

# Groton Daily Independent

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**Correction**  
**Emmanuel Lutheran Church**  
Groton  
Wednesday, July 7, 2021  
5 p.m. Sarah Circle



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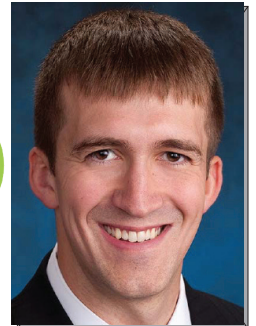




**OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton  
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

## Our Antiviral Founding Father

When the Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776, the American colonies still needed to win the Revolutionary War to truly gain their independence from the British Empire. The war continued another seven years until September 3, 1783. One of the deadliest threats to the Continental Army, however, was not the British Army, it was disease, especially smallpox.



By Andrew Ellsworth, MD ~ Prairie Doc® Perspectives

Boston had an outbreak of smallpox in 1775 from British Redcoats arriving to fight the rebellion. George Washington knew very well the dangers of smallpox after having had it himself as a young man, which left scars on his face. To keep his soldiers safe, Washington did not allow anyone from Boston near his troops. Washington wrote to John Hancock, the president of the Continental Congress, that he would "continue the utmost vigilance against this most dangerous enemy." Later, when the British withdrew from Boston, Washington allowed only soldiers with immunity into the city.

Most of the Continental Army had never had smallpox while most of the Redcoats had. This put the Americans at a big disadvantage. An attempt by the Continental Army to take Quebec failed in part because of heavy losses due to smallpox. In fact, General John Thomas died of smallpox in July 1776.

This was before the advancement of vaccinations. However, there was a procedure known as variolation, an early form of vaccination which involved exposing a cut on the recipient's arm to a small dose of the virus, hopefully just enough to trigger immunity without causing severe illness or death. The procedure was illegal in many places including Washington's home state of Virginia.

Washington knew they could not afford to lose more soldiers to smallpox. Thus, despite push back from the Continental Congress, Washington ordered this primitive form of vaccination for the entire army, and by the end of 1777 more than 40,000 soldiers had received it. Infection of the army dropped from 20 percent to one percent and lawmakers repealed bans of variolation for smallpox across the colonies.

George Washington's efforts at quarantine and primitive vaccination helped protect the Continental Army from disease which helped them eventually defeat the British Army and earn independence for the United States of America.

The war on Covid-19 may take several years as well. History shows how vaccination can be a great weapon against disease. Unfortunately, many remain unvaccinated, and hundreds in the U.S. continue to die each day. We need to rally both nationally and locally, to unite our efforts so we can gain our independence from Covid-19.

Andrew Ellsworth, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. For free and easy access to the entire Prairie Doc® library, visit [www.prairiedoc.org](http://www.prairiedoc.org) and follow Prairie Doc® on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show streaming on Facebook and broadcast on SDPB most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

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**JOIN  
OUR TEAM**

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](mailto:kathy@jsains.com) or drop off at 702 S Main, Aberdeen, SD 57401. (0629.0713)

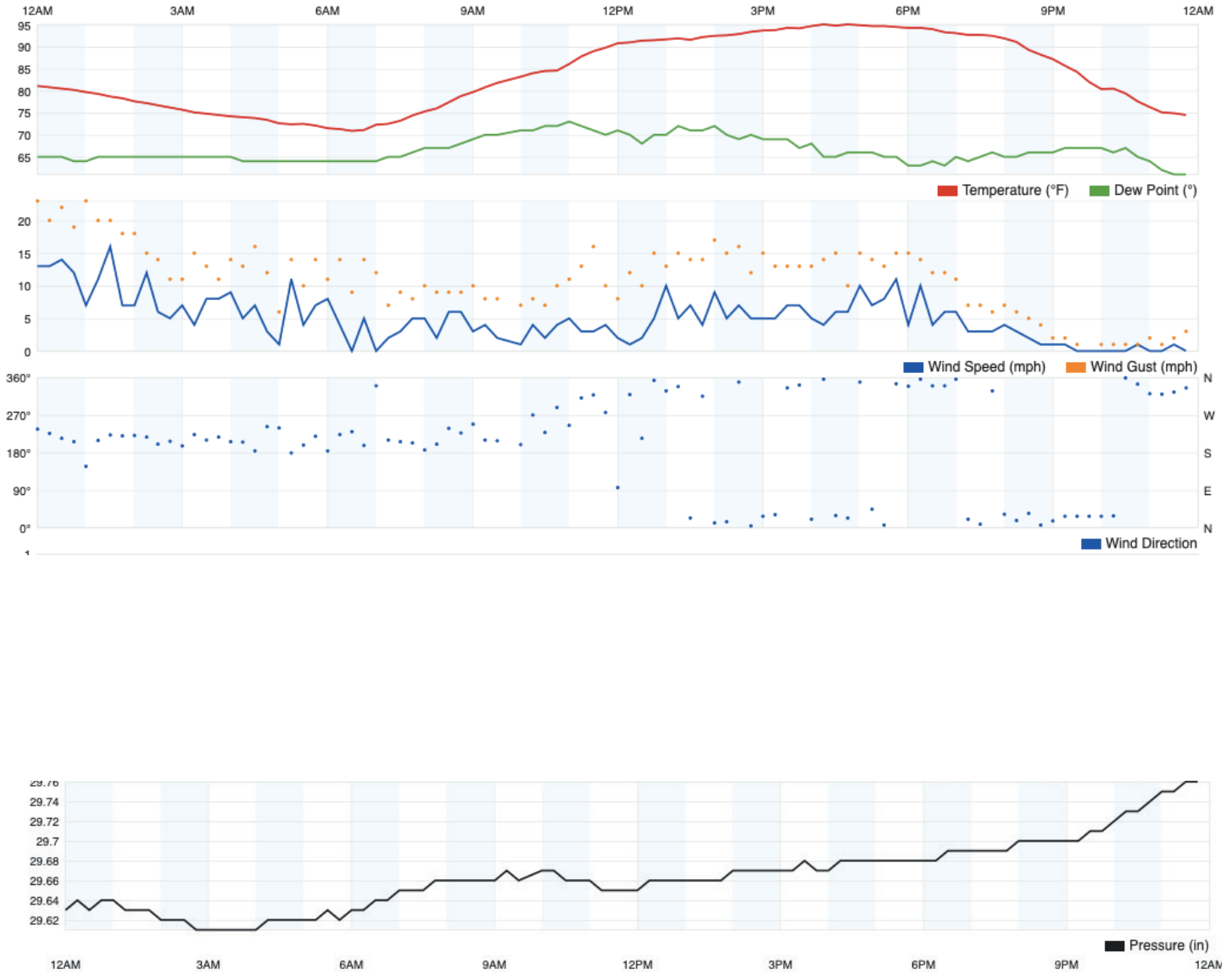


**Happy Fourth of July Holiday from the Kosels.**

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs







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Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
				
Mostly Sunny then Slight Chance T-storms	Mostly Cloudy then T-storms	T-storms	Partly Cloudy	Sunny
<b>High: 93 °F</b>	<b>Low: 61 °F</b>	<b>High: 72 °F</b>	<b>Low: 52 °F</b>	<b>High: 76 °F</b>

## Hot & Stormy Today

### Showers & Weak Thunderstorms Tonight

Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Wednesday
			
<b>Storms - Missouri Valley</b>	<b>Showers &amp; Weak Storms</b>	<b>Showers &amp; Storms Ending</b>	
<b>HIGHS: 90s</b>	<b>LOWS: 60s</b>	<b>HIGHS: 70s</b>	<b>HIGHS: 70s</b>

 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Updated: 7/5/2021 4:34 AM Central

Hot again today, however stormy conditions will become more widespread through the day and then overnight. Severe weather is unlikely.

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Mon, Jul 5, 2021, 7:00 PM to  
Tue, Jul 6, 2021, 7:00 PM

## Amount of Rainfall 0.5" or Above

This graphic displays the  
probability of rainfall reaching or  
exceeding 0.5".

Showers and storms are possible  
across central SD Monday  
afternoon, **but more widespread  
activity will move from west to  
east Monday night into Tuesday.**  
It exits through the day Tuesday.  
*Severe weather is not anticipated  
at this time.*



MOBRIDGE  
41%

ABERDEEN  
52%

SISSETON  
59%

GETTYSBURG  
46%

CLARK  
61%

WATERTOWN  
59%

PIERRE  
43%

MILLER  
48%

CHAMBERLAIN  
41%

Leaflet | © OpenStreetMap contributors © CARTO

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## Today in Weather History

July 5, 1936: Three record high temperatures were set on this day. Near Gann Valley, the temperature reached 120 degrees, setting the state record. The state record was tied on July 15, 2006, at 17 miles WSW of Fort Pierre. Other record highs on this date include 119 degrees in Kennebec and 116 degrees in Murdo. The record highs near Gann Valley, Kennebec, and Murdo are all-time highs for each location.

July 5, 1996: A powerful thunderstorm packing over 100 mph winds and grapefruit-sized hail tracked from Belle Fourche Reservoir to Wall. The storm caused an estimated \$4.5 million in crop damage, killed numerous livestock, and stripped vegetation bare.

1891 - Sixteen horses were killed by hail, and many more have to be put to death due to injuries from a hailstorm at Rapid City, SD. (The Weather Channel)

1900 - A spectacular three day fire began when a bolt of lightning struck a refinery in Bayonne NJ. (David Ludlum)

1916 - A hurricane produced 82 mph winds, an 11.6 foot tide, and a barometric pressure of 28.92 inches at Mobile, AL. (David Ludlum)

1925: A large hailstone weighing a half pound fell at Plumstead, just outside of London, England. This hailstone was the heaviest hailstone ever recorded in the United Kingdom.

1937 - The temperature at Medicine Lake, MT, soared to 117 degrees to establish a state record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1937 - Midale and Yellow Grass in Saskatchewan hit 113 degrees to establish an all-time record high for Canada that same day. (The Weather Channel)

1970 - The morning low at Death Valley CA was 103 degrees, and the high that afternoon was 120 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1980: The "More Trees Down" started in western Iowa and tracked eastward affecting several states along its path before dissipating in eastern Virginia.

1987 - Severe thunderstorms raked south central Kansas for the second morning in a row. Thunderstorm winds again gusted to 80 mph at Clearwater, and in the Wichita area reached 100 mph. Twenty-five persons were injured at a trailer park at El Dorado Lake. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms spawned eleven tornadoes in Montana and three in North Dakota. Baseball size hail was reported at Shonkin, MT, and wind gusts to 85 mph were reported south of Fordville, ND. Twenty cities in the north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Fargo ND with a reading of 106 degrees. Muskegon, MI, equalled their July record with a high of 95 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Moisture from what once was Tropical Storm Allison triggered thunderstorms over the Middle Atlantic Coast Region, which deluged Wilmington, DE, with a record 6.83 inches of rain in 24 hours, including 6.37 inches in just six hours. Up to ten inches of rain was reported at Claymont, northeast of Wilmington. July 1989 was thus the wettest month in seventy years for Wilmington, with a total of 12.63 inches of rain. Alamosa CO reported an all-time record high of 94 degrees, and Pierre, SD, hit 113 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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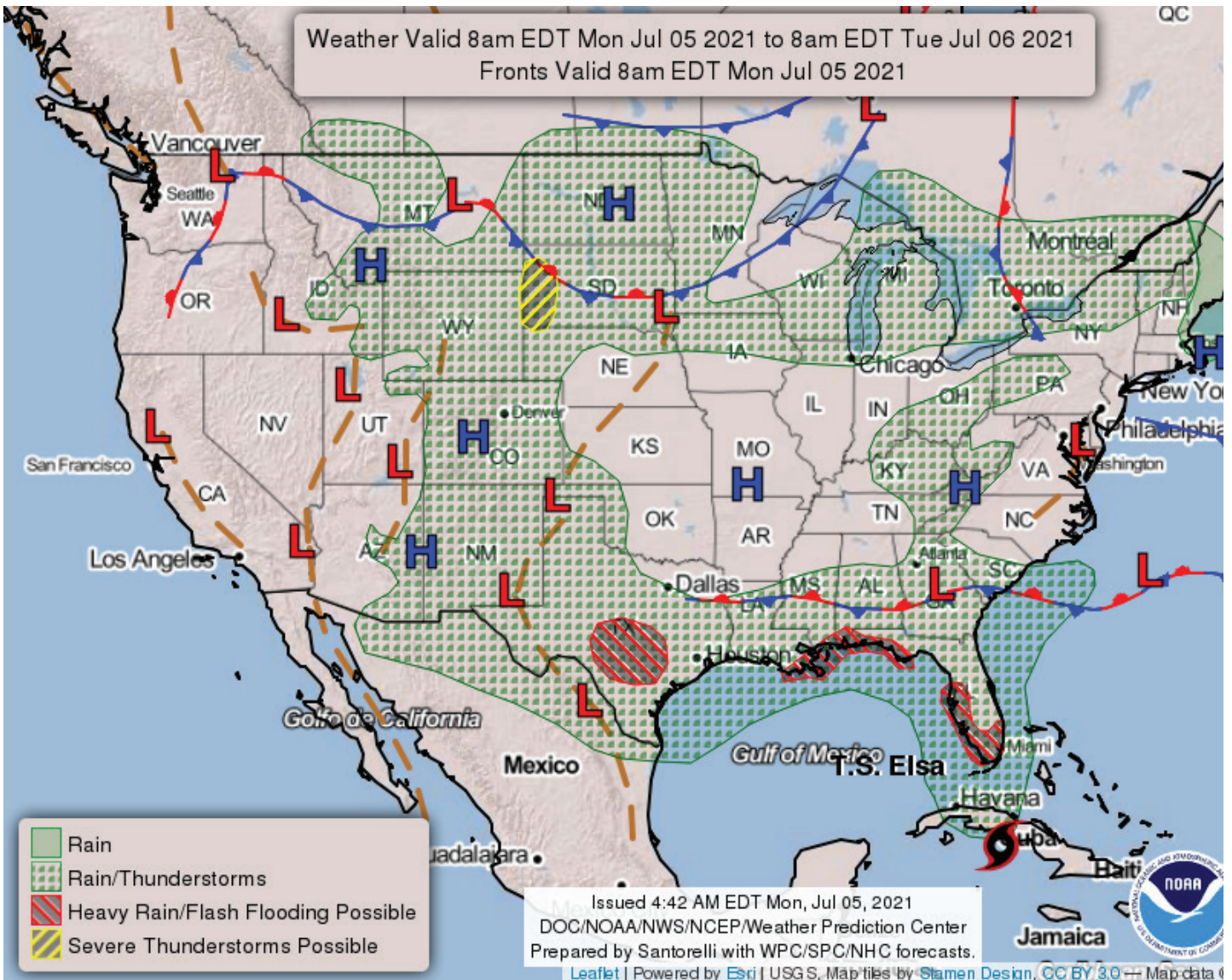
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 95 °F at 4:15 PM**  
**Low Temp: 71 °F at 6:30 AM**  
**Wind: 23 mph at 12:59 AM**  
**Precip: .00**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 108° in 1936**  
**Record Low: 35° in 1915**  
**Average High: 84°F**  
**Average Low: 59°F**  
**Average Precip in July.: 0.47**  
**Precip to date in July.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 11.48**  
**Precip Year to Date: 4.75**  
**Sunset Tonight: 9:25 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:53 a.m.**





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## CARDIO-CARE

Our hearts are amazing! The average adult heart beats 72 times a minute; 100,000 times a day; 3,600,000 times a year; and 2.5 billion times during a life time.

Although the adult heart only weighs about 11 ounces on average, a healthy heart pumps 2,000 gallons of blood through 60,000 miles of blood vessels each day. If laid out end to end it would circle the globe two times. It pumps blood to almost all of the body's 75 trillion cells. Only our cornea receives no blood. During an average lifetime, the heart will pump nearly 1.5 billion barrels of blood – enough to fill 200 train tank cars. And every day the heart creates enough energy to drive a truck 20 miles. In a lifetime, it will create enough energy to drive it to the moon and back.

When we consider all that our hearts do for us, its importance cannot be measured. Without its constant beating, we could not live. It sustains our lives. Its every beat is a gift from God but we rarely think about it unless we have "heart-problems." Yet, physical-heart problems are not as serious as spiritual-heart problems. Only God can do miracles with "both" hearts.

The word "heart" occurs six times in Psalm 73. But in verse one it speaks of "those who are pure in heart" – those whose heart is completely committed to God and place Him first in their lives and love Him unconditionally.

Over this God-centered heart is the heart that Jeremiah describes: "a heart that is deceitful and beyond cure." A heart in this condition needs the Great Physician to cleanse it, restore it, live in it, and fill it with His love.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to give our hearts to You, and then make room in our hearts for You to live – so that Your Spirit will occupy it completely. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Truly God is good to Israel, to those whose hearts are pure. Psalm 73:1

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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

### City, county groups seek help in addressing homelessness

By SIANDHARA BONNET Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Augustine Rosales said he'd likely be dead if it wasn't for the Cornerstone Rescue Mission.

Rosales never thought he or his siblings would amount to much of anything growing up poor with an alcoholic mother in Rapid City and later in Colorado.

He spent 15 years in prison and got out in 2013. In 2019, he became homeless trying to keep up with child support and paying \$1,000 a month in rent.

Rosales said he worked at Que Pasa for four years as the cook when things went south. He quit in January. In December 2019, he applied for a job as the cook at Cornerstone.

"That's when Justin Schofield... interviewed me," Rosales said. "He said you're not going to be a cook. I said, 'OK, what am I going to be?' He said, 'You're going to be a supervisor.' I said OK. He sat there and told me he believes in giving people second chances. I'm sitting on four felonies. I've done 15 years in prison."

Rosales is now the lead supervisor for the men's mission, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"Ever since I've been here and ever since I've been working with these people... each time I talk to an individual, I see myself in them," he said. "I try to point them in the right direction. ...I wish I could fix everything, but I can't. And I let them know that. I let them know, too, that whatever you did before you came here, you're human and we're not perfect and we are going to make mistakes."

Rosales said he doesn't know where those who stay at the mission would be if it didn't exist.

Lt. Tim Doyle said it will take the entire community to address homelessness.

"This is not a police issue, this is a community-wide issue and we understand that," he said. "The police department, we know we can't fix this, but we can take steps... because it's going to take the whole community together to start fixing it and making things better."

In September 2020, Mayor Steve Allender called a press conference to discuss the growing homelessness in Rapid City and the strain it put on city resources. He said there was an influx of people from nearby reservations and that many were attracted to free meals served in city parks.

The annual point-in-time count for the unsheltered homeless population was canceled in 2021 due to the pandemic, but the sheltered homeless count continued. That data is typically released in May.

Rapid City has seen a fluctuation in its point-in-time count over the past five years. In 2021, only sheltered homeless individuals were counted for the point-in-time count due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a total of 194 sheltered homeless for the count with 124 adults over 24, 44 children and 26 adults 18-24.

In 2020, there were 353 homeless people counted, both sheltered and unsheltered. In 2019 there were 334, 385 in 2018, 300 in 2017, 343 in 2016 and 247 in 2015.

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development released its 2020 annual Homeless Assessment report to Congress in mid-March and found an 82.7% change in the South Dakota homeless population since 2007. The department estimates there are 119 chronically homeless individuals, 67 unaccompanied homeless youth, 43 homeless veterans, and 315 people in families with children in the state.

According to the data, about 12 people in every 10,000 were experiencing homelessness during the 2020 point-in-time count. The data also found that African American and Indigenous people remained over-represented among the homeless population.

"Together, American Indian, Alaska Native, Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian populations account for one percent of the U.S. population, but 5% of the homeless population and 7% of the unsheltered population," the press release states.

Tracy Signastadt, founder of Journey On, a non-profit organization doing outreach similar to that of the Quality of Life Unit for those who are homeless, said she began the organization in 2018 after working in the nonprofit sector with at-risk youth.

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The organization is Native-led. Both Signastadt and Lance Lehmann, the business manager for the organization, are Native American and hope to help the homeless population.

"We want to be mentors through the process because the police department's job is to enforce laws," Lehmann said. "They're law enforcement officers whereas we can be mental health and social workers on the streets and advocate and follow up."

He said they could be the street outreach component for their partner organizations that can encourage individuals to seek resources.

"We're not trying to replicate any services, we're not going to be a therapy group or provide shelter," he said. "We're just going to be a group trying to connect these individuals with services that already exist in our community."

Signastadt said outreach members will train in harm reduction, conflict resolution, Lakota mental health and first aid, youth mental health and first aid, cultural responsiveness and more.

She said they'll also have people with who have experienced homelessness, addiction and recovery on staff to better relate to what some people may be going through.

Lehmann said the goal is to almost be a first or co-responder with the police department.

CommonBond, an affordable housing non-profit organization that works with residents to help achieve their goals through integrated on-site services and serves about 13,000 people in 60 cities, plans to expand to Rapid City.

President and CEO Deidre Schmidt said over the organization's 50 years, they've learned that building housing is hard enough, but that's only where it starts.

She said they've had a couple of false starts with land not quite panning out, but that it could easily take two to five years to bring a project like this from an idea to reality — it's been about 18 months so far.

"It's super disappointing, but we're not daunted," she said. "We just looked at over a dozen alternative sites in and around Rapid City and we're narrowing those down."

Schmidt said she came to Rapid City in 2018 to be part of a morning session and spoke with people trying to improve the health and diversity of the housing market.

She said the organization is looking at land that's either developable or redevelopable for multi-family housing, which is primarily due to the kind of funding programs that are available. She said they'd like to build 70 units or more at a time.

Thomas Adams, executive vice president of housing and services, said he's responsible for resident-facing services, which encompasses property management for affordable housing community sites, compliance, services and support services.

He said CommonBond doesn't provide direct therapy for residents and their communities, but connects them with services they need. He said they're focused on helping people with stable housing.

