completed his medical residency and internships, he had spent weekends staying at the home of his mentor Rabbi Yakov Saachs, always desperate to learn more about his faith.

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On his long commutes, he played cassette tapes, hungry to learn the teachings.

"Even though he was dog tired, it was a priority for him to try and glean as much information as he could," Saachs told The Associated Press in a phone interview.

At Brad Cohen's urging, the entire family became "more observant," the rabbi said, following customs about not driving or doing business on the Sabbath.

The night before the collapse, her mother sent a message to Cohen with a selfie taken by Elisheva in front of a mirror. She wore a pink T-shirt with a high ponytail. They were staying in separate homes.

"Look how pretty," the message read.

She was wearing the same outfit the next morning, when her mother "frantically woke her up" to tell her about the collapse.

For several days, Burkett shared Elisheva's story far and wide. After Biden's visit was announced, the girl's mother, Soriya Cohen, bought her a new blue and white dress for the occasion. Her teenage brother was the first one in the family chosen to meet Biden. He had rushed home from a kibbutz in Israel as soon as he heard about the collapse.

But the teen had already arranged to have a class with a rabbi in Miami during the president's visit.

"He said, 'I already made a commitment,'" Saachs said. "So he said no."

The mother also skipped the meeting with Biden, saying she felt the president's visit was a diversion from the search efforts. Elisheva went with another family member.

The mayor said the most moving moment of Biden's visit was when he shared Elisheva's story with the president.

"I wanted him to know and see the face of that little girl who is praying for her father across from the rubble," he said. "He looked at me and said, 'Would you please bring her to me right now?'"

Police went to get Elisheva. Biden walked up to her and they hugged.

Biden hosts baseball champion Dodgers at White House

By JOSH BOAK and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden praised sports' ability to heal and bring a nation together in a time of crisis as he hosted the World Series champion Los Angeles Dodgers at the White House on Friday.

The Dodgers, who captured the title by defeating the Tampa Bay Rays last October, were the first team to be honored at the White House since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the first since Biden took office.

"I think what we discovered is that we need sports more than we ever realized," said Biden, who praised baseball as an important totem of normalcy in "one of the most challenging years" in the nation's history.

The president saluted the Dodgers as "a lot more than a baseball club, they are a pillar of American culture." He also praised the team for using its stadium as a mass COVID-19 vaccination site.

The ceremony marked the latest step in the White House's efforts to return to large in-person events as it seeks to highlight the nation's emergence from the pandemic. More than 50 members of the team attended the East Room event as well as a number of political heavyweights with California ties, including Vice President Kamala Harris, House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy and Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti.

Biden kept the mood light, teasing that he didn't want to dwell on the fact that Harris roots for the Dodgers' long-standing rival, the San Francisco Giants. He also told stories about his own exploits in a congressional baseball game, saying he hit a ball off the wall that thrilled his sons more than any of his political accomplishments.

Clayton Kershaw, the team's future Hall of Fame pitcher, presented Biden with what has become the standard gift: a jersey emblazoned on the back with the president's name and number. Biden, the 46th commander in chief, joked that he was demonstrating that he was "a man of courage" by holding the jersey up because he risked incurring the wrath of First Lady Jill Biden, a rabid Philadelphia Phillies fan.

The jubilant ceremony bore few of the political overtones that became a hallmark of teams' visits during the presidency of Donald Trump. Some champions, like the Golden State Warriors and Philadelphia Eagles, skipped being honored at the White House. Others, like the New England Patriots and Boston Red Sox,

only sent limited delegations, with many players opting to stay home.

Pitcher Trevor Bauer, who has a protection order against him for allegedly assaulting a woman during what he says was consensual sex, did not attend the event. He has denied the allegations.

The Dodgers, who are in town for a four-game series with the Washington Nationals, said only members of the 2020 World Series team would attend, and Bauer didn't sign with the team until this year. Later Friday, the reigning NL Cy Young Award winner was placed on seven-day administrative leave by Major League Baseball.

Mookie Betts, the star outfielder for the 2018 champion Red Sox, did not make that team's trip to the White House. But Betts, now on the Dodgers, did attend Friday.

Trump also became known for serving fast food to the teams that did visit the executive mansion; details on any meals consumed by the Dodgers at the White House were not immediately released.

The 2020 title was the Dodgers' seventh World Series championship and they are among the favorites again this year, prompting Biden to joke that he may see them again.

Firefighter's daughter, 7, found in Florida condo rubble

By FREIDA FRISARO and TERRY SPENCER undefined

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — The body of a Miami firefighter's 7-year-old daughter was recovered from the site of a South Florida condo collapse by the search and rescue team he had been assisting, officials said Friday.

The child was one of two victims found in the rubble of Champlain Towers South late Thursday, one week after the building partially collapsed. On Friday, Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava announced the death toll now stands at 20, with 128 people still considered missing in the wreckage.

Miami Mayor Francis Suarez confirmed that the child, whose name hasn't been released, was the daughter of a firefighter. He said the family had asked for privacy.

"She was a member of our fire family," Suarez said, adding that the entire fire department is grieving.

The Miami Fire Department is part of Task Force 2, which has been assisting in the search since the collapse. The firefighter voluntarily joined the search, officials said, hoping he could help find his daughter and others still missing in the wreckage.

"It goes without saying that every night since this last Thursday has been immensely difficult, particularly for the families that have been impacted," Levine Cava said during Friday morning's news conference. "Last night was uniquely difficult. It was truly different and more difficult for our first responders. These men and woman are paying an enormous human toll each and every day, and I ask that all of you please keep them in your thoughts and prayers."

On Thursday, President Joe Biden visited the area to offer profuse thanks to those who've worked around the clock since the collapse.

"What you're doing here is incredible, having to deal with the uncertainty," Biden said.

Earlier this week, the search teams found the remains of Emma Guara, 4; her sister Lucia, 10; and their parents, Marcus and Anaely Guara, in the wreckage. The family had lived in Apartment 802.

"Obviously, the firefighters are emotional," Miami-Dade County Fire Chief Alan Cominsky said. "You know it takes a toll."

EXPLAINER: 5 key takeaways from the June jobs report

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. job market is storming into summer. Job creation and wages rose sharply in June. And more and more Americans are confident enough to quit their jobs and look for a better one.

In the strongest gain since August, employers added 850,000 jobs last month. And average wages rose a healthy 3.6% from a year earlier, a sign that businesses need workers so badly they're willing to ramp up pay.