"You may be in a place, but it's not stable. Every month is a determination on food, paying rent or buying medication and you only have enough money for two of the three," he said. "You're a decision away from your housing being in jeopardy. That's without mental health challenges, without addiction, without suffering some sort of abusive situation — those are just everyday factors for many folks in America."

Adams said CommonBond has an individualized approach for each resident and success is finding housing stability.

Lysa Allison, executive director of Cornerstone Rescue Mission, said success varies from person to person, and said a gap left in services is an education for the public.

"Homeless people aren't scary people," she said. "They're somebody's son, daughter, mom, dad, aunt, uncle sometimes. ... They really do have the same issues you and I have as far as wanting to be accepted and treated well. I would stay instead of giving them handouts when they're standing at traffic stops ... you can say go to the mission, go to the Care Campus."

Barry Tice, director of Pennington County Health and Human Services, said success depends on the individual, just like the level of care or service someone needs.

Chief Deputy Willie Whelchel said success is in the small steps people take to achieve their greater goal.

Tice said the Care Campus is looking into the next steps of helping the aging homeless.

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"I don't think we've quite understood how substantial this will be over the next three to five years," he said. "We have a growing population of elderly individuals in our community who've been housed, unhoused and homeless for decades. They might have an extensive criminal history, suffer from substance abuse disorders their entire lives, and you include some behavioral health needs in there and that's a lot."

Senior officer Jim Hansen with the Quality of Life Unit said Rapid City, the police department, sheriff's office, Pennington County Health and Human Services, Behavior Management Systems, Crisis Care and alcohol and detox are all at the table.

"Who's not at the table with us? That's the question," he said. "We need those entities."

Brendyn Medina, public information officer for the Rapid City Police Department, said the department hired two employees to assist the unit with social service and case management services.

Doyle said there needs to be more intention with the resources some are providing, and there needs to be more collaboration within the organizations.

He said they're willing to work with anyone who wants to respond to the problem.

"Some people are going to have to admit they're not the entire solution," Doyle said. "There's not one organization that's the entire solution. It's a whole spectrum of services and every one of these people needs something different."

Rosales said he wishes people understood more about what goes on at the mission.

"They don't get into the depth with it, they don't come out and say, 'Let me see what's going on,' and they just make their judgments like it's nothing," he said. "These are peoples' lives they're messing with or criticizing."

"These people are homeless," he said. "It does not mean that they're not human. These people deserve a meal, a bed, everything they don't have."

## Authorities suspect fireworks in blaze that damaged home

HARRISBURG, S.D. (AP) — Authorities believe fireworks were to blame for a blaze that caused significant damage to a Harrisburg home.

The Lincoln County Sheriff's Office says multiple fire departments responded about 11:30 p.m. Friday. The attached garage was completely destroyed in the fire and there was significant damage to parts of the house.

The sheriff's office says the cause is "suspected" to be fireworks, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported. The incident remains under investigation.

No injuries were reported.

## Tourists returning to Minnesota resorts but workers are not

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — With COVID-19 limits fading away, tourists are returning to Minnesota resorts, many of them from neighboring states. A lot of the workers are not coming back.

The worker shortage has been building for more than a year, said Ben Wogsland, a spokesman for Hospitality Minnesota, the trade association for the state's hotels, restaurants, resorts and campgrounds.

The industry is down about 50,000 workers from its normal summer level of 280,000 to 290,000 workers. Many of them found other jobs during the first COVID shutdown and others left when a second hospitality shutdown was ordered, the Star Tribune reports.

"After last year, we were hopeful that things would get back to normal," said Sue Dutcher, manager of the St. Croix River Resort in Hinckley. Instead, she said, "we're being run ragged."

In Detroit Lakes, Joanne Anderson faces a similar challenge at the Forest Hills Resort. Anderson manages Izzo's, the resort's bar and restaurant, and right now she's running it with eight workers instead of the usual 20.

Some operators have been fortunate enough to escape the labor shortage. The Trail Center Lodge on the Gunflint Trail is "100% staffed," according to owner Sarah Hamilton.

That's partly due to a new program called One Spirit Employment that brings young adults from the Pine

Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota to work at businesses on the North Shore.

## Japan searches for dozens missing in mudslide; 4 dead

By KANTARO KOMIYA and MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

ATAMI, Japan (AP) — Rescue workers dug through sludge and debris Monday looking for dozens of people who may be trapped after a a torrent of mud, trees and rocks ripped with a roar through a Japanese seaside resort town, killing at least four people.

Eighty people were still unaccounted for two days after the landslide, according to Shizuoka prefectural disaster management official Takamichi Sugiyama. Officials planned to release their names, hoping that perhaps some were away when the disaster struck, since many of the apartments and houses in Atami are second homes or vacation rentals.

Initially, 147 people were unreachable, but that number was revised downward after officials confirmed some had safely evacuated or were simply not at home. In addition to the four people found dead, officials said 25 people have been rescued, including three who were injured.

The disaster is an added trial as authorities prepare for the Tokyo Olympics, due to start in less than three weeks, while Japan is still in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, with cases steadily climbing in the capital and experts suggesting a need for another state of emergency.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told reporters that rescue workers are doing their utmost "to rescue those who may be buried under the mud and waiting for help as soon as possible." Three coast guard ships, and six military drones were backing up hundreds of troops, firefighters and others toiling in the rain and fog.

The landslide occurred Saturday mid-morning after days of heavy rain in Atami, which like many seaside Japanese towns is built into a steep hillside. It tore through the Izusan neighborhood, known for its hot springs, a shrine and shopping streets. The town has a registered population of 36,800 and is about 100 kilometers (60 miles) southwest of Tokyo.

Shizuoka Gov. Heita Kawakatsu, who inspected the area Monday where the mudslide was believed to have started, said rain soaked into the mountainside apparently weakening the ground under a massive pile of soil at a construction site that then slid down the slope.

The prefecture is investigating. Media reports said a planned housing development in the area was abandoned after its operator ran into financial problems.

Witnesses described a giant roar as a small stream turned into a torrent, and bystanders were heard gasping in horror on cellphone videos taken as it happened.

Naoto Date, an actor who was visiting Izusan, was awakened by sirens. His neighborhood is now awash in muddy water with rescuers wading through knee-deep sludge. Just blocks from his home, some houses have been completely washed away, with only their foundations still visible. Mangled traffic signs stick out from the mud. At the seafront, he saw cars floating along with debris from destroyed homes.

"I grew up here, and my classmates and friends live here. I'm so sad to see my neighborhood where I used to play with my friends is now destroyed," Date told The Associated Press by videocall from his home in Atami.

While Date's mother, who was staying next door, has moved to a hotel along with other evacuees, the actor said he was staying away from evacuation centers because he is concerned about the coronavirus.

The Izusan area is one of 660,000 locations in Japan identified as prone to mudslides by the government, but those designations are not widely publicized and public awareness is low. Early July, near the end of Japan's rainy season, is often a time of deadly flooding and mudslides, and many experts say the rains are worsening due to climate change.

With other parts of the country expecting heavy downpours, authorities were urging people near hillsides in areas at risk to use caution. Public broadcaster NHK carried a program Monday about risk factors and warning signs that might precede a landslide.

A year ago, flooding and mudslides triggered by heavy rain in Kumamoto and four other prefectures in the Kyushu region in southern Japan left nearly 80 people dead. In July 2018, hillsides in crowded

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residential areas in Hiroshima collapsed, leaving 20 dead. In 2017, mudslides and flooding in the Kyushu region killed 40.

Miyoko Okamoto, an employee at a care home for the elderly, said the mudslide came close to but narrowly missed her house. She and her son ran out of the house, while her husband, a community association leader, escorted neighbors to safer ground.

Okamoto said she hasn't been back home since fleeing because she is helping residents at the care home. "We were lucky to have survived, and that's most important," she said.

But her neighbor is still looking for his wife. "They are good friends of ours," she said, "and that pains my heart."

## Tropical Storm Elsa headed to landfall on central Cuba coast

By ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Tropical Storm Elsa swept along Cuba's southern coast early Monday, and forecasters said it could make landfall on the island's central shore by midafternoon.

By Sunday, Cuban officials had evacuated 180,000 people as a precaution against the possibility of heavy flooding from a storm that already battered several Caribbean islands, killing at least three people. Most of those evacuated stayed at relatives' homes, others went to government shelters, and hundreds living in mountainous areas took refuge in caves prepared for emergencies.

Elsa was forecast to cross over Cuba by Monday night and then head for Florida, where Gov. Ron DeSantis declared a state of emergency in 15 counties, including in Miami-Dade County, where a high-rise condominium building collapsed on June 24.

Late Sunday, Elsa's center was about 270 miles (440 kilometers) southeast of Havana and moving northwest at 15 mph (24 kph). Its maximum sustained winds had strengthened a bit to about 65 mph (100 kph), the National Hurricane Center in Miami said.

The center said the storm was likely to gradually weaken while passing over central Cuba. "After Elsa emerges over the Florida Straits and the southeastern Gulf of Mexico, some slight re-strengthening is possible," it said.

Rain fell intermittently in Cuba's eastern provinces throughout Sunday as the storm passed by to the south. "So far it's a soft, serene rain. There are no downpours. The streets are not overflowing," Yolanda Tabío, a 73-year-old retiree living in Santiago, told The Associated Press. "I thought it could be worse."

Rafael Carmenate, a volunteer for the local Red Cross who lives facing the beach in Santa Cruz del Sur, told the AP by telephone: "We have a little water — showers. The sea has not intruded. It's cloudy and gusty,"

The storm killed one person on St. Lucia, according to the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency. A 15-year-old boy and a 75-year-old woman died Saturday in separate events in the Dominican Republic after walls collapsed on them, according to a statement from the Emergency Operations Center.

Elsa was a Category 1 hurricane until Saturday morning, causing widespread damage on several eastern Caribbean islands Friday as the first hurricane of the Atlantic season. Among the hardest hit was Barbados, where more than 1,100 people reported damaged houses, including 62 homes that collapsed.

Downed trees also were reported in Haiti, which is especially vulnerable to floods and landslides because of widespread erosion and deforestation. Haiti's Civil Protection Agency said Sunday that three people had been injured by downed trees.

A tropical storm warning was in effect for western Cuba and for the Florida Keys from Craig Key westward to the Dry Tortugas. Cuba's government posted a hurricane warning for Cienfuegos and Matanzas provinces.

Elsa is the earliest fifth-named storm on record and also broke the record as the tropic's fastest-moving hurricane, clocking in at 31 mph Saturday morning, said Brian McNoldy, a hurricane researcher at the University of Miami.

Portions of Cuba were forecast to get rainfall of 5 to 10 inches (13 to 25 centimeters) through Monday,

with isolated spots getting up to 15 inches (20 centimeters). Jamaica expected a total of 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters), with maximum totals of 15 inches (38 centimeters).

## **New infrastructure deal must focus on climate, activists say**

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Climate activists and their Democratic allies in Congress are pressing with renewed urgency for huge investments to slow global warming, after a bipartisan infrastructure plan cut out some of President Joe Biden's key climate initiatives.

Supporters say a larger, Democratic-only package now being developed in Congress must meet Biden's promise to move the country toward carbon-free electricity, make America a global leader in electric vehicles and create millions of jobs in solar, wind and other clean-energy industries.

But passage of a larger, multitrillion-dollar bill faces significant hurdles, even if Democrats use a procedural method that requires only a simple majority. It's far from certain, in an evenly divided Senate, that moderate Democrats will agree to an expansive measure that could swell to as high as \$6 trillion.

On the other hand, a less costly bill that does not fully address climate change risks losing support from large numbers of liberal Democrats who have pledged action on an issue that Biden has called "the existential crisis of our times."

Elimination of climate measures in the bipartisan plan comes as the effects of climate change, like worsening disasters such as hurricanes, wildfires and drought, are increasing. Scientists urge immediate action to slash greenhouse emissions to avoid the worst consequences of global warming.

"The bipartisan infrastructure deal is not a climate bill," said Jamal Raad, executive director of Evergreen Action, an advocacy group that has pushed for urgent action on climate change. "And we know that fossil fuel lobbyists in Washington are already hard at work to eliminate key climate provisions from the (Democrat-only) package.

"To meet this moment, Democrats must stand firm and pass a package that makes historic investments in climate, jobs and justice," he said.

Even the bipartisan agreement is not certain to pass a closely divided Congress. A framework announced June 24 by Biden and a bipartisan group of senators does not include legislative provisions and many details need to be worked out.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden, D-Ore., called the bipartisan deal inadequate when his state and others in the West face a record heat wave and destructive wildfires. "It will not include comprehensive clean energy policy, and I am not willing to support throwing climate change overboard," Wyden said. "The two bills have to be directly connected."

The \$973 billion bipartisan deal includes money to build a national network of electric vehicle charging stations, purchase thousands of electric buses and upgrade the electrical grid. It also would spend \$55 billion to improve drinking water and wastewater systems and \$47 billion in resiliency efforts to tackle climate change.

But many climate-related proposals were cut out, including plans promoted by Biden to make electricity carbon-free by 2035 and spend hundreds of billions in tax incentives for clean energy such as wind and solar power and technologies that capture and store carbon emissions.

In La Crosse, Wisconsin, last week, Biden highlighted projects that would get more money from the bipartisan bill, such as hybrid buses and road repair equipment. And the White House says climate considerations will be a key part of a plan for infrastructure, jobs and education that would be determined solely by Democrats through a "budget reconciliation" process in Congress.

Activists say the bipartisan framework falls short on nearly every important climate commitment Biden laid out in his initial proposal in the spring, including energy upgrades for buildings, a Civilian Climate Corps and massive spending on environmental justice.

The White House, saying it is holding firm on Biden's ideas, released a memo last week reaffirming its commitment to bolster the electric vehicle market, make buildings and property more resilient to harsh



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weather patterns and ensure the country's electrical grid becomes carbon-free by 2035.

Environmental groups say that is not enough.

"This is a historic, narrow opportunity to combat the climate crisis, and we can't afford to kick the can down the road any further," said Lauren Maunus, advocacy director for the Sunrise Movement, another environmental group. "When Democrats agree to water it down more, they're condemning Americans to untold devastation."

The push on climate comes as some on the left express disappointment at several recent Biden administration actions on the environment. While generally supportive of Biden's approach, environmentalists are troubled by decisions to go forward with a huge Trump-era oil project on Alaska's North Slope and to defend two oil pipelines in the upper Midwest, the Dakota Access Pipeline and Enbridge Energy's Line 3 replacement project.

Environmentalists also are frustrated by the administration's failure to revive a ban on federal coal sales imposed under President Barack Obama.

While Biden made "good decisions" in rejecting the Keystone XL oil pipeline and drilling on Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, his administration's support for other oil projects and pipelines undermines Biden's commitment to slow global warming, said Drew Caputo of the environmental law firm Earthjustice.

"We're not going to successfully fight climate change if we trade pipeline for pipeline" and oil project for oil project, he said. "We have to transform the economy. Investing in expensive fossil fuel infrastructure like pipelines really puts the administration's ability to deal with climate change at risk."

A letter signed by 134 House Democrats calls on Biden to ensure the infrastructure legislation includes "robust" spending that "matches the scale of the challenge climate science tells us we face."

The letter, led by Reps. Mike Levin of California, Andy Kim of New Jersey and Sharice Davids of Kansas, outlines five climate priorities in the reconciliation package, including a carbon-free grid by 2035, replacement of lead water pipes and service lines, and a commitment that 40% of program benefits are reserved for poor and minority communities harmed by toxic pollution from refineries and other sites.

Levin, who serves on a House climate change panel, said in an interview that he is confident Biden "sees the climate crisis as the existential threat to the future that it is" and "will act as the moment needs."

Asked about concerns by some activists that Democrats may shy away from spending trillions on climate change, Levin said, "Don't agonize, organize," borrowing a quote often used by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

There's uncertainty about what Democrats ultimately will approve, Levin acknowledged, "but also continued optimism to do the right thing."

Levin cited a bill approved by the House last week authorizing \$715 billion for roads, rail, public transit and water over five years. The bill, which will probably serve as a marker in infrastructure negotiations, includes money for electric vehicle charging stations and other elements designed to counter climate change. Transportation is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S.

House Transportation Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio, D-Ore, the bill's primary author, said the threat of climate change means "we have to rebuild in ways that we never even thought about before. It's going to be expensive, but the good news is, it's going to create millions of good-paying jobs."

## Israel looks to renew law that keeps out Palestinian spouses

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's parliament is set to vote Monday on whether to renew a temporary law first enacted in 2003 that bars Arab citizens of Israel from extending citizenship or even residency to spouses from the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

Critics, including many left-wing and Arab lawmakers, say it's a racist measure aimed at restricting the growth of Israel's Arab minority, while supporters say it's needed for security purposes and to preserve Israel's Jewish character.

The law creates an array of difficulties for Palestinian families that span the war-drawn and largely invis-

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ible frontiers separating Israel from east Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, territories it seized in the 1967 war that the Palestinians want for a future state.

"You want your security, it's no problem, you can check each case by itself," said Taiseer Khatib. His wife of more than 15 years, from the West Bank city of Jenin, must regularly apply for permits to live with him and their three children in Israel.

"There's no need for this collective punishment just because you are Palestinian," he said.

Israel's dominant right-wing parties strongly support the law, and it has been renewed every year since being enacted. But Israel's new government includes opponents of the measure, and the right-wing opposition led by former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — aiming to embarrass the government — has warned it won't provide the votes needed to renew the law.

Dozens of families held a demonstration outside the Knesset, Israel's parliament, ahead of the vote, which is expected late Monday.

"We want stability in this country, like anyone else," said Maryam Abu Arar, from the West Bank town of Bethlehem, who requires a permit to live with her husband and four children in Israel. "We want to live in a democratic country, with peace and security for us as well."

The Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law was enacted as a temporary measure in 2003, at the height of the second intifada, or uprising, when Palestinians launched scores of deadly attacks inside Israel. Proponents said Palestinians from the occupied West Bank and Gaza were susceptible to recruitment by armed groups and that security vetting alone was insufficient.

The law has been continually renewed even after the uprising wound down in 2005 and the number of attacks plummeted. Today, Israel allows more than 100,000 Palestinian workers from the West Bank to enter on a regular basis.

"It was passed in the middle of the intifada, and now we are in a very different period in time," said Yuval Shany, a legal expert at the Israel Democracy Institute. Not only are attacks far rarer, but Israel has vastly improved its technological abilities to monitor Palestinians who enter, he said. "I don't think the security argument is very strong at this point in time."

Because of the law, Arab citizens have few if any avenues for bringing spouses from the West Bank and Gaza into Israel. The policy affects thousands of families.

Male spouses over the age of 35 and female spouses over the age of 25, as well as some humanitarian cases, can apply for the equivalent of a tourist permit, which must be regularly renewed. The holders of such permits are ineligible for driver's licenses, public health insurance and most forms of employment. Palestinian spouses from Gaza have been completely banned since the militant Hamas group seized power there in 2007.

The law does not apply to the nearly 500,000 Jewish settlers who live in the West Bank, who have full Israeli citizenship. Under Israel's Law of Return, Jews who come to Israel from anywhere in the world are eligible for citizenship.

Israel's Arab minority, which makes up 20% of the population, has close familial ties to Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and largely identifies with their cause. Arab citizens view the law as one of several forms of discrimination they face in a country that legally defines itself as a Jewish nation-state.

"This law sees every Palestinian as an enemy and as a threat, just because of his ethnic and national affiliation," said Sawsan Zaher, a lawyer with Adalah, an Arab rights group that has challenged the law in court. "The political message is very racist and very dangerous."

Palestinians who are unable to get permits but try to live with their spouses inside Israel are at risk of deportation. Couples that move to the West Bank live under Israeli military occupation. If their children are born in the West Bank, they would be subject to the same law preventing spouses from entering Israel, though there is an exception for minors.

The citizenship law also applies to Jewish Israelis who marry Palestinians from the territories, but such unions are extremely rare.

Human Rights Watch pointed to the law as an example of the widespread discrimination faced by Palestinians — both inside Israel and in the territories it controls — in a report earlier this year that said such

practices amount to apartheid.

Israel rejects such allegations and says Jewish and Arab citizens have equal rights. Arab citizens have the right to vote, and the new government for the first time includes an Arab faction, which is opposed to the citizenship law.

But even as Defense Minister Benny Gantz, a political centrist, recently urged the right-wing opposition to support the law on security grounds, he also evoked demographic concerns.

"This law is essential for safeguarding the country's security and Jewish and democratic character, and security considerations need to be put before all political considerations," Gantz said in a statement.

Ahmad Tibi, a prominent member of an Arab opposition party, called on fellow lawmakers to strike the law down.

"They should look at the eyes of these children and these families and then vote to prevent this most racist law," he said as he met with the demonstrators. "These families should be allowed to live normally as all other families, wherever they decide to live."

## Tale of rescue after falling several floors in Fla. collapse

By KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — When 16-year-old rising volleyball star Deven Gonzalez was pulled from the rubble of her Miami condo building, her initial reaction amid the shock was to tell firefighters that she had to compete in a major tournament in a few days.

The teen's entire world revolved around volleyball. She played beach volleyball, on her high school team and with a competitive travel club team. From her hospital bed where she's undergone multiple surgeries for a broken femur, she apologized profusely to her coach for missing their final practice.

"I said, 'Let's focus on you right now and not volleyball,'" said club coach Amy Morgan, who described the teen as extremely determined, passionate and unrelenting in pursuing her goals.

Gonzalez lived with her parents on the ninth floor of Champlain Towers South. She and her mother, Andrea Gonzalez, fell several stories before being rescued on the fifth floor, she told her coach. Her mother was among the survivors pulled from the rubble and is still hospitalized with serious injuries, Morgan told The Associated Press.

At least two dozen were killed in the building's partial collapse June 24. Deven's father, attorney Edgar Gonzalez, is among the more than 120 still missing. The family's eldest daughter, Taylor, who was not in the building at the time of the collapse, has been a source of strength for her mom and sister, according to Morgan and Joslyn Varona, a family friend who has posted frequent updates on Facebook.

"This is a strong and wonderful family," Varona said. "They have a lot of faith."

Deven still hasn't been able to see her mother because they are in separate parts of the hospital, but she briefly video chatted with her a few days ago on her mother's birthday when Andrea Gonzalez's intubation tube was removed, Morgan said.

Deven Gonzalez was conscious when the building collapsed and throughout her traumatic rescue, her coach said. She remembers the details vividly and is having trouble sleeping, haunted by nightmares.

"I don't know if she's completely come to terms with everything. She has and she hasn't," said Morgan, who added that Deven was unaware of the extent of the tragedy and the worldwide attention it's received.

"She says, 'My dad's still missing. My dad's still missing,'" Morgan said. "She gets really choked up about it."

The teen even took her first few steps recently.

"It's going to be a nasty, hard painful road, but I think she can do it," Morgan said.

Andrea Gonzalez will undergo surgery for her extensive injuries this week, but has been responsive when asked questions, Varona said in her Facebook posts.

"There has not been any news on Edgar," Varona wrote. "We are still praying and hoping for a miracle."

Varona said she has set up a letter writing campaign to encourage the family.

Edgar and Andrea Gonzalez were extremely involved with Deven's volleyball goals, the coach said. Her

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mom was like the team therapist, always listening and encouraging the girls.

Edgar is a kind, gentle and jolly father, Morgan said. After one tournament, he helped prepare a massive BBQ feast for the team. The family was about to leave for Orlando when the building collapsed. Edgar was so excited he'd been packed for two weeks.

"They're so loving, so supportive," Morgan said. "I see a lot of (Deven's) strength coming from her parents."

The tragedy has been difficult on the close-knit volleyball team, which met for practice Thursday night and allowed parents to participate. Everyone sat in a circle and held hands as they prayed. Many cried.

"Deven is such a hardworking and loving person," her teammate Liyah Deveaux said Sunday. "We can't wait for her to get back on her feet. We love and miss her so much."

A GoFundMe site has raised more than \$100,000 for the family.

"We're really trying to help and be supportive, but we feel absolutely helpless that we can't make it better," Morgan said. "Every single one of us would be in there digging through the rubble. If we could be there, we'd be doing it."

## 20 years after 9/11, lawsuit against Saudis hits key moment

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks approaches, victims' relatives are pressing the courts to answer what they see as lingering questions about the Saudi government's role in the attacks.

A lawsuit that accuses Saudi Arabia of being complicit took a major step forward this year with the questioning under oath of former Saudi officials, but those depositions remain under seal and the U.S. has withheld a trove of other documents as too sensitive for disclosure.

The information vacuum has exasperated families who for years have tried to make the case that the Saudi government facilitated the attacks. Past investigations have outlined ties between Saudi nationals and some of the airplane hijackers, but have not established the government was directly involved.

"The legal team and the FBI, investigative agencies, can know about the details of my dad's death and thousands of other family members' deaths, but the people who it's most relevant to can't know," said Brett Eagleson, whose father, Bruce, was among the World Trade Center victims. "It's adding salt to an open wound for all the 9/11 family members."

Lawyers for the victims plan to ask a judge to lift a protective order so their clients can access secret government documents as well as testimony from key subjects interviewed over the last year. Though the plaintiffs' lawyers are unable to discuss what they've learned from depositions, they insist the information they've gathered advances their premise of Saudi complicity.

"We're in a situation where only now, through the documents we have gotten and what our investigators have discovered and the testimony we've taken, only now is this iceberg that's been underwater" floating to the surface, said attorney James Kreindler.

The Saudi government has denied any connection to the attacks. But the question has long vexed investigators and is at the heart of a long-running lawsuit in Manhattan on behalf of thousands of victims. The issue gained traction not only because 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi — as was Osama bin Laden, the mastermind — but also because of suspicions they must have had help navigating Western society given their minimal experience in the U.S.

Public documents released in the last two decades, including by the 9/11 Commission, have detailed numerous Saudi entanglements but have not proven government complicity.

They show how the first hijackers to arrive in the U.S., Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdhar, were met and assisted by a Saudi national in 2000. That man, Omar al-Bayoumi, who helped them find and lease an apartment in San Diego, had ties to the Saudi government, investigators have said. Just before Bayoumi met the hijackers, he met with Fahad al-Thumairy, at the time an accredited diplomat at the Saudi consulate in Los Angeles who investigators say led an extremist faction at his mosque. Bayoumi and Thumairy left the U.S. weeks before the attacks.

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The 9/11 Commission, which assembled the most prominent accounting of the run-up to the attacks, laid out those connections but found Bayoumi to be an “unlikely candidate for clandestine involvement” with Islamic extremists. It said that while it was logical to regard Thumairy as a possible contact for the hijackers, investigators didn’t find evidence he actually assisted them. He has denied it.

More broadly, the commission in 2004 said it found no evidence the Saudi government or senior Saudi officials had funded al-Qaida, though it noted Saudi-linked charities could have diverted money to the group.

In 2016, the final chapter of a congressional report on the attacks was declassified. The document named people who knew the hijackers after they arrived in the U.S. and helped them get apartments, open bank accounts and connect with mosques. It said some hijackers had connections to, and received support from, people who may be connected to the Saudi government, and that information from FBI sources suggested at least two of them may have been intelligence officers.

But it didn’t reach a conclusion on complicity, saying while it was possible the interactions could reveal proof of Saudi government support for terrorism, there were also possibly more innocuous explanations for the associations.

The FBI conducted its own investigation, Operation Encore, with some agents drawing a tighter link.

One former agent, Stephen Moore, stated in a 2017 declaration that al-Qaida wouldn’t have sent Hazmi and Mihdhar to the U.S. “without a support structure in place.” The document said the FBI believed Bayoumi was a “clandestine agent” and that Thumairy knew the hijackers “were on a complex pre-planned mission.” He said he had concluded that “diplomatic and intelligence personnel of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia knowingly provided material support to the two 9/11 hijackers.”

Families of the 9/11 victims are hoping to prove similar allegations. They believe the entire story has not been revealed because of the U.S. government’s reluctance for a full accounting. Any new evidence they might surface could be politically explosive given Saudi Arabia’s role as a Middle East partner.

A spokesperson for the Saudi Embassy in Washington did not return a message seeking comment. Lawyers for the Saudi government declined to comment.

Andrew Maloney, another of the plaintiffs’ lawyers, said that besides getting compensation for families, they hope Saudi Arabia will accept responsibility and commit to root out terrorism.

“If they did all three of those things, that would be a huge victory,” he said.

The suit gained steam with a judge’s 2018 ruling permitting plaintiffs’ lawyers to do a limited fact-finding investigation.

Bayoumi and Thumairy were questioned in recent weeks, as was Musaed al Jarrah, a former Saudi embassy official whose name Yahoo News said was inadvertently revealed in an FBI filing last year that suggested he was suspected of having directed support for the hijackers.

The Justice Department, meanwhile, has given lawyers once-secret documents but under a protective order. Some information remains concealed entirely after the department invoked a “state secrets” privilege to block certain material seen as potentially jeopardizing national security.

“Sooner or later, this trial is going to become mainstream, and there’s going to be a tremendous amount of public pressure, and they can’t keep things secret forever,” Eagleson said.

## Search back on after rest of South Florida condo demolished

By REBECCA SANTANA and BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — Rescuers were given the all-clear to resume work looking for victims at a collapsed South Florida condo building after demolition crews set off a string of explosives that brought down the last of the building in a plume of dust.

Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava told the Associated Press that the demolition went “exactly as planned” around 10:30 p.m. Sunday.

Crews immediately began clearing some of the new debris so rescuers could start making their way into parts of the underground garage that is of particular interest. Once there, they were hoping to get a clearer picture of voids that may exist in the rubble as they search for 121 people believed to be trapped

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under the fallen wing of the Champlain Towers South in Surfside that collapsed June 24.

No one has been rescued alive since the first hours after the collapse. On Sunday, Miami-Dade police identified David Epstein, 58, as one of the 24 people known to have perished in the fallen tower. His remains were recovered Friday.

During the demolition, a loud rat-at-tat of explosions echoed from the structure. Then the building began to fall, one floor after another, cascading into an explosion of dust. Plumes billowed into the air, as crowds watched the scene from afar.

"It was picture perfect. Exactly what we were told would happen," Levine Cava said in an interview shortly after the demolition.

It wasn't long before cranes were again in motion at the site. Levine Cava said in an interview on NBC's "Today" that crews were back searching the rubble before midnight.

Some residents had pleaded to return to their homes one last time before the demolition to retrieve belongings left in haste, but were denied. Others wondered about the pets left behind, even though officials said they found no signs of animals after making three final sweeps, including the use of drones to peer into the abandoned structure.

Levine Cava said officials have been explaining their decisions with the survivors since the beginning of the search-and-rescue effort.

"We understand that families realize the fact that time has gone by, they realize that the chances are growing all dimmer," she said on "Today." "They are with us, they know what we've been doing every step of the way."

The mayor also said that teams are working to save any personal items they can. "We have been asking them to go ahead and catalog all of their precious belongings so that as soon as they are recovered, we'll be able to make a match."

Approaching Tropical Storm Elsa had added urgency to the demolition plans with forecasts suggesting the system could bring strong winds. President Joe Biden declared a state of emergency in Florida because of the storm, making federal aid possible.

The latest forecasts have moved the storm westward, mostly sparing South Florida, but National Hurricane Center meteorologist Robert Molleda said the area could still feel effects.

"We're expecting primarily tropical storm force gusts," Molleda said, referring to gusts above 40 mph (64 kph).

The decision to demolish the remnants of the Surfside building came after concerns mounted that the damaged structure was at risk of falling, endangering the crews below and preventing them from operating in some areas. Parts of the remaining building shifted on Thursday, prompting a 15-hour suspension in the work.

Authorities had gone door-to-door to advise nearby residents of the timing of the demolition, and to ask them to keep windows closed. They were told to stay inside until two hours after the blast to avoid the dust raised by the implosion.

The method used for Sunday night's demolition is called "energetic felling," which uses small detonation devices and relies on the force of gravity. The goal was to bring in the building down in place, containing the collapse to the immediate surroundings.

Officials used tarps to visually mark the search area, in case new debris scattered unexpectedly.

State officials said they hired the BG Group, a general contractor based in Delray Beach, Florida, to lead the demolition. They did not immediately respond to an inquiry about how the firm was selected, but a contract for the project calls for the state to pay the company \$935,000.

A spokesperson for the state's Division of Emergency Management said the company subcontracted with Maryland-based Controlled Demolition Inc., which experts say is among only a handful of companies in the U.S. that demolishes structures using explosives. The company was expected to place explosives on the basement and lobby levels of the still-standing structure, according to the contract for the work.

CDI is "probably one of the best" in the industry, said Steve Schwartz, a member of the National Demo-

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lition Association's board of directors. He described the company's president and owner, Mark Loizeaux, as "cool, calm and collected."

In implosions — using explosives to have a building fall in on itself — the charges are generally set off in rapid succession over a matter of seconds, said Scott Homrich, who heads the National Demolition Association and runs his own demolition company in Detroit, Michigan. Setting the explosives off at intervals serves to break up the building at the same time it's coming down.

## In crosshairs of ransomware crooks, cyber insurers struggle

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — In the past few weeks, ransomware criminals claimed as trophies at least three North American insurance brokerages that offer policies to help others survive the very network-paralyzing, data-pilfering extortion attacks they themselves apparently suffered.

Cybercriminals who hack into corporate and government networks to steal sensitive data for extortion routinely try to learn how much cyber insurance coverage the victims have. Knowing what victims can afford to pay can give them an edge in ransom negotiations. The cyber insurance industry, too, is a prime target for crooks seeking its customers' identities and scope of coverage.

Before ransomware evolved into a full-scale global epidemic plaguing businesses, hospitals, schools and local governments, cyber insurance was a profitable niche industry. It was accused of fueling the criminal feeding frenzy by routinely recommending that victims pay up, but kept many from going bankrupt.

Now, the sector isn't just in the criminals' crosshairs. It's teetering on the edge of profitability, upended by a more than 400% rise last year in ransomware cases and skyrocketing extortion demands. As a percentage of premiums collected, cyber insurance payouts now top 70%, the break-even point.

Fabian Wosar, chief technical officer of Emsisoft, a cybersecurity firm specializing in ransomware, said the prevailing attitude among insurers is no longer: Pay the criminals. It's likely to be cheaper for all involved.

"The ransomware groups got way too greedy too quickly. So the cost-benefit equation the insurers initially used to figure out whether or not they should pay a ransom — it's just not there anymore," he said.

It's not clear how the single biggest ransomware attack on record, which began Friday, will impact insurers. But it can't be good.

Pressure is building on the industry to stop reimbursing for ransoms.

In May, the major cyber insurer AXA decided to do so with all new policies in France. But it is so far apparently alone in the industry, and governments are not moving to outlaw reimbursement.

AXA is among major insurers that have suffered ransomware attacks, with operations in Thailand hard-hit. Chicago-based CNA Financial Corp., the seventh-ranked U.S. cybersecurity underwriter last year, saw its network crippled in March. Less than a week earlier, the cybersecurity firm Recorded Future published an interview with a member of the Russian-speaking ransomware gang, REvil, that is skilled in pre-attack intelligence-gathering and happens to be behind the current attack. He suggested it actively targets insurers for data on their clients.

CNA would not confirm a Bloomberg report that it paid a \$40 million ransom, which would be the highest reported ransom on record. Nor would it say what or how much data was stolen. It said only that systems where most policyholder data was stored "were not impacted."

In a regulatory filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, CNA also said that its losses might not be fully covered by its insurance and "future cybersecurity insurance coverage may be difficult to obtain or may only be available at significantly higher costs to us."

Another major insurance player hit by ransomware was broker Gallagher. Although it was hit in September, only this past week (June 30) did it disclose that the attackers may have stolen highly detailed data from an unspecified number of customers — from passwords and Social Security numbers to credit card data and medical diagnoses. Company spokeswoman Kelli Murray would not say if any cyber insurance policy contracts were on compromised servers. Nor would she say whether Gallagher paid a ransom. The criminals, from the RagnarLocker gang, apparently never posted information about the attack on their

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dark web leak site, suggesting that Gallagher paid.

Of the three insurance brokers that ransomware gangs claimed to have attacked in recent weeks, posting stolen data on their dark web sites as evidence, two, in Montreal and Detroit, did not respond to phone calls and emails. The third, in southern California, acknowledged being hobbled for a week.

By the time the Colonial Pipeline and major meat processor JBS were hit by ransomware in May, insurers were already passing higher coverage costs to customers.

Cyber premiums jumped by 29% in January in the U.S. and Canada from the previous month, said Gregory Eskins, an analyst at top commercial insurance broker Marsh McLennan. In February, the month-to-month jump was 32%, in March it was 39%.

In a bid to turn back ransomware-related losses — Eskins said they amounted to about 40% of cyber insurance claims in North America last year — policy renewals are carrying new, stricter rules or lowered coverage limits.

“The price has to match the risk,” said Michael Phillips, chief claims officer at the San Francisco cyber insurance firm Resilience and a co-chair of the public-private Ransomware Task Force.

A policy might now specify that reimbursement for extortion payments can't exceed one-third of overall coverage, which typically also encompasses recovery and lost income and can include payments to PR firms to mitigate reputational damage. Or an insurer may cut coverage in half, or introduce a deductible, said Brent Reith of the broker Aon.

While some smaller carriers have dropped coverage altogether, the big players are instead retooling.

Then there are hybrid insurers like Resilience and Boston-based Corvus. They don't simply ask potential customers to fill out a questionnaire. They physically probe their cyber defenses and actively engage clients as cyber threats occur.

“We're monitoring and making active recommendations not just once a year but throughout the year and dynamically,” said Corvus CEO Phil Edmundson.

But is the overall industry nimble enough to absorb the growing onslaught?

The Government Accountability Office warned in a May report that “the extent to which cyber insurance will continue to be generally available and affordable remains uncertain.” And the New York State Department of Finance said in a February circular that massive industry losses were possible.

Both insured and insurers, stingy about sharing experiences and data, shoulder the blame for that, the U.K. Royal United Services Institute said in a new report. Most ransomware attacks go unreported, and no central clearinghouse on them exists, though governments are beginning to pressure for mandatory industry reporting. As a business sector, insurers are not especially transparent. In the U.S. they are regulated not by the federal government but by the states.

And for now, cyber insurers are mostly resisting calls to halt reimbursements for ransoms paid.

In a May earnings call, the CEO of U.K.-based Beazley, Adrian Cox, said “generally speaking network security is not good enough at the moment.” He said it is up to government to decide whether payments are bad public policy. CEO Evan Greenberg of the leading U.S. cyber insurer, Chubb Limited, agreed in the company's annual report in February that deciding on a ban is government's purview. But he did endorse outlawing payments.

Jan Lemnitzer, a Copenhagen Business School lecturer, thinks cyber insurance should be compulsory for businesses large and small, just as everyone who drives must have car insurance and seat belts. The Royal United Services Institute study recommends it for all government suppliers and vendors.

While he considers banning ransom payments problematic, Lemnitzer says it would be a “no-brainer” to compel insurers to stop reimbursing for them.

Some have suggested imposing fines on ransom payments as a disincentive. Or the government could retain a percentage of any cryptocurrency recovered from ransomware criminals, the proceeds going to a federal ransomware defense fund.

Such measures could bite into criminal revenues, said attorney Stewart Baker of Steptoe and Johnson, a former NSA general counsel.

“In the long run, it probably means that resources that are currently going to Russia to pay for Ferraris



in Moscow will instead go to improve cybersecurity in the United States.”

## Johnson says UK must live with virus as he announces easing

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to unveil plans Monday to scrap mandatory mask-wearing and social distancing in England in two weeks’ time, despite surging coronavirus infections driven by the highly contagious delta variant.

Johnson said he would set out how the country would “learn to live with this virus” — a major shift in tone from a leader who has previously painted COVID-19 as an enemy to be vanquished.

Before a televised news conference on Monday afternoon, Johnson signaled that mandatory measures would be replaced by personal choice after July 19, the date dubbed “freedom day” by Britain’s populist press.

“As we begin to learn to live with this virus, we must all continue to carefully manage the risks from COVID and exercise judgment when going about our lives,” Johnson said.

That message will be welcomed by lockdown-skeptic lawmakers in Johnson’s governing Conservative Party, who say the economic and social damage of restrictions outweighs the public health benefits.

But public health officials and scientists have urged caution, saying ditching masks and social distancing altogether could be dangerous. Psychologist Stephen Reicher, a member of the government’s scientific advisory committee, said “proportionate mitigations” against the spread of the virus should stay in place.

“I think we need very clear messaging and I think in certain spaces — crowded, badly ventilated spaces — masks are crucial mitigation,” he told the BBC.

The government said Johnson will announce plans for rules on social distancing, face coverings and working from home after July 19, the government’s target date to remove remaining restrictions on business and daily life.

The British government, which enforced one of the longest lockdowns in the world, has lifted restrictions for England in a series of steps that began with reopening schools in March. The fourth and final stage was delayed last month to provide time for more people to be vaccinated amid the rapid spread of the delta variant, which was first discovered in India.

Current rules in England mean most businesses including shops, hairdressers, restaurants and bars can operate at limited capacity. Customers must provide contact details on paper or through a phone app, and face-coverings are required inside businesses and on public transit.

Crowded venues such as nightclubs can’t open at all, while many entertainment businesses say they will go broke unless caps on attendance are lifted.

The other parts of the U.K. — Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland — are following their own, broadly similar, road maps out of lockdown.

Britain has recorded more than 128,000 coronavirus deaths, the highest toll in Western Europe. Confirmed infections have risen sharply from about 2,000 a day earlier this year to more than 20,000 a day in the past week. But the 122 coronavirus-related deaths reported were two fewer than the previous week.

Public health officials say Britain’s vaccination program has weakened the link between infections and deaths. So far, 86% of U.K. adults have received at least one vaccine dose and 63% are fully vaccinated.

Jonathan Ashworth, health spokesman for the opposition Labour Party, said even with vaccination, “letting cases rise with no action means further pressure on the (health system), more sickness, disruption to education and risks a new variant emerging with a selection advantage.”

“We are all desperate to move on from restrictions but with infections continuing to rise steeply thanks to the delta variant, Boris Johnson needs to outline the measures he will introduce such as ventilation support for building and sick pay for isolation to push cases down,” he said.

Paul Hunter, professor in medicine at the University of East Anglia, said it made sense to ease restrictions in summer, when schools are closed, people spend more time outdoors and other respiratory infections are at a low level.

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"The disease burden associated with a larger peak during the summer would likely be less than one during the winter," Hunter said.

"There is a general consensus that COVID will never go away," he added. "Our grandchildren's grandchildren will be getting infected with SARS-CoV-2. But in the not too distant future SARS-CoV-2 will probably just be another cause of the common cold that we catch every few years."

## Vatican: Pope alert and well a day after intestinal surgery

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — The Vatican said Monday that Pope Francis is "in good condition, alert" and breathing on his own, a day after he underwent a three-hour operation that involved removing half his colon.

Francis, 84, is expected to stay in Rome's Gemelli Polyclinic, a Catholic hospital, for about seven days "barring complications," Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said.

The brief medical bulletin contained the first details the Vatican released, coming more than 12 hours after the end of Sunday's surgery. The procedure was necessitated by what the Holy See said was a diverticular stenosis, or narrowing the pope's sigmoid portion of the large intestine.

"His Holy Father is in good, general condition, alert and breathing spontaneously," Bruni said in a written statement. "The operation for the diverticular stenosis, performed during the evening of July 4, involved a left hemicolectomy and lasted for about three hours," Bruni said.

That procedure generally entails removing the left side of the colon and attaching the remaining parts of the large intestine. But the Vatican didn't elaborate.

Francis was spending his first morning convalescing in a Rome hospital following the surgery on the left side of his large intestine.

Before Monday's statement, the Vatican had given scant details about the operation.