The June jobs report did contain one conspicuous blemish: The unemployment rate actually ticked up

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last month. But many economists wrote that off as a technical blip.

With vaccinations still increasing, the number of new COVID-19 cases has plummeted to an average below 12,000 a day — down dramatically from around 250,000 in early January. The brightening health picture has allowed businesses to increasingly reopen and has encouraged formerly cooped-up consumers to rush out to restaurants, shops and entertainment venues and to book vacation flights.

As employers post job openings at a record pace, they're complaining that they can't find enough workers to fill jobs. Economists expect the supply of workers to gradually catch up with demand. Some Americans are delaying their job search owing to lingering health concerns, difficulty making child care arrangements or generous, though temporary, federal unemployment benefits. Others have decided to retire early or train for new careers.

The economy remains 6.8 million short of the number of jobs it had in February 2020, just before COVID-19 flattened the economy.

"It's only a question of time before hiring catches up with buoyant labor demand," said Lydia Bousour, senior U.S. economist at Oxford Economics. "The economy is set for a jobs boom in the coming months as labor supply constraints gradually dissipate."

Bousour said she foresees job growth exceeding 1 million a month over the summer.

"Let the employment fireworks begin," she wrote in a research note.

Here are five takeaways from the June jobs report:

TWO SURVEYS, TWO STORIES

The 850,000 jobs that employers added last month were a pleasant surprise. Economists had predicted about 675,000. Yet the unemployment rate ticked up from 5.8% to 5.9%. And the number of people who reported being employed actually dropped by 18,000.

What gives?

The contradictory numbers reflect the way the Labor Department compiles the monthly jobs report — with two surveys. The two surveys sometimes tell different stories, as they did in June. But the differences tend to even out over time.

One survey asks businesses how many people they employed during the month; this determines the number of jobs gained or lost.

The other survey asks households whether the adults living there have a job. Those who don't have one but are looking count as unemployed; those who aren't looking for work do not. This survey determines the unemployment rate.

The household survey, unlike the survey of businesses, counts farm workers, the self-employed and people who work at start-ups. It also does a better job of counting small-business jobs.

But the survey of businesses uses a larger sample size and is considered more precise: The Labor Department surveys 145,000 companies and government agencies, compared with just 60,000 households.

Economists also suspect that technical factors might have thrown off the household survey in June. Brian Coulton, chief economist at Fitch Ratings, for example, says the drop in employed Americans might be explained by "the challenges of seasonal adjustment after" huge job losses in the spring of 2020.

MOVING ON

A hot labor market, and perhaps a rethinking of personal priorities after COVID-19, has led many Americans to leave their jobs and look for higher-paying or more satisfying work elsewhere. In June, 942,000 people were unemployed because they voluntarily left their old employer. That was up 21% from 778,000 in May, and it's the highest such monthly figure since 2016.

"Workers clearly know that they are in the driver's seat right now, and many appear willing to walk away from their current position before they have even a new job lined up," says Stephen Stanley, chief economist at Amherst Pierpont Securities.

In an earlier report, the Labor Department had reported that 4 million workers quit their jobs in April.

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That was the highest such figure on records dating to 2000.

MUDDLED NUMBERS

The wild swings in the job market — from an epic collapse in the spring of 2020 as the coronavirus triggered devastating layoffs, to a vigorous rebound over the past year — have created confusion in the way the Labor Department calculates its numbers and adjusts them for seasonal fluctuations.

For example, the department reported a sharp increase last month in jobs in local (up 155,000), state (up 75,000) and private (39,000) education as schools reopened. But those job gains might have been exaggerated, the department conceded, because the bumpy switch from remote to in-person learning has “distorted the normal seasonal buildup and layoff patterns.”

Likewise, Joshua Shapiro, chief U.S. economist at the consulting firm Maria Fiorini Ramirez Inc., cautions that a surprising and seemingly unhealthy drop in weekly hours worked at private companies likely reflects the difficulty of accounting for people who work from home.

“With most who are able to work remotely still doing so at least part of the time,” Shapiro writes, “the reliability of these data are likely compromised to some degree.”

HIGHER UNEMPLOYMENT FOR ALL RACES

The unemployment rate rose 0.1 percentage point last month for Black, Hispanic and white workers alike. The jobless rates are now 5.2% for whites, 7.4% for Hispanics and 9.2% for Black Americans.

Despite steady job growth, lingering damage from the coronavirus recession is still taking a toll on Americans of all races: Nearly 6.5 million whites were unemployed in June, up 2.6 million, or 67%, from February 2020, just before the virus struck. Over the same period, the number of unemployed is up 53% to 1.9 million for African Americans and 65% to 2.2 million for Hispanics.

BACK TO THE CUBICLE

As the virus recedes and businesses reopen, Americans are increasingly packing up their laptops, leaving makeshift offices in the kitchen and trudging back to their old places of work.

The Labor Department reported that the proportion of people who are teleworking dropped to 14.4% in June — down from 16.6% in May and a peak of 35.4% in May 2020. (The figures include anyone who worked remotely at any point in the previous four weeks.)

Companies that operate out of downtown office buildings and restaurants that cater to weekday commuters are nervously waiting to see whether — or to what extent — the work-from-home trend sticks once economic life returns to normal after COVID-19. Many companies have already told their employees to expect a hybrid system in which they could work from home on certain days of the week.

EXPLAINER: Deterring tax avoidance by global companies

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

Negotiators from 130 countries have agreed on a major overhaul of how the world’s biggest companies are taxed in an effort to deter international avoidance schemes that have cost governments billions in revenue.

It’s an attempt to better cope with a world where globalization and an increasingly digital economy mean that profits can move easily from one jurisdiction to another. The agreement was sealed Thursday in talks overseen by the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, though there are still details to work out and hurdles to clear before it can take effect in 2023.

The key feature is a global minimum corporate tax of at least 15%, endorsing the broad outlines of a proposal from U.S. President Joe Biden.

While the tax deal is complex in its details, the idea behind the minimum tax is simple: if a multinational company escapes taxation abroad, it would have to pay the minimum at home.

Here’s why it was proposed and how it would work.

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THE PROBLEM: TAX HAVENS AND THE 'RACE TO THE BOTTOM'

Most countries only tax domestic business income of their multinational companies, on the assumption that the profits of their foreign subsidiaries will be taxed where they are earned.