Earlier, an Italian cardinal told reporters he had been informed that Francis was doing OK post-operatively. "Our prayer and our closeness are very great," Cardinal Enrico Feroci said at Rome's airport where he was catching a flight. The Italian news agency ANSA quoted him as saying that he had heard earlier in the morning from another cardinal, Angelo De Donatis, "and he told me that the pope is well." De Donatis is the vicar of the Rome diocese.

Francis is staying in special, 10th floor suite that the hospital keeps available for use by a pontiff, after Pope John Paul II stayed there several times for various medical problems.

When the Vatican announced on Sunday afternoon that Francis had been admitted to hospital for a planned operation, it said that he needed surgery because he had developed a narrowing of the sigmoid portion of the large intestine.

Without citing sources, Rome daily Il Messaggero reported that "complications" arose during the surgery. Without specifying what happened, the newspaper said that the surgeons, after starting to operate via laparoscopy, ended up having to do incisions.

The Vatican statement made no reference to that report or to any "complications."

Laparoscopy is a kind of surgical procedure often dubbed "keyhole surgery" since it allows the surgeon access to the inside of the abdomen without requiring large incisions. In the kind of surgery the Vatican said the pope was getting, laparoscopy is commonly used, experts have said.

Patients having laparoscopic surgery generally require shorter hospital stays.

Twice daily updates on Francis' condition were expected to be issued by the Vatican.

Doctors not connected to the pope's hospitalization have said it is common to perform a re-sectioning of the affected part of the bowel in such cases.

Get-well messages continued to arrive for the pope. Italian Premier Mario Draghi's office said the leader "expresses affectionate wishes for a rapid convalescence and quick healing."

## Malaysians suffering amid lockdown fly white flag for help

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By EILEEN NG Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — When Mohamad Nor Abdullah put a white flag outside his window late at night, he didn't expect the swift outpouring of support. By morning, dozens of strangers knocked on his door, offering food, cash and encouragement.

Malaysia's nationwide lockdown to curb a coronavirus surge was tightened further on Saturday, banning people in certain areas from leaving their homes except to buy food and necessities.

It lurched Mohamad Nor into desperation. He ekes out a living by selling packed nasi lemak, a popular dish of coconut milk rice with condiments, at a roadside stall every morning, but that income has vanished and government aid was insufficient.

The white flag campaign that emerged on social media last week aims to help people like Mohamad Nor, who is 29 and was born without arms. By chance, he saw the campaign on Facebook and decided to try to seek help.

"It was so unexpected. So many people reached out to help, support and also encouraged me," Mohamad Nor said, sitting in his dingy room amid boxes of biscuits, rice, cooking oil and water that were swiftly donated to him. He said kind Samaritans offered to help pay his room rental and that the assistance should be enough to tide him through the next few months.

The #benderaputih campaign began as Malaysian society's response to rising suicides believed linked to economic hardships caused by the pandemic. Police reported 468 suicides in the first five months this year, an average of four a day and up sharply from 631 for the whole of 2020.

Social media posts urged people to hoist a white flag or cloth to signal they needed immediate help "without having to beg or feel embarrassed." Scores of food retailers and celebrities have responded with offers of help and many Malaysians have driven around their neighborhood to find white flags.

Thousands of people have lost their jobs since Malaysia enacted various curbs on movement, including a coronavirus state of emergency that has suspended Parliament since January. The strict national lockdown imposed on June 1 is the second in more than a year.

Coronavirus cases in Malaysia have jumped to more than 778,000 cases, nearly seven-fold from the whole of last year, with over 5,400 deaths.

Reports of families receiving speedy help after raising a white flag have warmed the hearts of Malaysians. A single mother and her teenage daughter who survived on biscuits for days were fed by neighbors, an indebted hawker on the verge of ending his life received cash help to start anew, a Myanmar refugee family who survive on just one meal a day were given instant food supplies.

While many hail the white flag movement as a show of unity and solidarity, not all agree.

A lawmaker from an Islamist party, which is part of the ruling coalition, attracted public anger when he told people to pray to God instead of waving a white flag in surrender. A state chief minister slammed the campaign as propaganda against Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin's government.

It has sparked copycats. An animal association encouraged financially strapped people who couldn't afford to feed their pets to display a red flag.

Anti-government protesters launched a black flag campaign over the weekend, with opposition lawmakers and others putting up black flags on social media to demand the premier to resign, for an end to the emergency and for Parliament to reopen. Police however, reportedly said they are investigating the black flag campaign for sedition, public mischief and misuse of network facilities for offensive purposes.

Muhyiddin, who took power in March 2020 after political maneuvers brought down the former reformist government, faces intense challenge from the opposition and within his own coalition. Support for his leadership cannot be tested with Parliament suspended.

Muhyiddin's office announced Monday that the lower house will resume July 26, just days before the emergency expires Aug. 1, caving into pressure from the the king and ethnic Malay state rulers.

James Chin, an Asian expert at Australia's University of Tasmania, said the white flag movement could fuel public anger over a perceived inept in the government's ability to manage the crisis.

"The white flag campaign will no doubt be used as a major political weapon to show that the government is a massive failure," he said.

## Amid drought, Colorado rafters flock to oases while they can

By BRITTANY PETERSON and THOMAS PEIPERT Associated Press

FORT COLLINS, Colo. (AP) — Across Colorado, parched rivers are at some of their lowest levels on record. But on one still spared by the drought, boisterous children and guides bob along as water splashes into their blue inflatable rafts.

The summer activity on the Cache La Poudre River in northeastern Colorado reflects the precarious situations of rivers and lakes in dry regions, with rafters and boaters eager to enjoy the remaining oases while they can and businesses hoping to eke out a season threatened by drought.

“Any time that you make your living off of Mother Nature, you definitely partner with a pretty turbulent environment,” said Kyle Johnson, whose whitewater rafting company, Rocky Mountain Adventures, has been fully booked seven days a week.

Johnson said the booming demand on the river is a “redemption” from the last rafting season, which was cut short by the pandemic and wildfires. But the healthy water levels on the river might not last much longer. Johnson notes the drought could end this season prematurely as well.

“It’s a little bittersweet,” said Savannah House, a Fort Collins resident who was recently rafting on the Poudre, noting the extreme conditions in other parts of the state.

For years, those who rely on rivers and streams for their livelihoods have struggled with the hotter, drier weather brought on by climate change.

The rising temperatures have meant dwindling and less reliable amounts of the mountain snowpack that normally drains from high altitudes to replenish water levels. What does trickle down is more likely to get absorbed by the dry, thirsty ground before it reaches the river — a predicament many places were already experiencing this year.

“We really are seeing the impact of the dry conditions last year impacting all of our watersheds and water resources,” said Karl Wetlaufer, a hydrologist for the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Now the heat wave gripping the region is deepening worries, affecting even simple recreational activities once taken for granted.

The Yampa River in northwest Colorado is experiencing some of the lowest stream flows on record due to below average snowpack, increasingly dry soil, and the spring’s hot, dry weather. In Steamboat Springs, a recreational hub along the river, rafting and kayaking ended a few weeks ago, and fishing and tubing could soon be over too if the water dips much lower.

“We have known since 2002, when this mega-drought started, that our climate has shifted to a hotter and drier future. And the future is now,” said Kent Vertrees of Friends of the Yampa. The conservation group has received funding from the Walton Family Foundation, which also supports The Associated Press’ coverage of water and environmental policy.

To alleviate conditions, conservation groups and water agencies created a pathway to release water from an upstream reservoir. That helped “keep the fish wet, cool the river down and increase the oxygen levels in the river,” Vertrees said.

Cottonwood trees have also been planted to shade the river and cool it down when the water is running low. It’s unclear how much such measures will help maintain water levels.

## Mired in crises, Lebanon hopes summer arrivals bring relief

By AJ NADDAFF Associated Press

NIHA, Lebanon (AP) — In a village in Lebanon’s scenic Chouf Mountains, 69-year-old Chafik Mershad pulls out a massive rectangular guestbook and reads out despairingly the date when he hosted his last visitor: Nov. 16, 2019.

A month earlier, anti-government protests had exploded across the country over taxes and a deteriorating currency crisis. Amid such uncertainty, few people visited his guesthouse. Then came the coronavirus and subsequent government-imposed lockdowns. The guesthouse officially closed its doors in February

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2020. A year and a half later, he still has no plans to reopen amid the country's current financial meltdown.

"Corona really affected us, but the biggest thing was the currency crisis," Mershad said, speaking at his home above the guesthouse. "We used to offer meals for guests with Nescafe, tea, whatever they wanted for a cheap price. Now, one hamburger patty costs that much."

The dual shocks of the pandemic and a devastating financial crisis have gutted the hospitality sector of this Mediterranean nation, known for its beaches, mountain resorts and good food. Hundreds of businesses, including guesthouses like the Mershad Guesthouse, have been forced to close.

But as pandemic restrictions are being eased, the businesses that survived hope the dollars spent by visiting Lebanese expats and an increase in domestic tourism can get the wheels of the economy moving again.

Currently, most hotel reservations are from Lebanese expats and some foreigners from neighboring Iraq, Egypt and Jordan. Airport arrivals are picking up: Every day for the past several weeks, the Beirut Airport has had four flights coming from Iraq, with more than 700 passengers in total, according to Jean Abboud, president of the Travel and Tourist Agents Union. Chaotic scenes have been reported at the arrivals lounge as people crowd for the obligatory PCR test.

Many Lebanese who traditionally vacationed abroad over the summer are now turning to domestic tourism. It's the more practical option because of travel restrictions, dollars trapped in banks and a lack of functioning credit cards.

"In the past two years, the country has radically changed. It is no longer a destination for nightlife, for city tourism and for the things that people knew. There's ... more interest from the Lebanese to travel inside their country," said Joumana Brihi, board member of the Lebanese Mountain Trail Association. The association maintains a 290-mile (470-kilometer) hiking trail spanning the country from north to south.

Many in the industry say the number of domestic tourists has increased significantly since the country's lockdown eased in April. They expect to see expats piling in and spending this summer despite the instability, partly because of the devalued Lebanese pound.

That will save a lot of places from shutting down or "at least prolong the life of some businesses," said Maya Noun, general secretary of the syndicate of restaurant owners.

Since October 2019, Lebanon's currency has lost more than 90% of its value, trading at around 17,000 Lebanese pounds to the dollar on the black market. The official exchange rate remains at 1,507 pounds to the dollar.

Last year, Member of Parliament Michel Daher was chastised on social media for saying on TV that "Lebanon is really cheap, in every sense," because of the crumbling currency.

"People were laughing at me then," Daher told The Associated Press. "Now, there are lots of Lebanese expats coming because of the prices, but we also want foreigners."

Still, the scene on the ground is no picturesque vacation destination. Electricity cuts last much of the day and privately run generators have had to be turned off for several hours to ration fuel. The country suffers from a shortage of vital products, including medicine, medical products and gasoline.

For weeks, frustrated citizens have been lining up to fill up at gas stations, with occasional fistfights and shootings amid frayed nerves. More than half the population has been plunged into poverty, and with sectarian tensions on the rise, Lebanon feels ready to erupt.

Lebanon's currency crash has created a jarring schism between the comfortable minority whose income is in so-called fresh dollars that can be withdrawn from banks, and those being pushed farther into poverty, including former members of a vanishing middle class whose purchasing power has disappeared.

Resorts in the coastal cities of Batroun and Byblos are regularly packed and forecast to do well this summer after being closed last year because of the pandemic. Restaurants, pubs and rooftop bars are buzzing again and some mountain guesthouses and boutique hotels are fully booked.

Yet the idea that expats will help the economy is partially misleading, said Mike Azar, a Beirut-based financial adviser. "Foreign dollars coming from tourists is always going to be a positive thing, but does it make the lira (pound) appreciate or depreciate at a slower pace? It is not really something you can say."

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Many expats seem to be wavering on whether to visit Lebanon. Some yearn to reconnect with family after long separations caused by the pandemic. Others are not willing to risk it.

Joe Rizk, a 20-year-old mechanical engineering student at UMass Lowell in the U.S. from the coastal village of Damour, said his family persuaded him to return for the month of August. He said he would bring medicines that are in short supply, like Advil, for family and friends.

"I will not spend more than \$300 or \$400 this whole month even if I was going every night to a bar, or club or restaurant," he said, adding he would be using the family house and car while in Lebanon.

But Hala al-Hachem, a 37-year-old assistant bank manager in Massachusetts, said she was too worried to visit Lebanon with two children, aged 8 and 6. Originally from south Lebanon, she used to return with her family every summer.

Not this time.

"Do I want to go there and not be able to put gas in my car and travel around? Do I want to go there and risk one of them getting sick and going to a hospital where they don't have the medicine needed to treat them? Do I want my sons to wonder at night why there is no electricity?" she asked.

## Explosives bring down rest of South Florida collapsed condo

By REBECCA SANTANA and BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — Demolition crews set off explosives late Sunday that brought down the damaged remaining portion of a collapsed South Florida condo building, a key step to resuming the search for victims as rescuers seek access to new areas of the rubble.

A loud rat-at-tat of explosions echoed from the structure just before 10:30 p.m. Then the building began to fall, one floor after another, cascading into an explosion of dust. Plumes billowed into the air, as crowds watched the scene from afar.

Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava told the Associated Press after the demolition that crews had been given the all-clear to resume their search-and-rescue mission to locate the 121 people believed to be missing under a wing of the Champlain Tower South that collapsed June 24. So far, rescuers have recovered the remains of 24 people. No one has been rescued alive since the first hours after the collapse.

On Sunday, Miami-Dade police identified David Epstein, 58, as one of the two dozen people known to have perished in the fallen tower. His remains were recovered Friday.

The demolition went "exactly as planned," she said. "It was picture perfect. Exactly what we were told would happen."

Crews were to begin clearing some of the new debris so rescuers could start making their way into parts of the underground garage that is of particular interest. Once there, they were hoping to get a clearer picture of voids that may exist in the rubble and could possibly harbor survivors.

Levine Cava expressed relief that the search for victims can now continue, after being suspended on Saturday so workers could begin rigging the damaged but still-upright portion of the the partly-collapsed tower with explosives — a precarious operation that could have caused the structure to fail.

"I feel relief because this building was unstable. The building was hampering our search efforts," Levine Cava said.

Rescuers are hoping the demolition will give them access for the first time to parts of the garage area that are a focus of interest. Once a new pathway into the initial rubble is secure, "we will go back to the debris pile, and we'll begin our search and rescue efforts," Miami-Dade Fire Chief Albert Cominsky said.

The decision to demolish the remnants of the Surfside building came after concerns mounted that the damaged structure was at risk of falling, endangering the crews below and preventing them from operating in some areas. Parts of the remaining building shifted on Thursday, prompting a 15-hour suspension in the work. An approaching storm also added urgency to the concerns.

"I truly believe ... that the family members recognize and appreciate that we are proceeding in the best possible fashion to allow us to do the search that we need to do," Levine Cava said.

Residents in the area were told to stay inside until two hours after the blast to avoid the dust raised by

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the implosion. Local authorities had gone door-to-door to advise them of the timing, and to ask them to keep windows closed.

Approaching Tropical Storm Elsa has added urgency to the demolition plans with forecasts suggesting there could be strong winds in the area by Monday. President Joe Biden declared a state of emergency in Florida because of the storm, making federal aid possible.

The latest forecasts have moved the storm westward, mostly sparing South Florida, but National Hurricane Center meteorologist Robert Molleda said the area could still feel effects.

"We're expecting primarily tropical storm force gusts," Molleda said, referring to gusts above 40 mph (64 kph).

The method used for Sunday night's demolition is called "energetic felling," which uses small detonation devices and relies on the force of gravity. Levine Cava, speaking ahead of the demolition, said that should bring the building down in place, containing the collapse to the immediate surroundings so as to minimally disturb the existing mound of debris — where scores of people are believed to be trapped.

Officials used tarps to visually mark the search area, in case new debris scatters unexpectedly.

State officials said they hired the BG Group, a general contractor based in Delray Beach, Florida, to lead the demolition. They did not immediately respond to an inquiry about how the firm was selected, but a contract for the projects calls for the state to pay the company \$935,000.

A spokesperson for the state's Division of Emergency Management said the company is subcontracting with Maryland-based Controlled Demolition Inc., which experts say is among only a handful of companies in the U.S. that demolishes structures using explosives. The company was supposed to place explosives on the basement and lobby levels of the still-standing structure, according to the contract for the work.

CDI is "probably one of the best" in the industry, said Steve Schwartz, a member of the National Demolition Association's board of directors. He described the company's president and owner, Mark Loizeaux, as "cool, calm and collected."

In implosions — using explosives to have a building fall in on itself — the charges are generally set off in rapid succession over a matter of seconds, said Scott Homrich, who heads the National Demolition Association and runs his own demolition company in Detroit, Michigan. Setting the explosives off at intervals serves to break up the building at the same time it's coming down.

Officials acknowledged that the tragedy was continuing to unfold during the July 4th holiday.

"This July 4 we're reminded that patriotism isn't just about loyalty to country," said Levine Cava. "It's about loyalty to one another — to our communities, to those in need whose names or stories we may not know ever, but to whom we are connected by compassion and by resilience."

## Warnock balances partisanship with broad pitch ahead of 2022

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

SMYRNA, Ga. (AP) — On Capitol Hill, Sen. Raphael Warnock blasts Republicans' push for tighter voting rules as "Jim Crow in new clothes," while his campaign operation blasts emails bemoaning dire risks to democracy.

Back home, Georgia's first Black senator is more subtle, pitching a "comprehensive view of infrastructure" and avoiding talk of his reelection fight already looming just months after he won a January special election runoff with Senate control at stake.

"I'm busy being Georgia's United States senator," Warnock said, smiling, as he brushed aside a question recently about famed football hero Herschel Walker potentially running for his seat as a Republican.

Indeed, the preacher-turned-politician spent the Independence Day recess hopscotching from an inland port in the conservative Appalachian foothills to liberal Atlanta's urban microbreweries and sprawling public hospital, then the suburban defense contractors in between. At each stop, he highlighted the federal money he's routed — or is trying to route — to his state for health care, national security research, rural broadband and urban walking paths, among other projects.

"We as Georgians should be proud of all that happens in the state," Warnock said at the Georgia Tech

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Research Institute, cheerleading ongoing projects and arguing for more federal spending. "I had some sense of it before becoming a senator. But what I have been able to see firsthand is impressive."

The high-wire act will test whether Warnock, who will seek his first full Senate term next year, can again stitch together a diverse, philosophically splintered coalition that tilted Georgia to Democrats in 2020. He's still the high-profile freshman whose election gave Democrats unified control in Washington, but now he's angling to be seen as a "senator for all Georgians" delivering for the state with nuts-and-bolts legislative work.

The approach is part necessity given Georgia's toss-up status: Warnock and Sen. Jon Ossoff, also a freshman, each won their seats by less than 100,000 votes out of 4.5 million runoff ballots; Democrat Joe Biden topped Republican Donald Trump in the presidential contest by less than 13,000 votes out of 5 million last November.

Warnock's gambling that he can be an unapologetic advocate for Democrats' agenda, including on voting laws, yet still prove to Georgians beyond the left's base that he is a net-benefit for them. Come November 2022, that would mean maintaining enthusiasm among the diverse Democratic base in metro areas and Black voters in rural and small-town pockets, while again attracting enough suburban white voters, especially women, who've drifted away from Republicans in the Trump era.

The senator doesn't disclose such bald-faced election strategy. His office declined a one-on-one interview for Warnock to discuss his tenure and his argument for a full six-year term. Still, his public maneuvering illuminates a preferred reelection path.

"Georgia is such an asset to our national security infrastructure," Warnock said at the Georgia Tech outpost adjacent to Dobbins Air Reserve Base. He praised public and private sector researchers who develop technology for the Pentagon, U.S. intelligence and other agencies, saying they "keep our national defense strong and protect our service members."

He held up the installation as a beneficiary of the U.S. Innovation and Competition Act, a \$250 billion package that cleared the Senate on a rare bipartisan vote, 68-32, eight more than the 60-vote filibuster threshold that's held up Democrats' plans on election law and infrastructure.

As Warnock visited the Appalachian Regional Port, an inland container port in north Georgia, he highlighted the proposed RURAL Act, which he's co-sponsoring with Republican Sen. Mike Braun of Indiana. It would speed upgrades of rural railway crossings. Afterward, Warnock's office announced a \$47 million grant for port expansion. The surrounding Murray County delivered 84% of its presidential vote to Trump last November. Warnock won just 18% there on Jan. 5.

In Atlanta, where Warnock resides and still serves as senior pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, which Martin Luther King Jr. once led, the senator lined up more squarely with Democrats' priorities. Yet even then, Warnock was deliberate when discussing Republicans.

"It's ridiculous that we haven't expanded Medicaid," he declared outside Grady Memorial Hospital, a vast public complex in downtown Atlanta. He noted that Georgia, still run by Republicans at the state level, remains one of a dozen states not to expand eligibility under Congress' 2010 health insurance overhaul.

Warnock accused state politicians of "playing games," though he never mentioned Gov. Brian Kemp by name. Warnock said he'd soon introduce a measure allowing citizens in non-expansion states to be covered. That aligns with one of Biden's key presidential campaign pledges.

The senator later stood along the Atlanta Beltline, an old railroad path redeveloped into a pedestrian and cycling thoroughfare around the city's perimeter. He touted a \$5 million federal investment, billing it as an example of Democrats' wide interpretation of infrastructure, and alluding to the GOP's narrower "hard infrastructure" definition.

"America needs a home improvement plan," Warnock said.

He endorsed a pending bipartisan infrastructure deal negotiated at the Biden White House but said Democrats should use Senate rules to pass an even larger package over Republican objections in the 50-50 chamber.

To be sure, even with his emphasis on infrastructure, Warnock didn't shy away from the voting rights debate when asked. As on infrastructure, Warnock said Democrats should use Senate rules — or rewrite



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them, in the case of the filibuster — to counter the spate of Republican state laws tightening access to absentee and early voting.

Yet in all those arguments, Warnock tried to frame his case as something beyond party.

"I'm making a jobs-and-economic viability argument," he said on Medicaid expansion. "Once you have basic health care, you can pursue employment, and with a kind of freedom that you can work knowing that you're covered." He added that "rural hospitals are closing" under the financial strain of treating the uninsured and underinsured.

Warnock extended that analysis to rural broadband and the urban Beltline. Both, he said, connect individuals to economic opportunities around them. Housing and child care, he argued, are "basic infrastructure" for the same reasons.

As for voting rights, Warnock stood beside his co-sponsorship of Democrats' sweeping overhaul that Republicans have blocked. But he also opened the door to a Senate compromise, provided it shores up the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and sets a national "baseline" for absentee and early voting. Rather than harp only on current GOP opposition, however, he noted that in 2006, the last time the Senate voted to extend the Voting Rights Act, the chamber did so by a 98-0 vote. That, Warnock insisted, means Democrats' push shouldn't be viewed as merely partisan.

For Republicans, Warnock remains among the top Democratic targets in 2022. Senate GOP campaign aides in Washington maintain that his voting record is out of step with most Georgia voters, especially in a midterm year, which historically means a whiter, more conservative electorate than in presidential years.

Still, many GOP heavyweights in Georgia offer begrudging compliments for how Warnock is managing battleground politics.

"I don't think Warnock or Ossoff have done or said anything stupid," said former U.S. Rep. Jack Kingston, comparing the pair favorably to House progressives like Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York. "It's not like they've gone out and become 'The Squad' or something."

## Loved and decried, El Salvador's populist leader is defiant

By CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — In the narrow, gang-controlled alleys of the Las Palmas neighborhood, struggling Salvadorans are untroubled by actions of their president that so infuriate his critics.

They are not bothered by Nayib Bukele's dictatorial maneuvers -- sending armed troops into congress to coerce a vote, or ousting independent judges from the country's highest court, paving the way to control all branches of government. They praise his relentless attacks on the politicians who governed El Salvador for nearly 30 years before him, and the elites who benefited from their rule.

In this neighborhood they are grateful for the boxes of food staples they've received from Bukele's government during the pandemic. Adults proudly pat their shoulders and say they got both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine long before most other people in Central America.

For all the observers and critics who condemn a dangerous concentration of power by a charismatic leader who sports down-home blue jeans and leather jackets, Bukele enjoys an approval rating of more than 90% among people who saw three of four previous presidents jailed or exiled for corruption.

"They talk about democracy... I don't know what else," said Julio César López, 60, a street artist in Las Palmas. "It makes me really happy that they're kicking out that class of people."

Bukele's presidency so far is the story of one of Latin America's newest populist autocracies in the making: spending big to hand out goodies, branding opponents as enemies, raising the profile of the military. Like former President Donald Trump, Bukele prefers social media over press conferences, so he can control the message, though he does not miss a good photo op to brandish his image.

The president has convinced most Salvadorans that his government is on the move against poverty and gang violence, said Leonor Arteaga, program director at the Due Process of Law Foundation, a regional rule of law organization based in Washington. "No one can deny that he effectively has the support of the majority of the population and he is using that support and manipulating it to advance his agenda."

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The residents of Las Palmas say they recognize Bukele's concentration of power and initially, at least, they seem willing to trade democratic ideals for short-term solutions to their yawning needs.

Rigoberto Castellanos, a 57-year-old construction worker in Las Palmas, says the previous opposition-controlled congress and ousted constitutional justices were thorns in Bukele's side that needed to be removed.

He noted that currently El Salvador's constitution bans re-election, but if that were to change, "who wouldn't like to have the president for another five years?"

The 39-year-old Bukele, a non-ideological pragmatist, is the latest in a string of Latin American presidents from across the political spectrum who have used elections and their personal popularity to amass power.

For nearly three decades, El Salvador was ruled alternately by the conservative Arena party and the leftist Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front formed in the wake of El Salvador's brutal civil war. But the parties failed to deliver. Arena and the FMLN both had presidents who plundered El Salvador's coffers and left a society with few economic opportunities, besieged by powerful street gangs that extorted and killed with impunity.

Bukele, a former publicity executive, rose through the ranks of the FMLN from small town mayor to mayor of the capital, San Salvador, until the FMLN eventually booted him for refusing to toe the party line. It cemented his outsider status and he formed his own political party, New Ideas, winning the presidential vote in 2019.

While elections in El Salvador have been considered free, critics of Bukele say the country can no longer be described as a functioning democracy.

Bertha María Deleón, an organized crime prosecutor turned criminal defense lawyer, connected with Bukele on line when as mayor he retweeted some of her commentary. When he faced some legal trouble, he asked Deleón to join his defense team and she gradually became a close adviser, one of the few who would disagree with him during four years working together.

"I knew that he is a very impulsive person, very immature ... like an eternal adolescent," Deleón said. "But I always sensed that he was a man with good intentions." She was interested in becoming his justice and security minister, but didn't get the offer.

Her patience with Bukele began to fade shortly after he took office in June 2019, when he started firing government bureaucrats via Twitter. Deleón says she warned him that the practice was unnecessarily humiliating for state employees who could challenge the actions in court. Bukele called her a "killjoy."

The last straw came Feb. 9, 2020. Bukele had been locked in battle with the opposition-controlled congress. He wanted lawmakers to approve funding for a security plan to control gangs, but they had refused to convene for a vote, saying they wanted more information.

On that Sunday, heavily armed police and soldiers in tactical gear entered the Legislative Assembly with Bukele. Hundreds of supporters Bukele had rallied to pressure lawmakers waited outside. Sharpshooters took up positions on rooftops. Bukele took the seat of the body's president and prayed.

"If we wanted to press the button, we would press the button" and remove lawmakers from the legislature, he told supporters outside the building. "But I asked God and God told me: patience, patience, patience."

Deleón was stunned. She tweeted a photo of Bukele seated on the dais praying with a mocking message. "Pure manipulation of the masses. This is only a sample of what awaits us when he has the majority in the (congress)."

The president blocked her on Twitter and attacks from Bukele supporters and trolls began. Some threatened rape, murder.

Bukele's office denied requests for an interview or to respond to questions and comment for this article. But Deleón's reference to what would come if his party won a congressional majority was prescient.

A year later, New Ideas won a supermajority in legislative elections. On May 1, the first day the new lawmakers were seated, they voted to remove and then replace the five justices of the Supreme Court's Constitutional Chamber, and the attorney general.

As the lawmakers prepared to vote, police surrounded the Supreme Court. A police patrol vehicle was parked outside the Supreme Court president's home. The justices' replacements, all with ties to Bukele or

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his party, were later escorted into the building by police.

Bukele was pleased. "I know that most of the Salvadoran people eagerly await the second session," he said.

Arteaga, of the Due Process of Law Foundation, said "El Salvador is in a process of building authoritarianism. It is very clear, there are all the signs."

For the first two years of Bukele's administration the constitutional justices had been a critical check on his power. His critics described a sinking feeling, realizing that there would now be nowhere to turn.

In May, Deleón was called to appear at the Attorney General's Office where she had worked for seven years. A new attorney general -- previously the personal attorney of Bukele's national police chief -- had been installed. Now Deleón was informed they were moving forward with multiple investigations against her.

"They resent the constant criticism I've been making of his governance," she said, calling the cases baseless. "This is using the Attorney General's Office to intimidate me."

Media and business leaders face similar threats.

El Salvador's award-winning independent news outlet El Faro also has suffered public attacks by Bukele and his supporters, a government audit and its staff has reported being followed by strangers.

Last September, Bukele said on national television that there was an open money laundering and tax evasion investigation of El Faro. In January, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ordered El Salvador's government to take steps to protect 34 members of El Faro's staff and allow them to carry out their journalistic work.

In May, at the Ibero-American Colloquium on Digital Journalism, El Faro co-founder and director, Carlos Dada said, "We have been threatened. We have been persecuted. We have been the subject of massive defamation campaigns."

In one of its first orders of business, the new congress eliminated a decades-old tax break on imported newsprint, a hit on the country's traditional newspapers, which also have been critical of Bukele's administration.

Javier Simán, the president of El Salvador's largest business association and an outspoken Bukele critic, said he has been subject to more than 100 government audits. His family owns a retail empire with its department stores in El Salvador and other parts of Central America, as well as other businesses.

His critique has evolved from what he considered draconian lockdown measures early in the pandemic that pummeled El Salvador's economy to Bukele's more recent concentration of power. He said the Finance Ministry is hounding businessmen who criticize the government.

"You can only have prosperity when you live in a democratic state, where the law is respected, where there is a separation of powers, where there is rule of law," he said.

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Rev. Andreu Oliva, rector of the Jesuit-founded Central American University in San Salvador, served previously in Honduras and Nicaragua. And he can't shake the feeling that he has seen what is happening in El Salvador before, in Daniel Ortega's Nicaragua.

Ortega took over the judiciary and first coopted, then jailed and exiled the opposition.

"I have the fear, but well-founded I believe, that they are copying the Nicaragua playbook," Oliva said.

Mark Schneider, a senior adviser with the Americas Program and the Human Rights Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, says Bukele's actions so far are still far removed from Ortega's.

"In Salvador, what you see is that you have to be concerned about the direction and you would hope that Bukele would listen, because he's so popular in the country, he doesn't have to violate the laws, he doesn't have to violate the Constitution."

Ortega and Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro lead Latin America's movement to autocratic rule. While Maduro has long-since eviscerated the opposition, in recent weeks Ortega locked up five presidential hopefuls and more than a dozen other opposition figures as he seeks a fourth consecutive term in November.

Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro and Mexico's Andrés Manuel López Obrador also have combative styles, although from opposite ideological bents. Both attack the press, judges and non-governmental organizations criti-

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cal of their administrations. In contrast to El Salvador, their countries' democratic institutions have so far managed to blunt some of their more aggressive impulses.

Honduras and Guatemala's leaders don't enjoy the popularity of the others, but their parties have managed to erode judicial independence and operate with impunity.

To different degrees, the autocrats use their militaries to amplify their power. In El Salvador, there is concern that Bukele is both expanding the role of the military in politics and working to ensure that they are more devoted to him than to the constitution.

Besides sending soldiers into the Legislative Assembly last year, he has used them to deliver the boxes and sacks of food provided by the government.

Outside the massive Hospital El Salvador that Bukele built at the start of the pandemic, the people directing traffic and guiding people coming to receive their COVID-19 vaccinations were soldiers.

A retired high-ranking military officer, who requested anonymity because he feared repercussions for his family, noted that Bukele had tapped an obscure Navy officer, someone beholden to him, to be the defense secretary rather than someone from the more powerful army.

"He is abusing the apolitical nature of the armed forces," he said.

Bukele is fond of asking people to swear impromptu oaths of loyalty. He did it in his inauguration speech, days later during a military ceremony and most recently June 1 on the second anniversary of his inauguration, speaking to the new Legislative Assembly.

He asked them to swear they would defend their victories, fight pacifically against any enemy or obstacle and "not allow that those who made us suffer so much ever return to power, to not let them plunder our country again."

The problem, critics say, is that Bukele is defining "the enemy" as all who oppose him and his policies.

Experts say perhaps Bukele's biggest challenge will be to continue his brand of populism while El Salvador's financial resources dwindle. El Salvador's debt grew more than 15% last year, much of it pandemic-related spending, and in 2020 the ratio of debt to GDP was 89.9%. The new congress has approved heaps more since May 1.

Some believe Bukele's shocking announcement last month that El Salvador would make the volatile cryptocurrency bitcoin official tender along with the U.S. dollar could be a play to increase his room to maneuver financially.

Questions also are arising about whether he can sustain the substantial drop in the murder rate. When Bukele took over the murder rate was about 50 per 100,000 population, said Carlos Carcach, the research coordinator at the Higher School of Economics and Business in San Salvador. Now it is in the low 30s per 100,000, a rate not seen in 15 years and a far cry from the peak of more than 100 murders per 100,000 seen in 2015.

The reasons for the drop are unclear. The pandemic could be a factor. Bukele credits his Territory Control Plan to pressure gangs through raids, arrests, seizures, a cut in communications between jailed and free gang-leaders, and the use of soldiers in policing. Others believe it could be the result of a secret agreement between the government and the dominant street gangs to reduce the killing, although Bukele has denied this and was highly critical of a similar truce reached by a previous administration.

"It's a mystery," Carcach said.

Whatever the reason, Bukele touts it as one of his government's biggest accomplishments. Carcach said the gangs continue to control territory, extorting businesses and individuals, but killing less often.

"The gang wins because the people know that the government service, basically the food packages, get into the community because the gang allows it," Carcach said.

However popular Bukele remains domestically, he faces unfriendly reaction from abroad.

The Biden administration has been more wary of Bukele than was Trump, who seemed content with him as long as the number of Salvadorans migrating to the U.S. border kept falling. Administration of-

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officials publicly criticized the May 1 removal of judges and the attorney general. Last week, Bukele's chief of staff, a New Ideas party leader and others close to the administration were included on a U.S. State Department list of figures either corrupt or who undermine democracy. The same day Bukele announced he would push for a 20% increase in the minimum wage.

The U.S. Agency for International Development announced it would shift all aid from El Salvador's government agencies to civil society organizations. The agency's chief, Samantha Power, came to San Salvador and gave a speech on democracy on Oliva's campus.

Bukele has responded by trying to improve El Salvador's relationship with China. But with a quarter of El Salvador's population living in the U.S. and sending home about \$6 billion in remittances last year, no one believes China could begin to replace the deep ties to the United States.

Late on May 1, as international condemnation began to pour in over the ousting of the judges and attorney general, Bukele was defiant.

"To our friends in the international community: we want to work with you, trade, travel, get to know each other and help where we can," he tweeted. "Our doors are more open than ever. But with all due respect: We are cleaning our house ... and that is not your responsibility."

## Southwest, American delays hint at hard summer for travelers

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

This summer is already shaping up to be a difficult one for air travelers.

Southwest Airlines customers have struggled with thousands of delays and hundreds of canceled flights this month because of computer problems, staffing shortages and bad weather.

American Airlines is also grappling with a surge in delays, and it has trimmed its schedule through mid-July at least in part because it doesn't have enough pilots, according to the pilots' union.

Travelers are posting photos of long airport lines and describing painful flights.

"It was ridiculously crowded," Tracey Milligan said of airports after a round trip from her New Jersey home to Miami this week.

Milligan and her 6-year-old daughter endured hours-long delays on both legs of the trip. Before the flight to Florida, she said, JetBlue agents first told passengers there was a discrepancy with the plane's weight, then they were missing three crew members because the airline was short-staffed, then there was a weather delay.

"I really wanted to start screaming and cursing everybody out, but that doesn't get you anywhere, and security will come and remove you from the plane," she said.

At least the passengers on Milligan's flights kept their cool. Airlines have seen a surge in unruly passengers, and some experts predict it will get worse this summer as planes become even more crowded.

There have been 10 days in June when more than 2 million travelers went through U.S. airports, according to figures from the Transportation Security Administration. Airlines say that domestic leisure travel is nearly back to 2019 levels, although the lack of business travelers means that overall, the number of passengers over the past week is still down about 20% compared with the same days in 2019.

The airlines were expecting a blockbuster July Fourth weekend, scheduling more than 100,000 U.S. flights between July 1 and July 5. That was nearly twice the 58,000 that they offered over the same days last year, according to data from aviation researcher Cirium. July 1 was first time the TSA screened more people than on the same day in 2019.

The weekend highlights the rapid turnaround boosting an industry that was fighting for survival last year. The recovery has been faster than many expected — including, apparently, the airlines themselves.

Since the start of the pandemic, U.S. airlines have received \$54 billion in federal aid to help cover payroll expenses. In return, they were prohibited from furloughing or laying off workers. However, they were allowed to persuade tens of thousands of employees to take buyouts, early retirement or leaves of absence.

Now some are finding they don't have enough people in key roles, including pilots.

This week, as Southwest officials braced for crowded flights over the holiday weekend they offered to

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double pay for flight attendants and other employees who agree to extra work through Wednesday.

"The staffing shortage is across the board. On the pilot side, it's a training backlog," said Casey Murray, president of the Southwest Airlines Pilots Association. "Southwest came into the summer with very little margin."

Murray said many pilots coming back from leave are still getting federally required training to refresh their skills and aren't yet eligible to fly. When storms cause long delays, pilots can reach their FAA limit on the number of hours they are allowed to work, and there aren't enough backups to step in, he said. On top of that, he said, Southwest pushed for an "aggressive" summer schedule to capitalize on rising travel demand.

Since June 14, Southwest has averaged more than 1,300 daily flights delays — a staggering 40% of its schedule — according to figures from tracking service Flightaware.com.

Southwest spokeswoman Brandy King said most delays were caused by weather, and that with fewer flights than before the pandemic, it's harder for Southwest to recover from long thunderstorms.

At American Airlines, unions say labor shortages are contributing to delays and the scrubbing of up to 80 flights a day from the schedule through mid-July. In echoes of Southwest, the pilots' union at American said management did not act quickly enough to retrain 1,600 pilots who were temporarily furloughed then rehired last year or replace the 1,000 who retired.

American has also suffered high delay numbers in June. Delta Air Lines and United Airlines have appeared to fare better, although staffing shortages caused Delta to cancel dozens of flights over Thanksgiving last year and again around Easter this year.

Airlines that pushed people to quit a year ago and now beginning to hire again, which could help fix staffing shortages. Delta, for example, plans to hire more than 1,000 pilots by next summer, starting with about 75 by this August.

Passengers whose flights aren't canceled or delayed still risk being on board with troublesome plane mates. Airlines have reported more than 3,200 incidents of unruly passengers since Jan. 1, most of them involving compliance with the federal requirement to wear face masks on flights, and some face large fines.

Andrew Thomas, a frequent flyer who teaches international business at The University of Akron and has tracked air rage for more than 20 years, believes conditions are ripe for even more incidents on planes this summer because travelers are more stressed than ever.

"The problem was there before COVID, and now you are putting more people in the sky and you exacerbate this with the masks," Thomas said. "Service levels are atrocious. Planes are packed, they are not feeding you, it's hard to get food in an airport. The only thing that's easy to get is alcohol, which is not a good thing."

## Scale, details of massive Kaseya ransomware attack emerge

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Cybersecurity teams worked feverishly Sunday to stem the impact of the single biggest global ransomware attack on record, with some details emerging about how the Russia-linked gang responsible breached the company whose software was the conduit.

An affiliate of the notorious REvil gang, best known for extorting \$11 million from the meat-processor JBS after a Memorial Day attack, infected thousands of victims in at least 17 countries on Friday, largely through firms that remotely manage IT infrastructure for multiple customers, cybersecurity researchers said.

REvil was demanding ransoms of up to \$5 million, the researchers said. But late Sunday it offered in a posting on its dark web site a universal decryptor software key that would unscramble all affected machines in exchange for \$70 million in cryptocurrency.

Earlier, the FBI said in a statement that while it was investigating the attack its scale "may make it so that we are unable to respond to each victim individually." Deputy National Security Advisor Anne Neuberger later issued a statement saying President Joe Biden had "directed the full resources of the government to investigate this incident" and urged all who believed they were compromised to alert the FBI.

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Biden suggested Saturday the U.S. would respond if it was determined that the Kremlin is at all involved. Less than a month ago, Biden pressed Russian President Vladimir Putin to stop giving safe haven to REvil and other ransomware gangs whose unrelenting extortionary attacks the U.S. deems a national security threat.

A broad array of businesses and public agencies were hit by the latest attack, apparently on all continents, including in financial services, travel and leisure and the public sector — though few large companies, the cybersecurity firm Sophos reported. Ransomware criminals infiltrate networks and sow malware that cripples them by scrambling all their data. Victims get a decoder key when they pay up.

The Swedish grocery chain Coop said most of its 800 stores would be closed for a second day Sunday because their cash register software supplier was crippled. A Swedish pharmacy chain, gas station chain, the state railway and public broadcaster SVT were also hit.

In Germany, an unnamed IT services company told authorities several thousand of its customers were compromised, the news agency dpa reported. Also among reported victims were two big Dutch IT services companies — VelzArt and Hoppenbrouwer Techniek. Most ransomware victims don't publicly report attacks or disclose if they've paid ransoms.

CEO Fred Voccola of the breached software company, Kaseya, estimated the victim number in the low thousands, mostly small businesses like "dental practices, architecture firms, plastic surgery centers, libraries, things like that."

Voccola said in an interview that only between 50-60 of the company's 37,000 customers were compromised. But 70% were managed service providers who use the company's hacked VSA software to manage multiple customers. It automates the installation of software and security updates and manages backups and other vital tasks.

Experts say it was no coincidence that REvil launched the attack at the start of the Fourth of July holiday weekend, knowing U.S. offices would be lightly staffed. Many victims may not learn of it until they are back at work on Monday. Most end users of managed service providers "have no idea" whose software keep their networks humming, said Voccola,

Kaseya said it sent a detection tool to nearly 900 customers on Saturday night.

The REvil offer to offer blanket decryption for all victims of the Kaseya attack in exchange for \$70 million suggested its inability to cope with the sheer quantity of infected networks, said Allan Liska, an analyst with the cybersecurity firm Recorded Future. Although analysts reported seeing demands of \$5 million and \$500,000 for bigger targets, it was apparently demanding \$45,000 for most.

"This attack is a lot bigger than they expected and it is getting a lot of attention. It is in REvil's interest to end it quickly," said Liska. "This is a nightmare to manage."

Analyst Brett Callow of Emsisoft said he suspects REvil is hoping insurers might crunch the numbers and determine the \$70 million will be cheaper for them than extended downtime.

Sophisticated ransomware gangs on REvil's level usually examine a victim's financial records — and insurance policies if they can find them — from files they steal before activating the ransomware. The criminals then threaten to dump the stolen data online unless paid. In this attack, that appears not to have happened.

Dutch researchers said they alerted Miami-based Kaseya to the breach and said the criminals used a "zero day," the industry term for a previous unknown security hole in software. Voccola would not confirm that or offer details of the breach — except to say that it was not phishing.