But in today's economy, profits can easily slide across borders. Earnings often come from intangibles, such as brands, copyrights and patents. Those are easy to move to where taxes are lowest — and some jurisdictions have been only too willing to offer reduced or zero taxation to attract foreign investment and revenue, even if companies do no real business there.

As a result, corporate tax rates have fallen in recent years, a phenomenon dubbed a "race to the bottom" by U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen.

From 1985 to 2018, the worldwide average corporate statutory tax rate fell from 49% to 24%. From 2000-2018, U.S. companies booked half of all foreign profits in just seven low-tax jurisdictions: Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Singapore and Switzerland. The OECD estimates tax avoidance costs anywhere from \$100 billion to \$240 billion, or from 4% to 10% of global corporate income tax revenues.

That's money governments could use as they see deficits rise from spending on pandemic relief.

THE SOLUTION: THE GLOBAL MINIMUM TAX

The talks seek to put a floor under corporate tax rates by having countries legislate a minimum that they would levy on untaxed foreign income. In other words, if Company X headquartered in Country Y paid no or little tax on profits in Country Z, Country Y would tax those profits at home up to the minimum rate.

That would remove the reason for using a tax haven, or for setting one up. Biden has proposed a 15% floor for the global talks, though it could be higher.

ANOTHER PROBLEM: TAXING 'DIGITAL' COMPANIES

Another focus is what to do about companies that make profits in countries where they have no physical presence. That could be through digital advertising or online retail. Countries led by France have started imposing unilateral "digital" taxes that hit the biggest U.S. tech companies such as Google, Amazon and Facebook. The U.S. calls those unfair trade practices, and has threatened retaliation through import taxes.

THE SOLUTION: ALLOCATING TAXING RIGHTS

Biden's proposal focuses on the 100 biggest and most profitable multinationals no matter what kind of business they are in, digital or not. Countries could claim the right to tax part of their profits — under a proposal backed by the Group of Seven wealthy democracies, up to 20% of the profits of companies above a profit margin of 10%. Governments would have to roll back their unilateral taxes, defusing the trade disputes with the U.S.

BIDEN'S PLANS

The OECD talks play a role in Biden's push for changes that would, in his view, make the tax system fairer and raise revenue for investments in infrastructure and clean energy. The U.S. already passed a tax on foreign earnings under the Trump administration. But Biden wants to roughly double the Trump era rate to 21%, and also to charge that rate on a country-by-country basis so that tax havens can be targeted. The president also seeks to make it more difficult for U.S. companies to merge with foreign firms and avoid U.S. taxes, a process known as inversion.

All those changes must be approved by the U.S. Congress, where the Democratic president has only a thin majority. Biden wanted a diplomatic win at the OECD talks so that other countries impose a form of a minimum tax to prevent companies from avoiding their potential tax obligations.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The agreement reached at the OECD will be taken up by the Group of 20 countries representing 80 percent of the global economy. However, all 20 G-20 countries joined in signing the OECD deal, indicating broad agreement, at least with the outlines. The G-20 could give its final blessing at a summit Oct. 30-31 in Rome.

The global minimum tax would be voluntary. So countries would have to enact it into their own national tax codes on their own initiative. The proposal to tax companies on earnings where they have no physical

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presence, such as through online businesses, would require countries to sign up to a written international agreement.

Some countries that took part in the OECD talks did not sign the agreement. They include Ireland and Hungary, both of which have corporate tax rates below the 15% minimum. Ireland's finance minister, Paschal Donohoe, has said Ireland's 12.5% rate is "a fair rate." Donohoe said Thursday after the deal was announced that despite reservations about the rate, he remains "committed to the process" and aims "to find an outcome that Ireland can yet support."

According to Gabriel Zucman, an economics professor at the University of California at Berkeley who has written extensively on tax havens, the minimum tax will still work even if some countries don't sign up. He said in a tweet that "the fact remains: If some countries refuse to apply a minimum tax, then other countries will collect the taxes they refuse to collect."

In Cuba, novels and news accompany rolling of cigars

By ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Every morning Odalys de la Caridad Lara Reyes gets to work, takes her seat and starts to read out loud. Usually there's a novel. She's partial to books by Victor Hugo and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Of late, during the pandemic, it's just been the news.

She's one of a small band of tobacco factory readers — a job that has become a unique part of Cuba's culture.

"If I am born again, I would be a reader again, because through this profession I have learned in all areas," said Lara, a short, 55-year-old woman with straight, graying hair, a deep voice and perfect diction.

Arrayed before her at the La Corona factory are scores of workers rolling the world's finest cigars — San Cristobals, Montecristos, Cuabas.

By legend, at least, cigars like the Montecristos and Romeo y Julietas owe their very names to books being read as they were being rolled.

If they like what they're hearing, the torcedores rattle their cutters. If they don't, they may drop them to clatter on the floor.

During the pandemic, so many cutters have been absent so often — sometimes under quarantine or caring for children — that following a novel day to day is impossible. So for the time being, Lara has just read the news, reading items about COVID-19 therapies, the repatriation of migrants or the upcoming Tokyo Olympics.

Sitting at a podium on a wooden stage near a Cuban flag, she'll also read out birthday reminders and factory announcements, such as what's on offer at the cafeteria.

Historians say the practice dates to about 1865, when workers at the El Fígaro factory picked a colleague to read to them as they rolled — promising to produce more cigars to compensate for the missing worker. Later, they chipped in to pay a salary. Despite initial resistance from factory owners, the practice spread.

It became a way for workers to educate themselves. It also helped spread the cause of Cuban independence at the end of the 19th century — political activism that led to temporary bans.

Independence hero Jose Marti once took a turn at the reader's chair to deliver a speech to emigrant Cuban tobacco rollers working at a factory in Florida, said Spanish language Professor María Isabel Alfonso, a specialist in Cuban culture at St. Joseph's College in New York. The job "occupies a special place within the Cuban collective imagination," she said.

Today more than 200 readers are on staff at state-owned factories. The government has declared the job a "cultural patrimony of the nation." But the workers still elect the readers and vote on what will be read.

In 1996, Lara, then a mother with two small children, was working as an announcer at a radio station when she heard that a position was open at La Corona. She applied and was given a tryout along with two men.

"We spent 20 days reading ... and when the vote came, the workers elected me as the factory reader." She said that perhaps the most difficult days came in 2016, when she was reading out accounts of the

death of former President Fidel Castro.

"We cried to see the loss and there are no words to describe what one feels trying to convey to many people who are also hurting," she said.

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 20 people, with more than 120 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 that 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.

"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 Co. 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 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."

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.

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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.

Driven by delta variant, COVID-19 surges across Africa

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Driven by the delta variant, a new wave of COVID-19 is sweeping across the African continent where new cases, hospital admissions, and deaths are increasing.

"The speed and scale of Africa's third wave is like nothing we've seen before," said Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO's regional director for Africa.

South Africa is leading the new surge in Africa, where case numbers are doubling every three weeks, according to the World Health Organization.

The delta variant, reported in 16 African countries, has become dominant in South Africa, which accounts for more than half of Africa's new cases. It was detected in 97% of samples sequenced in Uganda and in 79% of samples sequenced in Congo, said the WHO.

"The rampant spread of more contagious variants pushes the threat to Africa up to a whole new level," Moeti said in a statement. "More transmission means more serious illness and more deaths, so everyone must act now and boost prevention measures to stop an emergency becoming a tragedy."

Less than 2% of Africa's 1.3 billion people have received even one dose of a vaccine.

With more than 20,000 new cases reported Friday, South Africa's total of 1.9 million cases, including 66,323 deaths, represents more than 30% of the 5.5 million cases reported by Africa's 54 countries, representing 1.3 billion people, according to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Johannesburg and the surrounding Gauteng province are South Africa's epicenter with its hospitals reaching 91% capacity and 5,500 additional health workers deployed, the health department announced Friday.

Staff at Tshepong Hospital in Klerksdorp, about 170 kilometers (105 miles) southwest of Johannesburg, say they are battling to cope with the new surge.

"With this new strain in the third wave, I think it's more aggressive than the second one," Onthatile Mmusi, a nurse at Tshepong Hospital said. "We tend to get patients and when they come in their oxygen levels are already down."

Richardson will miss Olympic 100 after marijuana test

By EDDIE PELLIS and PAT GRAHAM AP Sports Writers

American champion Sha'Carri Richardson cannot run in the Olympic 100-meter race after testing positive for a chemical found in marijuana.

Richardson, who won the 100 at Olympic trials in 10.86 seconds on June 19, spoke of her ban Friday on the "Today" show. She tested positive at the Olympic trials and so her result is erased. Fourth-place finisher Jenna Prandini is expected to get Richardson's spot in the 100.

Richardson accepted a 30-day suspension that ends July 27, which would be in time to run in the women's relays. USA Track and Field has not disclosed plans for the relay.

The 21-year-old sprinter was expected to face Jamaica's Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce in one of the most highly anticipated races of the Olympic track meet.

On Thursday, as reports swirled about her possible marijuana use, Richardson put out a tweet that said, simply: "I am human." On Friday, she went on TV and said she smoked marijuana as a way of coping with her mother's recent death.

"I was definitely triggered and blinded by emotions, blinded by badness, and hurting, and hiding hurt," she told NBC. "I know I can't hide myself, so in some type of way, I was trying to hide my pain."

Richardson had what could have been a three-month sanction reduced to one month because she participated in a counseling program.

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After the London Olympics, international regulators relaxed the threshold for what constitutes a positive test for marijuana from 15 nanograms per milliliter to 150 ng/m. They explained the new threshold was an attempt to ensure that in-competition use is detected and not use during the days and weeks before competition.

Though there have been wide-ranging debates about whether marijuana should be considered a performance-enhancing drug, the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency makes clear on its website that "all synthetic and naturally occurring cannabinoids are prohibited in-competition, except for cannabidiol (CBD)," a byproduct that is being explored for possible medical benefits.

While not weighing in on her prospects for the relays, USATF issued a statement that said her "situation is incredibly unfortunate and devastating for everyone involved." The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee said it was "working with USATF to determine the appropriate next steps."

Richardson said if she's allowed to run in the relay, "I'm grateful, but if not, I'm just going to focus on myself."

Her case is the latest in a number of doping-related embarrassments for U.S. track team. Among those banned for the Olympics are the reigning world champion at 100 meters, Christian Coleman, who is serving a suspension for missing tests, and the American record holder at 1,500 and 5,000 meters, Shelby Houlihan, who tested positive for a performance enhancer she blamed on tainted meat in a burrito. Also on Friday, defending Olympic 100-meter hurdles champion Brianna McNeal had a five-year ban for tampering or attempted tampering with the doping-control process upheld by the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Now, Richardson is out as well, denying the Olympics of a much-hyped race and an electric personality. She ran at the trials with flowing orange hair and long fingernails.

"To put on a face and go out in front of the world and hide my pain, who am I to tell you how to cope when you're dealing with pain and struggles you've never had to experience before?" Richardson said.

Arkansas governor ponders future in GOP turned Trumpian

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Leading a state that went heavily for Donald Trump in the 2020 election and that has enacted some of the most aggressive laws on social issues, Republican Gov. Asa Hutchinson in Arkansas has been in the national spotlight this year.

But not for embracing the state's Trumpian turn. It's for distancing himself from it.

At a time when red state governors like Ron DeSantis in Florida and Kristi Noem of South Dakota are carrying forward Trump's rhetoric and policies, Hutchinson is doing the opposite. He's taking a contrarian position that's making him an outsider in the state party he helped build and that now could test whether there's a path forward for ambitious Republicans in the reddest parts of the country that doesn't rely on the former president.

"He represents an important voice in the party, a voice that is relatively independent of any established consensus," said Republican pollster Whit Ayres, whose firm worked with Hutchinson before he was governor. "He thinks for himself and there are a number of us in the party who find that refreshing."

But, Ayres said, where the party is headed right now "remains a very open question."

Hutchinson couldn't be more different than Trump, at least when it comes to style. A mild-mannered attorney, Hutchinson tweets out Bible verses every Sunday morning. He tries to split the difference on contentious issues, such as when he supported keeping the state's Medicaid expansion but with a work requirement later blocked by courts.

He's also trying to manage an increasingly ominous COVID-19 situation in his state, with cases on the rise and vaccine rates low. His powers to address it were curbed by conservative lawmakers angry about his earlier restrictions.

Midway through his second term, Hutchinson, 70, would seem poised for a big move. He is to take over next week as chairman of the National Governors Association, a position that predecessors Bill Clinton and Mike Huckabee used to launch their own White House bids. He's started a political action committee that he said will help Republican candidates in next year's midterm election.

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He's also become a fixture on cable television, defending his veto of legislation targeting transgender youths in the state and warning fellow Republicans about tying their fortunes too closely to Trump.