"The level of sophistication here was extraordinary," he said.

When the cybersecurity firm Mandiant finishes its investigation, Voccola said he is confident it will show that the criminals didn't just violate Kaseya code in breaking into his network but also exploited vulnerabilities in third-party software.

It was not the first ransomware attack to leverage managed services providers. In 2019, criminals hobbled the networks of 22 Texas municipalities through one. That same year, 400 U.S. dental practices were crippled in a separate attack.

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One of the Dutch vulnerability researchers, Victor Gevers, said his team is worried about products like Kaseya's VSA because of the total control of vast computing resources they can offer. "More and more of the products that are used to keep networks safe and secure are showing structural weaknesses," he wrote in a blog Sunday.

The cybersecurity firm ESET identified victims in at least 17 countries, including the United Kingdom, South Africa, Canada, Argentina, Mexico, Indonesia, New Zealand and Kenya.

Kaseya says the attack only affected "on-premise" customers, organizations running their own data centers, as opposed to its cloud-based services that run software for customers. It also shut down those servers as a precaution, however.

Kaseya, which called on customers Friday to shut down their VSA servers immediately, said Sunday it hoped to have a patch in the next few days.

Active since April 2019, 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. U.S. officials say the most potent ransomware gangs are based in Russia and allied states and operate with Kremlin tolerance and sometimes collude with Russian security services.

Cybersecurity expert Dmitri Alperovitch of the Silverado Policy Accelerator think tank said that while he does not believe the Kaseya attack is Kremlin-directed, it shows that Putin "has not yet moved" on shutting down cybercriminals.

## Tropical Storm Elsa brushing along Cuba's southern coast

By ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Cuba evacuated 180,000 people amid fears Sunday that Tropical Storm Elsa could cause heavy flooding after battering several Caribbean islands, killing at least three people.

The Cuban government opened shelters and moved to protect sugarcane and cocoa crops ahead of the storm, which was offshore moving along Cuba's southern coast late Sunday and expected to make landfall farther west by Monday afternoon. Most of those evacuated went to relatives' homes, while some people sheltered at government facilities. Hundreds living in mountainous areas took refuge in natural caves prepared for emergencies.

The storm's next target was Florida, where Gov. Ron DeSantis declared a state of emergency in 15 counties, including in Miami-Dade County, where a high-rise condominium building collapsed last week.

Elsa's center was about 270 miles (440 kilometers) southeast of Havana and moving northwest at 15 mph (24 kph). Its maximum sustained winds had strengthened a bit to about 65 mph (100 kph), the National Hurricane Center in Miami said.

The center said the storm was expected to gradually weaken while passing over central Cuba on Monday. "After Elsa emerges over the Florida Straits and the southeastern Gulf of Mexico, some slight re-strengthening is possible," it said.

Rain fell intermittently in Cuba's eastern provinces throughout Sunday as the storm passed by to the south. "So far it's a soft, serene rain. There are no downpours. The streets are not overflowing," Yolanda Tabío, a 73-year-old retiree living in Santiago, told The Associated Press. "I thought it could be worse."

Rafael Carmenate, a volunteer for the local Red Cross who lives facing the beach in Santa Cruz del Sur, told the AP by telephone: "We have a little water — showers. The sea has not intruded. It's cloudy and gusty,"

The storm killed one person on St. Lucia, according to the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency. A 15-year-old boy and a 75-year-old woman died Saturday in separate events in the Dominican Republic after walls collapsed on them, according to a statement from the Emergency Operations Center.

Elsa was a Category 1 hurricane until Saturday morning, causing widespread damage on several eastern Caribbean islands Friday as the first hurricane of the Atlantic season. Among the hardest hit was Barbados, where more than 1,100 people reported damaged houses, including 62 homes that collapsed. The government promised to find and fund temporary housing to avoid clustering people in shelters amid the



pandemic.

Downed trees also were reported in Haiti, which is especially vulnerable to floods and landslides because of widespread erosion and deforestation. Haiti's Civil Protection Agency said Sunday that three people had been injured by downed trees.

A tropical storm warning was in effect for western Cuba and for the Florida Keys from Craig Key westward to the Dry Tortugas. Cuba's government posted a hurricane warning for Cienfuegos and Matanzas provinces.

Elsa is the earliest fifth-named storm on record and also broke the record as the tropic's fastest-moving hurricane, clocking in at 31 mph Saturday morning, said Brian McNoldy, a hurricane researcher at the University of Miami.

Portions of Cuba were forecast to get rainfall of 5 to 10 inches (13 to 25 centimeters) through Monday, with isolated maximum amounts of 15 inches (20 centimeters). Jamaica was expected to get 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters), with maximum totals of 15 inches (38 centimeters).

## Explosives set off to bring down rest of collapsed condo

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — Demolition crews set off explosives late Sunday to bring down the damaged remaining portion of a collapsed South Florida condo building, a key step to resuming the search for victims as rescuers possibly gain access to new areas of the rubble.

Crews were to begin clearing some of the new debris so rescuers could start making their way into parts of the underground garage that is of particular interest. Once there, rescuers are hoping that they will gain access for the first time to parts of the garage area that are a focus of interest, Miami-Dade Assistant Fire Chief Raide Jadallah has said. That could give a clearer picture of voids that may exist in the rubble and could possibly harbor survivors.

The precarious, still-standing portion of a collapsed South Florida condo building was rigged with explosive charges and set for demolition overnight, Miami-Dade County officials said late Sunday. The work has suspended the search-and-rescue mission, but officials said it will open up new areas for rescue teams to explore.

Rescuers will await the "all-clear" after the demolition and then immediately dive back into the task of trying to locate any survivors buried under the rubble, County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said. Officials had previously said that the search could resume from 15 minutes to an hour after the detonation.

"We are standing by. We are ready to go in, no matter the time of night," Levine Cava told a news conference Sunday night.

Search efforts have been suspended since Saturday afternoon to allow workers to drill holes for explosives. Miami-Dade Assistant Fire Chief Raide Jadallah said earlier that up to 210 rescuers will be poised to restart the search as soon as the site is declared safe after the blast.

Levine Cava said Sunday that demolishing the building was a top priority.

"Bringing down this building in a controlled manner is critical to expanding the scope of our search-and-rescue effort," she said at a news conference.

Officials had evacuated residents around the site ahead of the demolition and warned others to stay indoors and close windows, doors and any other openings that could allow dust in.

So far, rescuers have recovered the remains of 24 people, with 121 still missing. No one has been rescued alive since the first hours after the June 24 collapse, but officials have pledged to keep looking despite the dwindling chance of finding survivors.

"There's nobody in charge really talking about stopping this rescue effort," Surfside Mayor Charles Burgett told CBS' "Face the Nation." "This rescue effort as far as I'm concerned will go on until everybody is pulled out of that debris."

Concerns had mounted that the damaged Champlain Towers South building in Surfside was at risk of falling on its own, endangering the crews below and preventing them from operating in some areas. The approach of Tropical Storm Elsa added urgency to the demolition project. The latest forecasts have moved

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the storm westward, mostly sparing South Florida, but meteorologists have said the area could still feel effects starting Monday.

Jadallah said suspending the search effort was necessary during the drilling work ahead of the demolition because it could cause the structure to fail. Once the structure is gone and its remnants cleared, rescuers should have access for the first time to parts of the garage area that are a focus of interest, Jadallah has said. That could give a clearer picture of voids that may exist in the rubble and could possibly harbor survivors.

State officials said they hired the BG Group, a general contractor based in Delray, Florida, to lead the demolition. It was not immediately known how the company was selected, but a contract for the projects calls for the state to pay the company \$935,000.

A spokesperson for the state's Division of Emergency Management said the company is subcontracting with Maryland-based Controlled Demolition Inc., which experts say is among only a handful of companies in the U.S. that demolishes structures using explosives. The company was supposed to place explosives on the basement and lobby levels of the still-standing structure, according to the contract for the work.

The detonation aimed to bring the remaining portion of the building straight down and toward the street side, away from the existing pile of debris, Jadallah said.

The method of demolition is called "energetic felling," which uses small detonation devices and relies on the force of gravity. It was expected to bring the building down in place, containing the collapse to the immediate surroundings.

A spokesperson for the state's Division of Emergency Management said BG Group subcontracted with Maryland-based Controlled Demolition Inc., which experts say is among only a handful of companies in the U.S. that demolishes structures using explosives.

## July Fourth Latest: White House marks holiday with party

The latest on Fourth of July celebrations across the U.S.:

8:45 p.m.

WASHINGTON — The White House party for the July Fourth holiday has the hallmarks of both happiness and commiseration.

The crowds danced to a military band playing popular songs and whooped when President Joe Biden took the podium to speak.

The Washington Nationals' four presidential mascots — George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt — ran a footrace with Teddy winning.

Yet there was an undeniable sense of loss for participants such as Twanda Taylor, a New Jersey kindergarten teacher. She brought her godson, Nasir Dickerson, 14, who lost his father to COVID-19 on April 21, 2020.

"This is what it's all about — bringing America all back together," Taylor said. "It's an honor to be here."

### MORE ON THE FOURTH OF JULY:

- After a year lost to the coronavirus, New York City's most well-known Fourth of July traditions are back.
- President Joe Biden is ready to host the largest event yet of his presidency, an Independence Day barbecue and fireworks-watching celebration on the South Lawn on Sunday night.
- Fireworks were unintentionally detonated as they were being set up for an Independence Day show in Ocean City, Maryland, leaving employees of the fireworks company with minor injuries.

### HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

5:40 p.m.

NEW ORLEANS — Fireworks are returning to New Orleans on Independence Day thanks to actor Will Smith.

Smith is picking up the roughly \$100,000 tab for the pyrotechnics over the Mississippi River after learning

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New Orleans didn't plan a 2021 show, city officials told news outlets.

New Orleans cancelled last year's fireworks because of COVID-19.

Smith is in New Orleans working on his latest film "Emancipation," which will tell the story of a slave, Peter, who escaped a Louisiana plantation and whose photo of scars on his back from being whipped exposed the brutality of slavery. He would also fight for the Union in the Civil War.

Smith moved production of the film from Georgia to Louisiana in early April after Georgia passed a new voting law that prompted a federal lawsuit saying the overhaul was intended to deny Black voters equal access to the ballot.

2:10 p.m.

NEW YORK — Chowdown champ Joey "Jaws" Chestnut broke his own record to gulp to a 14th win in the men's Nathan's Famous Hot Dog Eating Contest on Sunday.

Michelle Lesco took the women's title.

Chestnut downed 76 franks and buns in 10 minutes. That's one more than he did in setting the men's record last year, when the contest unfolded without fans because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Lesco downed 30 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> dogs in 10 minutes.

Reigning women's champ and record-holder Miki Sudo skipped this year because she's expecting a baby in a few weeks.

2 p.m.

MIAMI — The Fourth of July holiday was marked with somber tones in South Florida, where a collapsed building has left at least 24 dead and more than 120 missing under rubble.

"July 4 is ordinarily a time to gather with our loved ones and to celebrate our freedom and our independence, and this year the holiday looks very different," said Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava.

"But through this grief," she said, "and all of the other obstacles that have been thrown our way, a clear picture emerges of what it means to be American."

A candle-light vigil was planned for Sunday night in Miami Beach for the victims of the fallen Champlain Towers South condominiums complex in Surfside, Florida.

Neighboring Miami Beach typically hosts one of the region's most spectacular fireworks displays, but officials canceled its show for the second year out of respect for the families. The show could not go on last year because of the coronavirus outbreak.

While many communities across South Florida canceled fireworks, one of the few locations in Miami-Dade County that was going forward with fireworks displays was former President Donald Trump's golf resort in Doral. Tickets for the free event, 20 miles (32 kilometers) inland from Surfside, were sold out.

## **Biden: US 'coming back together,' but COVID not yet finished**

By ZEKE MILLER and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Calling a vaccination "the most patriotic thing you can do," President Joe Biden on Sunday mixed the nation's birthday party with a celebration of freedom from the worst of the pandemic. He tempered the strides against COVID-19 with a warning that the fight against the virus wasn't over.

"Today, all across this nation, we can say with confidence: America is coming back together," Biden declared as he hosted more than 1,000 service members, first responders and other guests for a July Fourth celebration on the South Lawn of the White House.

For Biden it was a long-awaited opportunity to highlight the success of the vaccination campaign he championed. The event was the largest yet of his presidency, the clearest indication yet that the U.S. had moved into a new phase of virus response. Shifting from a national emergency to a localized crisis of individual responsibility, the nation also moved from vaccinating Americans to promoting global health.

"This year the Fourth of July is a day of special celebration, for we're emerging from the darkness of a year of pandemic and isolation, a year of pain fear and heartbreaking loss," the president said before fireworks lit up the sky over the National Mall.

Noting the lockdowns that shuttered businesses, put millions out of work and separated untold numbers

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of families, Biden said: "Today we're closer than ever to declaring our independence from a deadly virus. That's not to say the battle against COVID-19 is over. We've got a lot more work to do."

Biden wanted all Americans to celebrate, too, after enduring 16 months of disruption in the pandemic and more than 605,000 deaths. The White House encouraged gatherings and fireworks displays all around the country to mark — as though ripped from a Hollywood script — the nation's "independence" from the virus.

And there was much to cheer: Cases and deaths from COVID-19 were at or near record lows since the outbreak began, thanks to the robust U.S. vaccination program. Businesses and restaurants were open, hiring was picking up and travel was getting closer to pre-pandemic levels.

However, Biden's optimism was measured for good reason. The vaccination goal he had set with great fanfare for July Fourth — 70% of the adult population vaccinated — fell short at 67%, according to figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. More concerning to officials was the gap between heavily vaccinated communities where the virus was dying out and lesser-vaccinated ones where a more infectious variant of the virus was already taking hold.

More than 200 Americans still die each day from COVID-19, and tens of millions have chosen not to get the lifesaving vaccines.

"If you've had the vaccine, you're doing great," said Dr. Mati Hlatshwayo Davis, an infectious disease physician at the John Cochran VA Medical Center and St. Louis Board of Health. "If you haven't had the vaccine, you should be alarmed and that's just the bottom line, there's no easy way to cut it."

"But that doesn't take away from the fact that this country is in a significantly better place," she said.

Still, about 1,000 counties have a vaccination rate below 30%, and the federal government is warning that they could become the next hot spots as virus restrictions ease.

The administration was sending "surge" teams to Colorado and Missouri. Additional squads of infectious disease experts, public health professionals and doctors and nurses were getting ready to assist in additional locations with a combination of low vaccination rates and rising cases.

Overall, the vastly improved American landscape stood in stark contrast with much of the rest of the world, where there remained vast vaccine deserts and wide community spread that could open the door to even more dangerous variants. The Biden administration was increasingly turning the federal response to the complicated logistics of sending excess U.S. vaccines abroad in an effort to assist other nations in beating back the pandemic.

With U.S. demand for vaccines falling even as they have been widely available for months, and as governments and businesses dangled an array of incentives at Americans to get a shot, officials were increasingly emphasizing that the consequences of disease now largely reflect the individual choices of those who are not yet vaccinated.

"The suffering and loss we are now seeing is nearly entirely avoidable," said the CDC's director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky.

When asked about the potential risks of holding gatherings around July Fourth in areas where there are large pockets of unvaccinated individuals, White House press secretary Jen Psaki had countered that "if individuals are vaccinated in those areas, then they are protected."

The cookout and fireworks viewing at the South Lawn was "being done in the right way," White House COVID-19 response coordinator Jeff Zients said in television interviews, and "consistent" with CDC guidelines. The White House was not requiring vaccinations but was asking guests to get a COVID-19 test and to wear a mask if they are not fully vaccinated.

"For as much work there still is to do, it's so important to celebrate the victories," Davis said. "I'm OK with us having those pockets of joy and celebration as long as we still wake up the next day and continue to go to work and prioritize equity in vaccine distribution."

## Vatican says pope 'reacted well' to intestinal surgery

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis "reacted well" to planned intestinal surgery Sunday evening at a

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Rome hospital, the Vatican said, without giving much detail about the pontiff's condition.

In a statement late Sunday, a Holy See spokesman, Matteo Bruni, said the 84-year-old Francis had general anesthesia during the surgery necessitated by a narrowing of the large intestine.

The written statement, which came shortly before midnight, was notable for its scarcity of medical detail.

Bruni didn't say how long surgery lasted, nor for how long the pope was unconscious under anesthesia.

Also not immediately clear was how long Francis would stay Rome's Agostino Gemelli Polyclinic, a Catholic hospital, although he was expected to convalesce for a few days in a private 10th floor apartment suite reserved for popes.

"The Holy Father, admitted in the afternoon to A. Gemelli Polyclinic, underwent in the evening planned surgery for a diverticular stenosis of the sigmoid" portion of the colon, Bruni said in the brief written statement. "The Holy Father reacted well to the surgery conducted under general anesthesia," the spokesman said, noting there was a four-person surgical team, plus a four-person anesthesiologist team.

A stenosis is an abnormal constriction or narrowing. The sigmoid portion of the large intestine extends from the end of the descending colon to the rectum. Gastroenterologists say the sigmoid segment is a common location for a diverticular stenosis.

The main surgeon was Dr. Sergio Alfieri, the director of Gemelli's digestive surgery department.

Among those present in the operating room was the official papal physician, whom Francis tapped earlier this year. The pope's previous physician had contracted COVID-19 and died at Gemelli while hospitalized for cancer treatment.

It was a remarkable end to a day that began publicly for Francis when, during his traditional Sunday appearance to the faithful in St. Peter's Square, he cheerfully announced he would go to Hungary and Slovakia in September.

The pope made no mention of his impending surgery, but headed shortly after his window appearance to the hospital. At the end of his public remarks from an Apostolic Palace window, Francis told the crowd: "And please, don't forget to pray for me." Then he added, sounding casual, almost wistfully: "Thanks, ciao."

A couple hours after he was admitted, reportedly arriving with little escort and no fanfare, the Vatican revealed that Francis had been diagnosed with a narrowing in the large intestine.

A week earlier, Francis had used his same Sunday appearance to ask the public for special prayers for himself, which may have been related to the planned surgery.

"I ask you to pray for the pope, pray in a special way," Francis had asked the faithful in the square on June 27. "The pope needs your prayers," he said, adding his thanks and saying "I know you will do that."

A diverticulum is pouch-like protrusion through the muscular wall of the intestine.

When diverticula become inflamed — a common condition, especially in older people — part of the intestine can sometimes narrow and surgery might be required, according to gastroenterologists. Such surgery can be performed under general anesthesia, possibly with a laparoscopic intervention. Sometimes a re-sectioning of the affected part of the intestine is needed.

Francis is in generally good health, but he did have part of one lung removed as a young man. He also suffers from sciatica, in which a nerve affects the lower back and leg, a painful condition that has forced him at times to skip scheduled appearances.

The pope had a particularly demanding set of appointments last week, including celebrating a Mass on Tuesday to mark the Catholic feast day honoring Saints Peter and Paul, and later in the week, presiding at a special prayer service for Lebanon. On June 28, he also had a long private audience at the Vatican with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Throughout all those engagements, Francis appeared to be in good spirits.

Get-well wishes began arriving immediately for Francis. Italian President Sergio Mattarella, as soon as he landed in Paris for a state visit in France, offered an "affectionate thought" on behalf of all Italians. Mattarella said he was wishing for "a good convalescence and even a speedier recovery" for the pope.

Gemelli doctors have performed surgery before on popes, notably Pope John Paul II, who had what the Vatican said was a benign tumor in his colon removed in 1992. John Paul had several other surgeries at

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the hospital, including after being shot by a gunman in St. Peter's Square in 1981. After those surgeries, the Vatican and hospital officials gave detailed accounts of the pope's medical condition.

John Paul also had several medical issues in his final years, including severe complications from Parkinson's disease, and had numerous stays at Gemelli. At one point, the future St. John Paul II dubbed the hospital "the third Vatican," after Vatican City and the papal summer residence at Castel Gandolfo outside Rome.

## 8 people wounded in shooting near Fort Worth car wash

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) — Eight people were wounded early Sunday when a person began shooting toward groups of people near a Fort Worth car wash and multiple people returned fire, police said.

Police said in a statement that the eight gunshot victims were taken to hospitals and were in stable condition. Police said no suspects were in custody.

Police said an officer in the area heard gunshots at about 1:30 a.m. and when officers arrived, they found the eight people who had been shot.

Police said Sunday afternoon that detectives had determined the shooting began following an argument between several men. Police said one person then left the scene, retrieved a gun and began shooting toward groups of people.

Police said multiple people in the area then returned fire.

Most of those wounded were innocent bystanders, police said.

Fort Worth police Chief Neil Noakes said officers provided medical care to the injured on arrival.

A juvenile female had minor injuries after being stuck by a vehicle, police said.

## Tragedy casts pall over July Fourth holiday in South Florida

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN and FREIDA FRISARO Associated Press

The Fourth of July holiday was marked with somber tones in South Florida, where a collapsed building has left at least 24 dead and more than 120 missing under rubble.

"July 4 is ordinarily a time to gather with our loved ones and to celebrate our freedom and our independence, and this year the holiday looks very different," said Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava.

"But through this grief ... and all of the other obstacles that have been thrown our way, a clear picture emerges of what it means to be American," she said.

A vigil was planned for Sunday night in Miami Beach for the victims of the fallen Champlain Towers South condominium complex in Surfside, Florida.

Neighboring Miami Beach typically hosts one of the region's most spectacular fireworks displays, but officials canceled their show for the second straight year out of respect for the families. The show could not go on last year because of the coronavirus outbreak.

"So many in our city are less than one degree of separation from those who are grieving the loss of loved ones, or praying for the unaccounted ... who remain in the massive rubble," Miami Beach Mayor Dan Gelber said in a statement.

"The blanket of grief that has overcome us does not leave room, right now, for the kind of joyous celebrations that are traditionally part of the Fourth of July experience," the mayor said.