"If Trump is the issue in 2022, we lose," Hutchinson told The Associated Press in a recent interview in his office. "He's not on the ballot and we have to be the party of ideas and principles that are relevant to what's happening in our country today. We can't be revisiting what happened last election and we can't relitigate that."

Hutchinson has provided a contrast with other top Republican figures in his state, including the front-runner to replace him. Sarah Sanders is seeking the party's nomination with a campaign that showcases her time as Trump's press secretary, during which she regularly sparred with reporters and defended the president's most contentious policies.

Sen. Tom Cotton, a hard-edged conservative, has already been laying the groundwork for a presidential campaign, with visits to key early states.

Hutchinson's history in Arkansas' politics dates back to the 1980s, when Ronald Reagan appointed him as a U.S. attorney. He went on to chair Arkansas' Republican party and was elected to Congress before serving as head of the Drug Enforcement Administration and later as a federal Homeland Security official in George W. Bush's administration.

He ran unsuccessfully for statewide office three times before winning the governorship in 2014. Some critics on his right now say the state's politics have left him behind.

"What he's done for the last 30 or 40 years isn't how the party is going to succeed moving forward," said Republican Sen. Trent Garner, who frequently clashed with Hutchinson. "While I can appreciate Gov. Hutchinson's service, he is a relic of the past. Trump and Trumpism is the bold new future of the Arkansas Republican Party."

Hutchinson leaves office in 2023 and it's unclear what he plans on doing next. Unlike his Democratic predecessor Mike Beebe, Hutchinson won't rule out another run for office.

But he's not making overt moves. He appears more eager to talk about dry policy than identity politics. He testified before a Senate committee in favor of efforts to end the sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine offenders. He aims to promote one of his pet issues: computer science education in public schools.

Hutchinson said next year's midterms may demonstrate whether his message still resonates with the electorate.

Hutchinson drew the ire of some conservative lawmakers this year by vetoing a bill that banned gender confirming treatments for transgender youth. The veto, which was promptly overridden, was also criticized by Trump, who called Hutchinson a "RINO," or Republican In Name Only.

The bill was among several that the governor complained were the product of culture wars and weren't necessary.

But Hutchinson hasn't strayed as far from the right wing as he could have. He was among more than two dozen governors who decided to end supplemental federal unemployment payments before they were set to run out. He's signed other bills restricting transgender people's rights, including one banning trans girls and women from competing on women's school sports teams.

This week, he announced he was joining the growing list of GOP governors directing law enforcement or other help to Texas to assist with security along the border with Mexico in a fight with the Biden administration over immigration policy. Hutchinson initially said he would not send state troopers, citing public safety needs in the state. But hours later he announced he was dispatching up to 40 members of Arkansas' National Guard.

Hutchinson has defended his party, even when his nephew, state Sen. Jim Hendren, made a high-profile exit after the deadly riot at the U.S Capitol.

Hendren, who has formed a group aimed at promoting centrist candidates, pointed to his uncle as a model for Republicans in the post-Trump era.

"I would be surprised if he's ready to lay down that mantle of public service that he's carried for so long," Hendren said.

Saying goodbye to Marcus Guara, who 'lived for his family'

By MARK KENNEDY Associated Press

Peter Milián has sifted through hundreds of pictures of his cousin Marcus Guara and his family during the past few days since their beachfront condominium building collapsed, killing the family of four.

He finds himself returning to one that was posted last year on Facebook celebrating Father's Day. It shows a collage of three family snaps, Marcus Guara firmly in the middle of each, smiling broadly as he hugs his daughters and wife. To honor the day, he was picking a film they'd all watch together.

It reminds of him of how Apartment 802 at Champlain Towers South was always bursting with life. It was home to the Guara family: Marcus and Anaely Guara and their two daughters, 10-year-old Lucia Guara and 4-year-old Emma Guara.

Amid suffocating grief, Milián and other relatives are clinging to the bittersweet comfort that all four family members perished together when the condo complex collapsed; that they died the way they had lived: as one.

"I know it sounds terrible to say this, but sometimes you have some comfort knowing that all four of them were together," Milián said Thursday.

The remains of Marcus Guara, 52, were the first to be pulled from the rubble Saturday. The girls and their mother were recovered Wednesday.

Marcus Guara studied business at the University of Miami, where he was the captain of the rowing team, and worked as a regional sales manager for New York-based bed and bath textile company Kassatex. But he was, above all, a family man.

"He loved life and he loved his family. I mean, he loved his family dearly. He lived for them," said Milián, vice president of sales for Clear Channel Outdoor in Miami. He added that Guara was "the type of person that just makes everybody feel wonderful."

Kassatex CEO and Founder Ernesto Khoudari said in a statement that Guara's colleagues "are heartbroken to lose one of our best."

"Marcus was truly an amazing human being. From the moment he started working with us, his creativity, vivacity for the business, charming smile, and never-give-up attitude fueled his passion for our company, and his loyal relationships he made along the way," Khoudari said.

"As a family brand, he was our family man. Our Zoom conference calls were always visited by his adorable daughters on a regular basis, as he was so proud of his family."

Former rowing teammates took to social media to remember and honor a man whose work ethic inspired others and was known as a fierce competitor.

"Marc had an infectious laugh and a smile to accompany stories, which put a young kid at home while 1,400 miles from home," wrote Jim Heller, a former rowing teammate. "Marc was a joker and had natural charisma that made everyone feel good."

Another former teammate, Mike Spring, told the story of driving back from a rowing competition and almost running out of gas. With the fuel gauge on empty, Guara kept calm as the duo nervously drove around seeking an open gas pump.

"We eventually found a station, fueled up and laughed about it all the way back to campus," Spring wrote on Twitter. "Marc was a great person who made everyone's life better whether you were in a stressful situation or not."

Milián said he hopes the deaths of Guara and his wife and daughters can make people appreciate life and family a little bit more.

"There's a lot of tragedies in this world," he said. "You hear about stuff like the Parkland shooting, the Pulse nightclub in Orlando. How many tragedies happened with COVID? But I mean, you don't hear about entire families being wiped out."

Justices turn away florist who refused same-sex wedding job

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Friday declined to take up the case of a florist who refused to provide services for a same-sex wedding, leaving in place a decision that she broke state anti-discrimination laws.

Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito and Neil Gorsuch said they would have agreed to hear the case and review the decision. Four justices are needed for the court to take a case.

In 2018 the high court ordered Washington state courts to take a new look at the case involving florist Barronelle Stutzman and her Arlene's Flowers business. That followed the justices' decision in a different case involving a Colorado baker who declined to make a cake for a same-sex wedding.

After that review, the Washington Supreme Court ruled unanimously that state courts did not act with animosity toward religion when they ruled Stutzman broke the state's anti-discrimination laws by refusing on religious grounds to provide flowers for the wedding of Rob Ingersoll and Curt Freed.

Stutzman had sold Ingersoll flowers for nearly a decade and knew he was gay. But she contended his marriage went against her religious beliefs and she felt she could not provide services for the event.

Washington state law says businesses offering services to opposite-sex couples must provide the same service to same-sex couples.

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Posts mislead on delta variant data

CLAIM: Data from the U.K.'s public health agency confirms that those who have been vaccinated against COVID-19 are anywhere from two times to six times more likely to die from the delta variant than the unvaccinated.

THE FACTS: Public Health England's report did not show evidence that those who are vaccinated are more susceptible to dying from the coronavirus delta variant. Rather, the data, which was published June 18, shows the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines are highly effective against hospitalization from the variant. An Instagram post falsely claimed the health agency's data showed vaccinated people were twice as likely to die from the delta variant than unvaccinated people. Another falsely claimed vaccinated people were "six times more likely to die from a circulating 'variant' like 'Delta' than are unvaccinated people." One post used a table from the report to share the false claim, but the post misrepresented the table's data. While the table does address delta variant deaths, it shows that among 60,624 confirmed cases of the variant between Feb. 1 and June 14, recorded deaths included 37 vaccinated people and 34 unvaccinated. Furthermore, the table does not state the age group of those who died and whether they suffered from any additional illnesses. Experts say that means conclusions cannot be drawn about the role of vaccines in those deaths. "Unless you account for these differences in age and population, you really can't make the argument that vaccination confers a higher risk of death," said Dr. Nasia Safdar, an infectious disease physician at the University of Wisconsin's School of Medicine and Public Health. The report notes that follow up is needed when examining the data on delta variant deaths because "it is too early to provide a formal assessment of the case fatality of delta, stratified by age, compared to other variants." The public health agency issued another report on June 25 that showed that no deaths had been recorded of patients under 50 who were infected with the delta variant and had received both doses of vaccine. The data from the agency shows that two doses of the vaccines made by Pfizer or AstraZeneca are highly effective against hospitalization from the delta variant.

— Associated Press writer Beatrice Dupuy in New York contributed this report.

Viruses can evolve to be more deadly

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CLAIM: No virus has ever mutated to become more lethal. As viruses mutate, they become less lethal.

THE FACTS: As the spread of coronavirus variants raise new public health questions, social media users are sharing misinformation about how viruses mutate. A post on Facebook reads, "In the history of virology, there has never, EVER, been a viral mutation that resulted in a virus that was MORE lethal. As viruses mutate, they become more contagious/transmissible and LESS lethal." But in fact, there have been cases of viruses that mutated to become more deadly. "That claim as a whole is just nonsense," said Troy Day, a professor of mathematics and biology at Queen's University in Canada, who has studied the ways infectious diseases, including coronavirus, can evolve. Some examples of viruses that became more deadly over time include those that developed drug resistant variants, and animal viruses such as bird flu, which were harmless to humans initially but then mutated to become capable of killing people, according to Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at Johns Hopkins University's Center for Health Security. "Flu viruses have developed resistance to certain antivirals that make them more difficult to treat, and therefore make them more deadly," Adalja said, also noting the same has happened with HIV and certain Hepatitis C strains. While early scientific theories suggested that as viruses evolved, they would become more contagious and less lethal to keep spreading, over time the scientific community has acknowledged that's not always the case. "Becoming more transmissible and less lethal are absolutely what's best for the pathogen," said Day. "But the problem is that it's not always possible, and in many instances is never possible, to be more transmissible and also less lethal." Day said there are documented cases of animal viruses that evolved over time to become more lethal, including myxoma virus in rabbits and Marek's disease in chicken. Some viruses provoke severe symptoms in their hosts that make it easier to transmit the virus to others. But those same symptoms can wind up killing the hosts. "The virus, speaking anthropomorphically, just wants to spread and have its genes replicated," said Adalja. "If the best way for it is to spread by causing severe symptoms it will continue to do that."

— Associated Press writer Terrence Fraser in New York contributed this report.

Fake memo targets cold remedies amid spread of COVID-19 variant

CLAIM: Information in a confidential memo from a professor at Imperial College London shows that pharmaceutical companies are being told to stop manufacturing medicine for colds, flu and hay fever, and, as of July, pharmacists will not be allowed to sell them.

THE FACTS: The memo, which has a subject line: "Next Steps – Permanent Lockdown of the UK (Private & Confidential)," was fabricated, according to officials at Imperial College London. Pharmaceutical companies were not asked to stop making such medications, nor will sales be halted. The memo falsely claims that global leaders are behind a conspiracy to use COVID-19 and vaccines to manipulate their citizenry. Social media users shared parts of the fake memo online, including one paragraph that says "in order to get more people to be vaccinated" GlaxoSmithKline and several other pharmaceutical companies are to stop the production of medicines for "Common Colds, Flu and Hay Fever." It goes on to say, "No Chemist will be able nor allowed to sell them." One tweet sharing the letter encouraged social media users to stock up on cold medications before they are gone. The letter first circulated on social media in the United Kingdom and is now being shared in the U.S. The college rebutted the false information on their website saying, "Although most readers recognise that this 'memo' is an obvious fake, some have sought to share it widely and some have threatened and abused Imperial staff." The fake memo, falsely attributed to Imperial College London epidemiologist Neil Ferguson, was addressed to top medical officials across the U. K., including in Wales and Northern Ireland. Ferguson, a former adviser to the U.K. government on its COVID-19 response, has spoken out about a possible third wave of COVID-19 infections from the delta variant that has been found to be more transmissible. An Imperial College London spokesperson confirmed to the AP that the memo was fake and not written by Ferguson. "This fake memo entitled 'Next Steps - Permanent Lockdown of the UK (Private & Confidential)' was not written by Neil Ferguson," the college said in a statement. "This totally untrue piece of disinformation was constructed and spread by extremists and has no association with Imperial College London, the UK government, or its scientific advisors."