Instead, he asked residents to go outside at 9 p.m. for a moment of silence with a lighted candle, a flashlight or cellphone — anything, he said to pay tribute to their neighbors affected by the tragedy and as a show of support to the first responders risking their lives in the search for victims.

Other cities across the region also canceled fireworks shows, as officials overseeing rescue operations in Surfside prepared to demolish the still-standing portion of Champlain Towers South.

One of the few locations in Miami-Dade County that was going forward with fireworks displays was former President Donald Trump's golf resort in Doral. All of the tickets for the free event, 20 miles (32 kilometers) inland from Surfside, had been snatched up.

But in Surfside, the holiday had taken on a new meaning: one without fanfare, but with a lot of gratitude.

"This July 4 we're reminded that patriotism isn't just about loyalty to country," Cava, the Miami-Dade

County mayor, said during a news conference. "It's about loyalty to one another — to our communities, to those in need whose names or stories we may not know ever, but to whom we are connected by compassion and by resilience."

## Surfside pushes back on report on delayed building repairs

By BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

A Surfside, Florida, official pushed back Sunday on the idea that the town was responsible for slowing down a condo board's plans to make needed structural repairs to a building that eventually collapsed, killing dozens.

Following a Miami Herald report that it took more than a month for the town to respond to plans submitted by the building's board in May, town manager Andrew Hyatt released a statement saying the issues under discussion were preliminary plans unrelated to structural work and not permits to begin repairs the building needed to pass a 40-year recertification.

"It would appear that the Champlain Towers South Condominium Association sought to address a number of issues outside the scope of any proposed 40-year re-certification work," such as new natural gas lines and added parking, Hyatt's statement said. "There was no indication during any communications between the Town and the association by telephone or electronic mail that this submission required emergency action by the Town of Surfside."

Emails first obtained by the Herald show the condo building manager growing impatient at the lack of response from the town to plans for a temporary parking plan needed to move forward on repair of a concrete slab under building's pool and on damaged columns in its garage.

"As we are out to bid on our project (we) need to get to answers to these questions," wrote building manager Scott Stewart to a town building official on June 21, more than a month after an initial email request was sent. "This is holding us up and cost (sic) are going up and out (sic) 40 year is coming up fast."

He added, "Can we get some feed back please so we can keep moving forward please."

The town responded with requests for additional information on June 23, just 14 hours before major sections of the 12-story building pancaked on itself, burying sleeping residents in twisted metal and broken concrete. So far, 24 people have been confirmed dead and 121 are still unaccounted for.

A spokesman for the condo board declined to comment.

Even without the town delay, it is not certain it would have made any difference. Approving bids and permits for such work may have taken longer than a month. And while the structural problems that were to be repaired have gotten intense scrutiny, it has not been determined definitively that they caused the collapse.

The emails between the condo building and the town came after years of delay over the structural repairs.

The problems with the building were first highlighted by an inspection report submitted by an engineering firm to the condo board in 2018. The report urged work on a concrete slab that been improperly laid flat instead of sloped, preventing water from draining off, causing "major structural damage."

The report submitted by Morabito Consultants did not warn that the building was in danger of falling down. And a town building official at the time was reassuring, telling members soon after the report that the condo building was in "very good shape."

Another possible factor adding to the delay was Morabito Consultant's estimated price tag for the work — more than \$9 million.

Some owners protested, members of the board left, new ones came in, the repairs were put off and by the time a new board was ready to start the work this year, the price tag had ballooned to more than \$15 million, according to a board letter sent to owners in April.

When the building fell on June 24, the board had taken out a loan, work on the roof had begun, requests for bids for structural repairs were put out, and some owners had already paid in full their special assessment to pay for the work. Those who elected to pay in installments over many years instead faced a deadline for their first payments on July 1.

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## Joey Chestnut sets new record at post-pandemic hot dog race

NEW YORK (AP) — Chowdown champ Joey “Jaws” Chestnut broke his own record to gulp to a 14th win in the men’s Nathan’s Famous Hot Dog Eating Contest on Sunday, while Michelle Lesco took the women’s title.

Chestnut downed 76 franks and buns in 10 minutes. That’s one more than he did in setting the men’s record last year, when the contest unfolded without fans because of the coronavirus pandemic.

“It just felt good,” Chestnut, of Westfield, Indiana, said in an ESPN interview after his win Sunday. “Even if I was uncomfortable, having everybody cheer me and push me, it made me feel good.”

Lesco, of Tucson, Arizona, downed 30  $\frac{3}{4}$  dogs in 10 minutes and called her win “an amazing feeling.”

Reigning women’s champ and record-holder Miki Sudo skipped this year because she’s expecting a baby in a few weeks with fellow competitive eater Nick Wehry. He vied for the men’s title but came up short.

The annual Fourth of July frankfurter fest normally happens outside Nathan’s flagship shop in Brooklyn’s Coney Island neighborhood. But this year’s planning took place amid shifting coronavirus restrictions, and the event was held in a nearby minor league baseball stadium, Maimonides Park, with 5,000 spectators.

Last year, it was held indoors and without an in-person audience because of the pandemic.

Chestnut said he’d missed the fans last year.

“I’ve been looking forward to this all year,” he told ESPN in an interview before this year’s competition.

## French far-right chief lays out plans for presidential race

PARIS (AP) — French far-right leader Marine Le Pen says she will stick with her strategy of making her party a more mainstream political force despite a stinging loss in France’s regional elections, and that tactic will carry her into next year’s presidential race.

Le Pen, 52, was reelected Sunday as the head of the National Rally at a party gathering in the southern town of Perpignan.

Her anti-immigration party failed to win any of mainland France’s 12 regions in last week’s vote — raising criticism about Le Pen’s strategy. Some members deplored her choice to tame the party’s extremist edge and accused her of ignoring grassroots members, warning this could cost her votes.

In her speech, Le Pen instead praised the “healthy and necessary development” of the party and said there will be no return to the National Front, the former name of the party that was changed in 2018. The rebranding was part of a broader strategy to revive the nationalist movement after her defeat by centrist Emmanuel Macron in France’s 2017 presidential race.

Le Pen also confirmed she would be a candidate in France’s 2022 presidential election. Polls show she is in a position to reach the runoff, possibly facing Macron again.

“That victory, we’re going to go out and get it,” she said, calling the 2022 presidential vote a “historic choice.”

“The sole alternative to globalization is nation,” she said. “We have the ambition to restore order in France.”

The far-right leader also issued a broad attack on the European Union, which many nationalists believe has overstepped its powers.

“I cannot repeat it enough, sovereignty is to nations what freedom is to men. We want to be able to decide, by ourselves, our commitments, our laws, our way of life,” she said.

Jordan Bardella, 25, was named the party’s first vice president. Le Pen said he will lead the party during her presidential campaign.

## A Cannes (sans kisses) to reawaken our romance with movies

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

The Palais des Festivals, the central hub of the Cannes Film Festival, a massive bulwark of filmmaker-named halls and pristine movie screens, is about as close as you can get to a cinema temple. To enter, you must ascend red-carpeted steps.

But in the past 16 months, Cannes’ Palais hasn’t been home to the movie frenzy it hosts annually. Last



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year's festival was postponed, then canceled. The Palais, instead, was lined with hospital beds in the early months of the pandemic. Earlier this year, it was turned into a mass-vaccination "Vaccinodrome."

On Tuesday, the Cannes Film Festival, delayed from May to July, will finally open its doors for its 74th and maybe most critical edition. Its famed red carpet will again flood with stars. The screens will be relit. And, maybe, the movies will rekindle some of the romance and grandeur that went dormant this past pandemic year.

"It's a kind of pilgrimage or Mecca, and even more so this year," says Mark Cousins, the Scotland-based filmmaker whose "The Story of Film: a New Generation" will premiere opening day on the Cannes beach. In the Palais, Leos Carax, a director whose freewheeling fictions reflect real movie dreams, will debut his anticipated "Annette," a musical with Adam Driver and Marion Cotillard.

The annual pressure of mounting Cannes, arguably the world's most celebrated film festival and a global standard-bearer for the big screen, is always massive. The last Cannes, a good one, launched Bong Joon Ho's "Parasite," the Cannes' Palme d'Or winner before it took best picture at the Oscars.

But this year, after much of the movie world went into hibernation, Cannes' greatest duty may be jolting moviegoing awake. Announcing the lineup last month, Cannes artistic director Thierry Frémaux declared: "Cinema is not dead."

"When Thierry Frémaux called me after he had seen the film, he said: 'We've been asleep and we want to wake up and pick up where we left off,'" says Cousins, who will also premiere a documentary on the British film producer (and Cannes regular) Jeremy Thomas. "I just can't wait for the overload, the deluge, the exhaustion of Cannes."

Cannes will be the first major film festival to attempt an essentially full edition. There will be no virtual component. No empty seats between (masked) festivalgoers. Attendees are required to be vaccinated or tested for COVID-19 every 48 hours. Ready or not, the throngs will be back on the Croisette, the French Riviera city's main drag.

But at a festival that prides itself on rigid, clockwork rhythm, much will be different. Many from abroad won't be able to attend due to travel restrictions. Stunts, like when Sacha Baron Cohen rode a camel down the Croisette, may be in short supply.

On the red carpet, some age-old traditions have been axed for safety, too. Frémaux typically meets all filmmakers and casts on the top of the Palais steps with the standard European greeting of pecks on each cheek. But under COVID, it will be a Cannes sans kisses.

France, which has more than 111,000 COVID-19 deaths, has eased most restrictions in recent weeks as cases have fallen and vaccinations have surged. Like most countries, it's also confronting the rise of the delta variant.

Many of the filmmakers coming to Cannes have experienced the worst of the pandemic. Celebrated French director Mia Hansen-Løve lost her father to COVID. But coming to the festival to premiere her "Bergman Island" (starring Vicky Krieps, Tim Roth and Mia Wasikowska) doesn't worry her.

"I've experienced the reality of this on a very brutal and interior way," says Hansen-Løve, speaking from Paris where she's shooting her next film. "It doesn't mean I'm not unaware or unconscious. I'm still in grief. I don't want my answer to seem light, like someone who doesn't care. What I mean is: I'm not afraid. Maybe because I've looked at death in the eye."

"I cannot live in fear for so long," she adds. "I can still be sad. But I cannot be afraid anymore."

This year's lineup includes many of the most acclaimed filmmakers in the world — many of whom are Cannes regulars. Among them: Wes Anderson ("The French Dispatch"), Asghar Farhadi ("A Hero"), Paul Verhoeven ("Benedetta"), Jacques Audiard ("Paris, 13th District"), Bruno Dumont ("Par un Demi Clair Matin") and Sean Penn ("Flag Day"). Some of the movies, like Anderson's, were official selections last year for a festival that never happened.

Twenty-four films will vie for the Palme d'Or, to be decided by a jury headed by Spike Lee, the first Black person to ever hold that position.

Some of the entries were shot back in 2019, others were products of the pandemic. Sean Baker will pre-

miere in competition his much-awaited follow-up to the Oscar-nominated 2017 film "The Florida Project." He spent two years on a project that was about to shoot in Vancouver when the virus ruined that chance.

"This film wouldn't have happened without COVID," said Baker, who describes "Red Rocket" — about a washed-up porn star returning to his Texas hometown — as "a darker, raunchier comedy."

The shoot was difficult. False positives nearly shut them down. But Baker believes "the crazy energy of the moment and the anxiousness" was caught on film. He spoke from Los Angeles while hurrying to finish the film's mix in time for Cannes, still agog that he's in competition with "some of the most renown filmmakers that have ever walked the earth" — like Verhoeven and Dumont, directors whose work influenced "Red Rocket."

"The first thing I thought about was that cliché: You don't know what you got until it's gone."

## Philippine military plane crashes, 45 dead, 49 rescued

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — A Philippine air force C-130 aircraft carrying combat troops assigned to fight Muslim militants crashed and exploded while landing in the south Sunday, killing at least 42 army soldiers on board and three civilians on the ground in one of the worst disasters in the air force's history.

At least 49 other soldiers were rescued with injuries and survived the fiery noontime crash into a coconut grove outside the Jolo airport in Sulu province, including some who managed to jump off the aircraft before it exploded and was gutted by fire, military officials said. Three of seven villagers who were hit on the ground died.

The aircraft had 96 people on board, including three pilots and five crew while the rest were army personnel, the military said, adding only five soldiers remained unaccounted for late Sunday. The pilots survived but were seriously injured, officials said.

The Lockheed C-130 Hercules was one of two ex-U.S. Air Force aircraft handed over to the Philippines as part of military assistance this year.

The aircraft originally took off from Manila with only a few passengers, including a two-star army general, Romeo Brawner Jr., who disembarked with his wife and three children in Cagayan de Oro city, where he's set to become the new military regional commander on Monday. The army troops then boarded the C-130 in Cagayan de Oro for the flight to Sulu.

Brawner said he was stunned to learn that the plane he'd just flown on had crashed.

"We're very thankful that we were spared, but extremely sad that so many lost their lives," Brawner told The Associated Press.

Officials said the injured personnel were brought to a hospital in Sulu or flown to nearby Zamboanga city, and troops were continuing to search for the missing. "A number of soldiers were seen jumping out of the aircraft before it hit the ground, sparing them from the explosion caused by the crash," a military statement said, citing witnesses.

Initial pictures released by the military showed the tail section of the cargo plane relatively intact. The other parts of the plane were burned or scattered in pieces in a clearing surrounded by coconut trees. Soldiers and other rescuers with stretchers were seen dashing to and from the smoke-shrouded crash site, where a dark gray smoke billowed shortly after impact.

The plane was transporting troops, many of them new soldiers who had just undergone basic training, from the southern Cagayan de Oro city for deployment in Sulu, officials said.

"They were supposed to join us in our fight against terrorism," Sulu military commander Maj. Gen. William Gonzales said. Government forces have been battling Abu Sayyaf militants in the predominantly Muslim province of Sulu for decades.

It was not immediately clear what caused the crash. Regional military commander Lt. Gen. Corleto Vinluan said it was unlikely that the aircraft took hostile fire, and cited witnesses as saying that it appeared to have overshot the runway then crashed on the periphery of the airport.

Military chief of staff Gen. Cirilito Sobejana told reporters that "the plane missed the runway and it was

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trying to regain power but failed and crashed.”

An air force official told The AP that the Jolo runway is shorter than most others in the country, making it more difficult for pilots to adjust if an aircraft misses the landing spot. The official, who has flown military aircraft to and from Jolo several times, spoke on condition of anonymity because of a lack of authority to speak publicly.

Initial pictures showed that the weather was apparently fine in Sulu, although other parts of the Philippines were experiencing rains due to an approaching tropical depression. The airport in Sulu’s main town of Jolo is located a few kilometers (miles) from a mountainous area where troops have battled Abu Sayyaf militants. Some militants have aligned themselves with the Islamic State group.

The U.S. and the Philippines have separately blacklisted Abu Sayyaf as a terrorist organization for bombings, ransom kidnappings and beheadings. It’s been considerably weakened by years of government offensives but remains a threat.

President Rodrigo Duterte expanded the military presence in Sulu to a full division in late 2018, deploying hundreds of additional troops, air force aircraft and other combat equipment after vowing to wipe out Abu Sayyaf and allied foreign and local militants.

Government forces at the time were pursuing Muslim armed groups a year after quelling the five-month siege of southern Marawi city by hundreds of militants linked to the Islamic State group. More than 1,000 people, mostly militants and long-elusive Abu Sayyaf commanders, were killed in months of intense air and ground assaults.

Sunday’s crash comes as the limited number of military aircraft has been further strained, as the air force helped transport medical supplies, vaccines and protective equipment to far-flung island provinces amid spikes in COVID-19 infections.

The Philippine air force has a history of tragic disasters. One of its aircraft crashed in a rice field north of Manila in 1971, killing 40 military personnel. A recently delivered S-701 Blackhawk helicopter crashed more than a week ago near Clark freeport, a former U.S. air base, killing all six air force personnel on board.

The Philippine government has struggled for years to modernize its military, one of Asia’s least equipped, as it dealt with decades-long Muslim and communist insurgencies and territorial rifts with China and other claimant countries in the South China Sea.

## Jimmy, Rosalynn Carter mark 75 years of ‘full partnership’

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The young midshipman needed a date one evening while he was home from the U.S. Naval Academy, so his younger sister paired him with a family friend who already had a crush.

Nearly eight decades later, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter are still together in the same tiny town where they were born, grew up and had that first outing. In between, they’ve traveled the world as Naval officer and military spouse, American president and first lady, and finally as human rights and public health ambassadors.

“It’s a full partnership,” the 39th president told The Associated Press during a joint interview ahead of the couple’s 75th wedding anniversary on July 7.

It will be another milestone for the longest-married presidential couple in American history. At 96, Carter also is the longest-lived of the 45 men who’ve served as chief executive. Yet even having reached that pinnacle, Carter has said often since leaving the Oval Office in 1981 that the most important decision he ever made wasn’t as head of state, commander in chief or even executive officer of a nuclear submarine in the early years of the Cold War.

Rather, it was falling for Eleanor Rosalynn Smith in 1945 and marrying her the following summer. “My biggest secret is to marry the right person if you want to have a long-lasting marriage,” Carter said.

The nonagenarians — she’s now 93 — offered a few other tips for an enduring bond.

“Every day there needs to be reconciliation and communication between the two spouses,” the former president said, explaining that he and Rosalynn, both devout Christians, read the Bible together aloud each

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night — something they've done for years, even when separated by their travels. "We don't go to sleep with some remaining differences between us," he said.

Rosalynn Carter noted the importance of finding common interests. Even now, she said, "Jimmy and I are always looking for things to do together." Still, she emphasized a caveat: "Each (person) should have some space. That's really important."

As first lady, Rosalynn Carter carved her own identity even as she supported her husband. Building on her predecessors' efforts to highlight special causes, she went to work in her own East Wing office, setting a standard for first ladies by working alongside her husband's West Wing aides on key legislation, especially dealing with health care and mental health. She continued that focus as the couple built the Carter Center in Atlanta after their White House years.

Certainly, a 75-year marriage hasn't been seamless, the couple acknowledges.

Jimmy was initially on course to be an admiral, not commander in chief, and Rosalynn appreciated their life beyond Plains, home to fewer than a thousand people, then and now. But when James Earl Carter Sr. became sick and died in 1953, his son cut short his Navy career and decided the family would return to rural Georgia.

The former president has written that in retrospect he finds it inconceivable not to discuss such a life-changing decision with his wife, who was unhappy with the move. Now, they see the blossoming of their partnership in that challenging juncture.

"We developed a partnership when we were working in the farm supply business, and it continued when Jimmy got involved in politics," Rosalynn Carter told AP. "I knew more on paper about the business than he did. He would take my advice about things," she added, drawing a laugh and affirmation from her husband.

Jimmy Carter also didn't seek Rosalynn's permission to make his first bid for office a few years later. In that instance, she was on board anyway.

"My wife is much more political," he said.

She interjected: "I love it. I love campaigning. I had the best time. I was in all the states in the United States. I campaigned solid every day the last time we ran."

That didn't help avoid a rout by Republican Ronald Reagan in 1980. But it further cemented Rosalynn — who'd originally given up her own opportunity to go to college when she married at age 18 — as equal partner to the leader of the free world. And it marked Jimmy Carter's evolution as a spouse.

He's since been an outspoken voice for women's rights, including within Christianity. Carter left the Southern Baptist Convention in 2006, denouncing what he called "rigid" views that "subjugated" women in the church and in their own marriages.

The former president ratified those views again, as well as his support for the church recognizing same-sex marriage. "It will continue to be divisive," he said. "But the church is evolving."

The Carters plan to celebrate their own marriage milestone a few days after their anniversary with a party in Plains. Decades removed from inaugural balls and state dinners, the most famous residents of Sumter County said they have mixed feelings about the spotlight.

"We have too many people invited," Rosalynn Carter said with a laugh. "I'm actually praying for some turndowns and regrets."

## After last Middle Sunday, Wimbledon resumes with fresh faces

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

WIMBLEDON, England (AP) — Wimbledon's traditional Middle Sunday of rest will disappear in 2022, as will the Manic Monday that follows it.

For one last time, the oldest Grand Slam tournament was quiet as Week 1 of this year's edition ended. And for one last time, Week 2 will begin with a bevy of action, the only major to schedule all 16 women's and men's fourth-round singles matches on the same day.

"I think I will miss it, to be honest," 2018 champion Angelique Kerber said.

Get ready for a packed scheduled Monday that includes teenagers Coco Gauff and Emma Raducanu, No.

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1 Ash Barty and Kerber in women's matches, along with Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer, a total of eight of the top 10 seeds and 20-year-old American Sebastian Korda in men's matches.

It won't be the same moving forward, and Federer understands why the All England Club is changing its ways in this regard.

"Everybody wants more days. Look, more days means more revenue, more options, more this and that. I get it," he said. "I don't think they did it only because of revenue. I think they just think it's going with the times, as well."

It's quite possible that the rest of the fortnight could end up being viewed as its own sort of referendum on the present and future of tennis.

That's because while there are representatives of the old guard who have multiple Grand Slam titles, including at the All England Club — Federer (20), Djokovic (19) and Kerber (three) — there truly are so many fresh faces.

Of the 32 singles players still in the brackets, 26 never have been to the quarterfinals at Wimbledon — and 20 are participating in the fourth round for the first time.

Korda, who faces No. 25 seed Karen Khachanov, is making his debut at Wimbledon, as is Ilya Ivashka, a 27-year-old from Belarus who takes on No. 7 Matteo Berrettini, a 2019 U.S. Open semifinalist who leads all remaining players with 60 aces.

Djokovic's opponent, No. 17 Cristian Garin of Chile, and Federer's, No. 23 Lorenzo Sonego of Italy, were a combined 0-5 at the All England Club until this year.

The other men's matches Monday are No. 2 Daniil Medvedev vs. No. 14 Hubert Hurkacz, No. 4 Alexander Zverev vs. No. 16 Felix Auger-Aliassime, No. 5 Andrey Rublev vs. Marton Fucsovics, and No. 8 Roberto Bautista Agut vs. No. 10 Denis Shapovalov.