— Beatrice Dupuy. Associated Press writer Tristan Werkmeister in London contributed.

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Advisory on Alabama flesh-eating bacteria is fake

CLAIM: A letter from Alabama Power, an electric utility company, states the company has taken samples from Lewis Smith Lake and found dangerous levels of "flesh eating bacteria." Due to this, Alabama Power has encouraged visitors to the lake not to enter the water.

THE FACTS: The letter is not authentic and Alabama Power has not issued any such advisory. An image circulated on Facebook this week showing the fake letter that purported to be from the utility company. "Necrotizing Fasciitis (flesh eating bacteria) has significantly increased at Lewis Smith Lake," the letter read. "We here at Alabama Power Company have asked that all boaters and swimmers stay out of the water for their own safety." In an email statement sent to The Associated Press, Alabama Power spokesperson Danielle Kimbrough denied the authenticity of the letter. "A prank Facebook post warning residents to stay out of Smith Lake this summer is fake," Kimbrough said. "Smith Lake and the rest of our company's lakes around Alabama are open as normal. We encourage visitors to observe the usual safety guidelines."

— Terrence Fraser

Unusually agreeable justices end term 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.

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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 before the voting rights decision of the last day.

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."

After pandemic pause, one woman's crusade for kids resumes

By JOHN MINCHILLO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After more than two decades beating the odds to obtain medical care for children injured in war and crises around the world, Elissa Montanti's Global Medical Relief Fund was thwarted by COVID-19.

The Dare to Dream House, the typically bustling boarding house her nonprofit maintains a few doors down from her Staten Island home, fell silent.

"I was in a dark unknown," she said.

"My fear was, my God, what's going to happen to the charity? These poor kids, are they going to have no place to come and be helped to get arms, or legs to walk?"

The pandemic put a hold on international travel, and on the services she has facilitated for the more than

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450 kids who have passed through her care. Prosthetics needed fitting. Surgeries required scheduling. From her converted walk-in closet office, Montanti wondered if she would ever again see her children, as she regards them.

Now, Montanti is bringing her charity back to life.

As restrictions have begun lifting across the country, Montanti faces a new set of hurdles unique to a post-pandemic world. In addition to "knocking on doors" to recruit volunteers and professionals to her cause, disease prevention protocols have become critical.

In June, outside the entrance of Richmond University Medical Center, she served as counselor to four recent arrivals from Tanzania who were nervous before receiving their COVID-19 vaccinations.

The four have albinism — a lack of color in the skin, hair and eyes. All had lost limbs to machete attacks; in their homeland, some believe that the bodies of albinos contain a mystical energy, and unscrupulous shamans use them to make potions that are sold at exorbitant prices.

Now Pendo Sengerema, 20, was afraid of the shot. After 15 minutes of gentle coaxing, Montanti calmed her, and they entered the hospital hand in hand.

"They live in a safe house right now. They cannot go back to their villages" for fear of more attacks, Montanti said. She held the youngest of the four, 12-year-old Baraka Cosmas, on her lap as he received the first round of his vaccination. His tears turned to smiles after he received a well-timed cookie.

The next day they would travel to a Shriners Hospital for Children in Philadelphia for their prosthetic fittings. During their brief stay, they roomed at the Dare to Dream House, studying together and eating ice cream outside on the stoop. In the afternoons, they took walks in the open air and visited parks to kick around a soccer ball, safe from the dangers of home.

Since the founding of her charity in 1997 in the wake of the sudden deaths of her grandmother, mother and childhood sweetheart, Montanti has shown uncanny skill in rallying support. She has lobbied at the United Nations, written a memoir and built a sprawling network of charitable doctors and professionals.

Her charity says it has taken in children from 50 countries, mostly from Central and South America, Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia.

She recalls her foray into Iraq after the U.S.-led coalition invasion following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. "I'll never forget the burning oil fields," she said, "And here I was, going in there because I knew that my destiny was to help."

With the world reopening, she is cautiously optimistic that her charity will again take up its mission unabated.

"When the kids are in that house, it brings me so much joy," Montanti said while walking her dog down the street to visit her Tanzanian charges. "There, they are not numbers."

African leaders gather to pay respects to Kenneth Kaunda

By TSVANGIRAYI MUKWAZHI Associated Press

LUSAKA, Zambia (AP) — African leaders have gathered with ordinary Zambians to attend a memorial service Friday for Kenneth Kaunda, the nation's founding president and champion of African nationalism.

The presidents of Ghana, Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe flew into Lusaka, the capital, to honor Kaunda, who died last month at 97.

Kaunda is remembered for leading Zambia to independence from British colonial rule in 1964 and backing nationalist movements that fought to bring majority rule to the southern African states of Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Zambian President Edgar Lungu presided over the service at the National Heroes' Stadium where Kaunda's casket, draped in Zambia's flag, was brought in by a military guard.

As Zambia is battling a surge of COVID-19, those attending wore masks and kept a distance apart, preventing the stadium from filling to its capacity of 60,000.

Zambia, with a population of 18 million, has reported a cumulative total of 157,832 cases of COVID-19, including 2,271 deaths. Zambia's 7-day rolling average of daily deaths has doubled over the past two weeks

from 0.15 deaths per 100,000 people on June 17 to 0.32 deaths per 100,000 people on July 1.

Since Kaunda's death on June 17 of pneumonia, Zambia's military has flown his body to the country's 10 provinces so that people from all areas of the country could pay their respects.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa on Friday signed the official condolence book for Kaunda.

Kaunda is to be buried on July 7.

No lockdown plans in Russia as virus deaths hit new record

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian authorities reported a record-breaking 679 new coronavirus deaths on Friday, a fourth day in a row with the highest daily death toll in the pandemic.

No plans for a lockdown are being discussed, however, the Kremlin insisted.

The previous record, of 672 deaths, was registered on Thursday. Russia has struggled to cope with a surge in infections and deaths in recent weeks that comes amid slow vaccination rates.

Daily new infections have more than doubled over the past month, soaring from around 9,000 in early June to over 20,000 this week. On Friday, Russia's state coronavirus task force reported 23,218 new contagions. Moscow, its outlying region and St. Petersburg account for nearly half of all new cases.

Yet the authorities are not discussing a lockdown, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday. "No one wants any lockdowns," Peskov told reporters during a daily conference call, admitting that the situation with coronavirus in a number of Russian regions is "tense."

"In order for it to continue not being discussed, we all need to get vaccinated as soon as possible."

Russian officials have blamed the rise in cases on Russians' lax attitude toward taking precautions, the growing prevalence of more infectious variants and slow vaccination rates. Although Russia was among the first countries to announce and deploy a coronavirus vaccine, just over 23 million people — or 15% of its 146 million population — have received at least one shot.

Experts have attributed the comparatively low vaccine uptake to widespread vaccine hesitancy and limited production capacity. Only 36.7 million sets of the four domestically developed vaccines have been released into circulation so far. Nevertheless, this week Russian health authorities gave a go-ahead to booster coronavirus vaccinations for people immunized more than six months ago.

Amid the latest surge of cases, about 20 Russian regions — from Moscow and St. Petersburg to the remote far-eastern region of Sakhalin — have made vaccinations mandatory last month for employees in certain sectors. The move seemingly helped ramp up the immunization drive in recent weeks but also elicited some pushback. Small protests against mandatory vaccinations erupted in Moscow and the Sakhalin region this week.

As of Monday, restaurants, bars and cafes in Moscow can only admit customers who have been vaccinated, have recovered from COVID-19 in the past six months or can provide a negative test in the previous 72 hours. Customers must visit a government website and get a QR code — a digital pattern designed to be read by a scanner.

Moscow authorities on Friday said that everyone with symptoms of a respiratory infection should self-isolate at least until they get a negative coronavirus test. "Starting from today, we will view all cases of acute respiratory infections as, highly likely, coronavirus infection," Deputy Mayor Anastasia Rakova said.

Russia's coronavirus task force has reported more than 5.5 million confirmed coronavirus cases in the pandemic and 136,565 deaths.

Russia had only one, six-week nationwide lockdown last spring, and the authorities have largely shunned tough restrictions that would require shutting down businesses ever since. Only one Russian region — the Siberian republic of Buryatia — has since had two local lockdowns, with the latest one in effect since Sunday.

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By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, July 3, the 184th day of 2021. There are 181 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 3, 1775, Gen. George Washington took command of the Continental Army at Cambridge, Massachusetts.

On this date:

In 1863, the three-day Civil War Battle of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania ended in a major victory for the North as Confederate troops failed to breach Union positions during an assault known as Pickett's Charge.

In 1913, during a 50th anniversary reunion at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Civil War veterans re-enacted Pickett's Charge, which ended with embraces and handshakes between the former enemies.

In 1944, during World War II, Soviet forces recaptured Minsk from the Germans.

In 1950, the first carrier strikes of the Korean War took place as the USS Valley Forge and the HMS Triumph sent fighter planes against North Korean targets.

In 1971, singer Jim Morrison of The Doors died in Paris at age 27.

In 1976, Israel launched its daring mission to rescue 106 passengers and Air France crew members being held at Entebbe (en-TEH'-bee) Airport in Uganda (yoo-GAHN'-dah) by pro-Palestinian hijackers; the commandos succeeded in rescuing all but four of the hostages.

In 1979, Dan White, convicted of voluntary manslaughter in the shooting deaths of San Francisco Mayor George Moscone (mahs-KOH'-nee) and Supervisor Harvey Milk, was sentenced to seven years and eight months in prison. (He ended up serving five years.)

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan presided over a gala ceremony in New York Harbor that saw the re-lighting of the renovated Statue of Liberty.

In 1988, the USS Vincennes shot down an Iran Air jetliner over the Persian Gulf, killing all 290 people aboard.

In 1996, Russians went to the polls to re-elect Boris Yeltsin president over his Communist challenger, Gennady Zyuganov (geh-NAH'-dee zhoo-GAH'-nahf), in a runoff.

In 2003, the U.S. put a \$25 million bounty on Saddam Hussein, and \$15 million apiece for his two sons. (The \$30 million reward for Odai and Qusai Hussein went to a tipster whose information led U.S. troops to their hideout, where the brothers were killed in a gunbattle.)

In 2013, Egypt's first democratically elected president, Mohammed Morsi, was overthrown by the military after just one year by the same kind of Arab Spring uprising that had brought the Islamist leader to power.

Ten years ago: Novak Djokovic (NOH'-vak JOH'-kuh-vich) won his first Wimbledon, beating defending champion Rafael Nadal 6-4, 6-1, 1-6, 6-3.

Five years ago: A devastating truck bombing on a bustling commercial street in downtown Baghdad killed nearly 300 people. Actor Noel Neill, who played Superman's love interest, Lois Lane, in both a movie serial and on TV, died in Tucson, Arizona, at age 95.

One year ago: Speaking at the foot of Mount Rushmore on the eve of Independence Day, President Donald Trump asserted that protesters pushing for racial justice were engaging in a "merciless campaign to wipe out our history." Amid a rampant resurgence of the coronavirus, Texas began mandating face coverings on the orders of Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, who said it seemed that people were "not comprehending the magnitude of the problem."

Today's Birthdays: Playwright Tom Stoppard is 84. Writer-producer Jay Tarses is 82. Actor Michael Cole (TV: "The Mod Squad") is 81. Attorney Gloria Allred is 80. Folk singer Judith Durham (The Seekers) is 78. Actor Kurtwood Smith is 78. Country singer Johnny Lee is 75. Humorist Dave Barry is 74. Actor Betty Buckley is 74. Actor Jan Smithers is 72. Actor Bruce Altman is 66. Talk show host Montel Williams is 65. Country singer Aaron Tippin is 63. Rock musician Vince Clarke (Erasure) is 61. Actor Tom Cruise is 59. Actor Thomas Gibson is 59. Actor Hunter Tylo is 59. Actor Connie Nielsen is 57. Actor Yearley Smith is 57. TV chef Sandra Lee is 55. Singer Ishmael Butler is 52. Rock musician Kevin Hearn (Barenaked Ladies)

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is 52. Actor-singer Shawnee Smith is 52. Actor-singer Audra McDonald is 51. WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is 50. Actor Patrick Wilson is 48. Country singer Trent Tomlinson is 46. Actor Andrea Barber is 45. Singer Shane Lynch (Boyzone) is 45. Actor Ian Anthony Dale is 43. Actor/comedian Jule Klausner is 43. Actor Elizabeth Hendrickson is 42. R&B singer Tonia Tash (Divine) is 42. Country singer-songwriter Sarah Buxton is 41. Actor Olivia Munn is 41. Actor Shoshannah Stern is 41. Rock singer-songwriter Elle King is 32. Actor Grant Rosenmeyer is 30.