Bautista Agut was a semifinalist in 2019, the last time the tournament was played because of the cancellation a year ago amid the pandemic, and is the only man left other than eight-time champion Federer and five-time champion Djokovic to even have been to so much as one quarterfinal at Wimbledon.

Kerber, No. 23 Madison Keys and No. 19 Karolina Muchova are the only women with past quarterfinal experience at the place.

Kerber faces Gauff, a 17-year-old American who also made it to the fourth round in 2019 and is coming off her first Grand Slam quarterfinal at Roland Garros last month.

"She's really dangerous, especially on grass courts," Kerber said. "I see the fire (in) her, as well."

A key to Gauff's success is her serve: She is tied for the fastest by a woman during Week 1 at 121 mph and her 23 aces rank second only to Barty's 26.

Britain's Raducanu, a wild-card entry who is 18 and ranked 338th, is making her Grand Slam debut and appearing in only her second tour-level event of any sort. Other women at Wimbledon for the first time include 2019 French Open champion and Barty's opponent, 2021 French Open champ Barbora Krejckova, No. 18 Elena Rybakina (who plays No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka) and Liudmila Samsonova (who plays No. 8 Karolina Pliskova).

The other women's matchups: Raducanu vs. Ajla Tomljanovic, Muchova vs. No. 30 Paula Badosa, Keys vs. Viktorija Golubic, and 2020 French Open champion Iga Swiatek vs. No. 21 Ons Jabeur.

Only three of the top 12 women in the WTA rankings will play Monday.

"The past couple of Slams, we have seen that there have been a lot of upsets ... and a lot of opportunities for really anyone to do well at any tournament," said Keys, the 2017 U.S. Open runner-up. "It's been great to watch."

Note: The All England Club announced Sunday that Centre Court and No. 1 Court can be at full capacity as of Tuesday, when the quarterfinals begin.

## Summer swelter trend: West gets hotter days, East hot nights

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

As outlandish as the killer heat wave that struck the Pacific Northwest was, it fits into a decades-long

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pattern of uneven summer warming across the United States.

The West is getting roasted by hotter summer days while the East Coast is getting swamped by hotter and stickier summer nights, an analysis of decades of U.S. summer weather data by The Associated Press shows.

State-by-state average temperature trends from 1990 to 2020 show America's summer swelter is increasing more in some of the places that just got baked with extreme heat over the past week: California, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Oregon and Colorado.

The West is the fastest-warming region in the country during June, July and August, up 3 degrees on average since 1990. The Northwest has warmed nearly twice as much in the past 30 years as it has in the Southeast.

That includes Portland, Oregon which set a record 116-degree high that was 3 degrees warmer than temperatures ever recorded in Oklahoma City or Dallas-Fort Worth.

Although much of the primary cause of the past week's extreme heat was an unusual but natural weather condition, scientists see the fingerprint of human-caused climate change, citing altered weather patterns that park heat in different places for longer periods.

"The ridiculous temperatures in the Pacific Northwest may on one hand be considered a black swan (ultra-rare) event, but on the other hand are totally consistent" with long-term trends, said meteorologist Judah Cohen of the private firm Atmospheric and Environmental Research. "So I am not going to predict when is the next time Portland will hit 116 but I believe hotter summers for the broader region are here to stay."

Climate change is altering and weakening the jet stream, narrow bands of wind that circle the Earth flowing west to east. Those changes allow key weather-producing patterns of high and low pressure to stall in place. High pressure is stalling more often in the West in summer, said Pennsylvania State University climate scientist Michael Mann. High pressure brings hot and dry weather that, when stalled, can create what are known as heat domes. Low pressure brings wet weather.

Another factor is higher water temperatures in the Pacific Ocean that also generate more so-called high-pressure ridges the West, said Gerald Meehl, a National Center for Atmospheric Research scientist who studies heat waves.

These patterns are showing up so often that their effects can be seen in long-term data. The U.S. Northwest, western Canada and Siberia, which also just saw a stunning heat wave, are among Earth's fastest warming land areas during summer since 1990, Cohen said.

The Midwest is warming slower during the summer than either coast. That's because stalled low pressure areas often drive cooler air into the Great Lakes region, said North Illinois University climate scientist Victor Gensini.

Water explains the big difference between western and eastern heat trends, scientists said.

"In western states where drought has been expanding and intensifying during the past decade, soil moisture has been declining. Dry soil heats up faster than moist soil during the day because all the solar energy goes into heating rather than into evaporating moisture," said Jennifer Francis, a climate scientist at the Woodwell Climate Research Center. "Dry soil also cools off faster at night."

That's partly why the West, which is getting drier by the decade and is mired in a 20-year megadrought, is seeing those crazy triple digit daytime temperatures.

The East is getting wetter by the decade, NOAA records show, and the East Coast is seeing its biggest warming increase at night. The overnight lows in New Jersey and Delaware have warmed 3 degrees since 1990, the biggest increases in the nation.

Water vapor is a greenhouse gas, Francis explained, "So at night it traps more of the heat."

Kathie Dello, North Carolina's state climatologist, attributes the trends to human-caused warming. "There's no other explanation," she said.

She added that while the extreme daytime highs may be eye-popping, warmer nights can also be dangerous. "Warm nights may not sound like a problem but they are a public health risk for people who lack sufficient cooling," she said.

And hiding from the heat is becoming harder and harder: "All my places to go for a quick break were absurdly hot — Oregon, North Carolina, even upstate New York? Where is left to go? Even Canada isn't safe."

## Race is on to get rental assistance out to avert evictions

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — More than \$7,000 behind on rent, Tyesha Young had hoped a program in Louisiana would bail her out and allow her family to avert eviction in the coming weeks.

But the 29-year-old mother of two from Jefferson Parish is still waiting to hear whether any of the \$308 million available from the state for rental assistance and utility payments will give her a lifeline. She applied for money last year but never heard anything. She is waiting to hear on her latest application.

The federal money was divided between a Louisiana statewide program and its largest parishes. Neither has gone well. The state has paid out \$10.5 million out of \$147 million, while Jefferson Parish has only distributed \$1.4 million out of \$12.9 million. The parish replaced the company overseeing the program after only \$236,000 was handed out by May.

"Where are we going to go?" asked Young, who lost her hospital job during the pandemic and now must stay home to care for her 7-month-old.

"This is all new, not something I thought I ever would have to deal with in my life," she said. "I have two children to think about. It's a lot."

Louisiana's struggles are playing out across the country as states rush to distribute nearly \$47 billion allocated by Congress for emergency rental assistance before a federal eviction moratorium ends July 31, putting millions at risk of losing their homes.

The historic amount — more than the Department of Housing and Urban Development's annual budget — was allocated in December and March.

Housing advocates blame the slow rollout partly on the Treasury Department under President Donald Trump that they say was slow to explain how the money could be spent. The criteria, while clearer under the Biden administration, was still criticized for a burdensome process that seemed more focused on preventing fraud than helping tenants.

Advocates also said states made things worse — some waited months to set up programs and others created bureaucratic hurdles.

As a result, little money has gone out. According to data released Friday from the Treasury Department, only \$1.5 billion was provided to about 350,000 households by May 31. That's less than 4% of the money allotted.

Missouri Rep. Cori Bush, a Democrat who has herself experienced eviction, said her office has received calls from families "who either don't know how to apply for the funds or who say the application is confusing and stressful."

"It's unconscionable that millions of dollars are sitting in the state's bank account, while families ... across Missouri are struggling to stay in their homes," she said.

"For many families, this assistance is the difference between coming home to an eviction notice or coming home to a safe place to lay their heads at night."

Some 3.4 million people could face eviction in the next two months, according to the latest U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey — a number some advocates say could be twice that.

Many tenants will be forced out into a red-hot housing market where prices are rising and vacancy rates plummeting. They also will be stuck with eviction and delinquent back-rent records that make it almost impossible to find new housing, leaving many to turn to homeless shelters or find dwellings in low-income neighborhoods without good schools and access to transportation and jobs.

Among those at risk is Freddie Davis, a 51-year-old Miami truck driver who lost his job during the pandemic and saw his rent increase from \$875 to \$1,400-a-month. He is \$7,000 behind on rent and fears his monthly \$1,038 disability check after he lost a leg to diabetes won't be enough to find another place. He applied for rental assistance, but his landlord refused to take it.

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"I'm worried as hell. I don't have no other place to go," said Davis, who has worked since he was 15 and never before been evicted. "In Miami, rent is sky high. I am going to sleep in my truck and put all my stuff in storage."

The National Low Income Housing Coalition found that of the 51 programs it has tracked so far, just 14% of funds allocated in December had been distributed. Most states aren't yet distributing the March money.

The Associated Press found states as varied as North Dakota and California facing difficulty getting assistance out. Georgia distributed only \$11 million of \$552 million, North Dakota provided \$3.4 million of \$200 million, North Carolina awarded \$73 million out of \$546 million and California \$73 million of \$1.4 billion. New York launched a \$2 billion program last month but expects it will be four to six weeks before it distributes anything.

The hurdles vary, according to a Housing Coalition survey in April, including lack of capacity to administer the program, technical difficulties setting it up and lack of cooperation from tenants and their landlords.

Some landlords refused to participate. Tenants sometimes didn't complete applications — often because they were required to provide proof of lost jobs or other financial hardship during the pandemic.

Some of the same problems emerged last year when states set aside nearly \$2.6 billion from the CARES Act for rental assistance.

A common refrain was that federal requirements were too onerous and the guidelines too stringent.

Erica Boggess, executive director of the West Virginia Housing Fund, which runs the state's rental assistance program, called it "time consuming" in explaining why it had distributed only \$8.7 million of \$200 million from the first round of funding.

"It's labor intensive," Boggess said of requirements that include verifying a COVID-19 hardship and documenting an applicant's income before going to a landlord for acceptance of the funds.

"It's frustrating for the tenant and probably landlords as well," she said. "We have to go through the process. It's just not something that can happen overnight."

California has made changes to its lengthy application, which could take three hours to complete. It reduced the number of required documents from as many as nine to as few as one; now it takes 30 minutes to fill out. It also expanded the languages on the program website from two to six.

Russ Heimerich, a spokesman for California's Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency, said the state initially followed Treasury rules aimed at preventing duplication of benefits and ensuring applicants were entitled to what they got. "Now we simply rely on a tenant's attestation that they had a COVID-19 financial hardship," he said.

Since March, the Treasury Department has required money to go directly to tenants, among other streamlining moves, and urged landlords be barred from evicting tenants for up to 90 days after the period covered by assistance.

"We need relief distributed now, before the eviction moratorium expires at the end of July," Susan Rice, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, said this week. "Renters at risk of eviction are desperate for that relief, and landlords need to cover their bills."

## 6 months after Capitol assault, corporate pledges fall flat

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — As shockwaves spread across the country from the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, corporate America took a stand against the lies that powered the mob. Or so it seemed.

Dozens of big companies, citing their commitment to democracy, pledged to avoid donating money to the 147 lawmakers who objected to Congress' certification of Joe Biden's victory on the false grounds that voting fraud stole the election from then-President Donald Trump.

It was a striking gesture by some of the most familiar names in business but, as it turns out, it was largely an empty one.

Six months later, many of those companies have resumed funneling cash to political action committees that benefit the election efforts of lawmakers whether they objected to the election certification or not.



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When it comes to seeking political influence through corporate giving, business as usual is back, if it ever left.

Walmart, Pfizer, Intel, General Electric and AT&T are among companies that announced their pledges on behalf of democracy in the days after Trump supporters stormed the Capitol in a violent bid to disrupt the transfer of power.

The companies contend that donating directly to a candidate is not the same as giving to a PAC that supports them. Given America's porous campaign finance laws, that's a distinction without a difference to campaign finance experts.

The companies' argument also glosses over the fact that, in large measure, they did their giving through PACs before their pledge, rather than to individuals, so in many cases nothing changed.

"Pledging not to give to a certain person doesn't mean that much when there are so many other ways that corporate money reaches elected officials," said Daniel Weiner, a former senior counsel at the Federal Election Commission who now works at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University's law school. "These pledges are largely symbolic."

Walmart's moral stand lasted three months. In January, the retail giant said it would suspend all donations to the 147 lawmakers who objected to the election results. But in April, the company gave \$30,000 to the National Republican Congressional Committee, the party organization that supports House Republicans in elections.

Two-thirds of those House members voted against certifying Biden's win.

Walmart gave an additional \$30,000 to the House committee's counterpart for Senate Republicans, the National Republican Senatorial Committee. That group is led by an objector to the election's certification, Sen. Rick Scott of Florida, who stands to benefit from the contribution along with seven other GOP senators who also sought to overturn the will of voters. Messages left with both committees by The Associated Press were not returned.

In January, after the attack, General Electric said it would "halt donations to lawmakers who voted against certification" because "we believe it is important to ensure that our future contributions continue to reflect our company's values and commitment to democracy." But that's not exactly what happened.

In April, General Electric gave \$15,000 each to the House and Senate GOP election groups.

Likewise, Pfizer pledged to suspend contributions to Republican objectors for six months. But after only three months, it gave \$20,000 to the GOP's Senate group. Pfizer spokeswoman Sharon Castillo told the AP that the company drew a distinction between giving money to individual lawmakers and to groups created to help those same lawmakers. "We just don't think it is an accurate connection," she said.

Yet she said Pfizer had no commitment from the Senate election committee that the company's donation would not be used to benefit the eight senators who voted against certification.

AT&T also pledged not to give money to lawmakers who objected, but the company sent \$5,000 in February to the House Conservatives Fund. Company spokeswoman Margaret Boles said AT&T received assurances the money would not flow to lawmakers who objected to election results, though the PAC is led by a lawmaker who did.

Campaign finance experts say there's no way to know whether the money given to Republican PACs will end up directly in the campaign accounts of incumbents who objected to the election results. These Republican committees, like the ones for Democrats, help incumbents in a variety of ways, whether through direct contributions or technical and professional help with voter data, advertising and get-out-the-vote assistance.

Moreover, corporate donations to the party committees do not include so-called dark money contributions given to groups that are not required to disclose details publicly. Dark money is a favored vehicle for corporate giving.

"It's completely frustrating from an accountability point of view," Ciara Torres-Spelliscy, a Stetson University Law School professor who studies corporate campaign finance.

Many of the lawmakers who objected to the certification leaned heavily on the GOP House and Senate election committees in the past and can be expected to want substantial help from them again.

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For the 2020 election, the NRCC passed along contributions to 39 Republican lawmakers who later objected to the election result, compared with 11 who did not. Altogether, the objectors of Jan. 6 got five times more money in total last year than did those who later voted to certify the states' electoral tallies.

Pfizer, GE, Walmart and other companies contacted by the AP said their criticism of lawmakers who objected to the election results stands.

For other companies, the pledges may just be a cynical attempt to look good in the eyes of the public. Few of the companies that made pledges tended to give big donations to individual lawmakers anyway, preferring the big party PACs or dark money groups.

Weiner said that if companies were serious about using their clout to support democracy, they would fund efforts to defeat Republican measures that would make it harder to vote in many states.

"I don't think these companies are giving to these groups because they supported the insurrection," Weiner said. "They give money — and are pressured to give money — for a lot reasons all related to their bottom line."

Some companies did follow through on their pledges. Hallmark, for instance, said it would not donate to objectors — and the record to date shows no PAC donations by that company this year as well as no direct giving to the 147 objectors.

Hallmark also asked two objectors, Republican Sens. Josh Hawley of Missouri and Roger Marshall of Kansas, to return direct contributions it made to them before the insurrection. Campaign finance records do not yet show those refunds. Messages seeking comment from the two senators were not returned.

Other companies said they would halt campaign contributions following Jan. 6 to give them time to reassess their campaign finance strategy. That list includes Charles Schwab, Citigroup, Archer Daniels Midland and Kraft Heinz.

The money given to Republican groups by companies that pledged not to support objectors is small compared with the huge amounts of cash given overall. Walmart's \$60,000 contribution to the GOP Senate and House committees is just a fraction of the company's overall political spending on both parties, which last year topped \$5 million.

Companies often give money to Democrats and Republicans alike as they try to cultivate good relations with whichever party is in power. The companies behind the pledges are no exception.

Jan. 6 seemed to shake up that calibration. The violent images from the Capitol were so visceral, the assault at the core of American democracy so extraordinary and the falsehoods behind the attack so audacious that some loyal Republicans abandoned their president and denounced the objectors in their ranks.

If the objectors got their way, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said that fraught night, "our democracy would enter a death spiral."

For a time, all but the 147 seemed on the side of the angels, and corporations jostled to get on board with their pro-democracy pledges. But the devil was in the details.

## National Spelling Bee stalwarts persevere through 2-year gap

By BEN NUCKOLS Associated Press

When the Scripps National Spelling Bee was canceled last year because of the pandemic, Avani Joshi didn't lament her lost year of preparation. She immediately pivoted to studying for competitions in her other favorite discipline: geography.

Then, about six months later, the 2020-21 geography bee season was canceled, so she returned to spelling, confident that Scripps would bring back the biggest academic competition on the calendar.

Avani also competes in Science Olympiad and quiz bowl. What if all of it had been wiped out?

"I would immerse myself in books, obviously. Books are always going to be there, so I have that guarantee that I can rely on books," the 13-year-old from Roscoe, Illinois, said. "I also like coding, so I also have that. I would try to learn a new language. My goal is actually to learn C++ this year, and, let's see, I would immerse myself in other things, honing my language skills, learning Spanish and Sanskrit."

The restless minds of Avani and other top spellers got lessons in patience and perseverance as COVID-19

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forced them into lockdown. Spellers prepare for the bee year-round, drilling for hours a day, often with the help of pricey study guides and private coaches. Their competitive window is small: Spellers can't compete after the eighth grade, and it's rare for kids to have more than one real shot at winning.

The two-year gap between bees only strengthened the resolve of many spellers — including Avani, who will be competing in the finals Thursday night at an ESPN campus in Florida — to maximize their potential.

"My love for spelling is what has kept me going. If you don't truly have a passion for spelling, the quarantine could be really, really hard for you," said another finalist, 13-year-old Akshainie Kamma of Round Rock, Texas.

The disappointment of 2020 was most sorely felt by that year's eighth-graders, who were robbed of their last and best opportunity to win the Scripps trophy and unsuccessfully petitioned the Cincinnati-based media company to host a virtual or limited-participation bee.

Those who competed two years ago but were still eligible this year struggled with a different challenge: lack of motivation.

"I pushed through it," said Akshita Balaji, a 14-year-old semifinalist from Herndon, Virginia. "My passion kind of went down a little bit. I was a little de-motivated and everything, but I was still studying."

The bee itself underwent major changes since the last in-person competition, which ended in an eight-way tie because Scripps' word list wasn't strong enough to challenge the champion spellers. Last December, bee executive director Paige Kimble — herself a former champion — stepped down.

J. Michael Durnil, a longtime nonprofit leader, took over and shepherded the bee's return in a mostly virtual format, while adding vocabulary questions and a lightning-round tiebreaker to ensure the bee would conclude with a single winner.

Only the 11 finalists will compete in person because the ongoing threat of COVID-19 made it too risky to plan months in advance for a large in-person gathering during the bee's traditional spot on the calendar, the week before Memorial Day. The early rounds of the bee were stretched over a few weeks, concluding with last Sunday's semifinals.

Changes to the rules and format of the bee often provoke strong reactions within the spelling community. Vocabulary questions, for example, had only been included on written tests before this year, and some believe they detract from the singular skill of figuring out on the fly how to spell an unfamiliar, crazy-sounding word.

But the pandemic and last year's cancellation have put such minor changes in perspective.

"The knowledge, the experience and the learning that I've gained from the pandemic, it's definitely taught me to adapt better," Vayun Krishna, a 14-year-old from Sunnyvale, California, said before he was eliminated in the semifinals. "If this didn't happen, if they'd introduced vocab I'd be in more of a panic, but now I feel like I'm taking it in stride."

The in-person bee is more than just a competition, of course. It's a weeklong celebration — wholesome and unapologetically nerdy — that brings together a few hundred ambitious kids who share a peculiar passion.

Akshainie learned invaluable lessons from her fellow spellers in 2019, and she laments the loss of those social opportunities. Nonetheless, she thinks she benefited from isolation.

"Before the pandemic, it was like everybody's watching you and everybody's expecting something from you," she said. "At home, I was alone and I was able to work for myself and not everybody else."

Avani, who was nervous on stage two years ago and misspelled a word she knew, used the time off to embrace sangfroid — "which means calm," she explained, because she's a speller.

"I could work on meditation a lot, worked on techniques to calm my nerves," she said. "Yoga has also helped a lot over this past year. All these things have given me time to work on my weaknesses, which were prevalent back in sixth grade."

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## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, July 5, the 186th day of 2021. There are 179 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 5, 1971, President Richard Nixon certified the 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which lowered the minimum voting age from 21 to 18.

On this date:

In 1687, Isaac Newton first published his Principia Mathematica, a three-volume work setting out his mathematical principles of natural philosophy.

In 1811, Venezuela became the first South American country to declare independence from Spain.

In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the National Labor Relations Act.

In 1943, the Battle of Kursk began during World War II; in the weeks that followed, the Soviets were able to repeatedly repel the Germans, who eventually withdrew in defeat.

In 1947, Larry Doby made his debut with the Cleveland Indians, becoming the first Black player in the American League three months after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in the National League. In the game against the Chicago White Sox at Comiskey Park, Doby, pinch-hitting for Bryan Stephens, struck out in his first at-bat during the seventh inning; Chicago won 6-5.

In 1948, Britain's National Health Service Act went into effect, providing publicly-financed medical and dental care.

In 1954, Elvis Presley's first commercial recording session took place at Sun Records in Memphis, Tennessee; the song he recorded was "That's All Right."

In 1975, Arthur Ashe became the first Black man to win a Wimbledon singles title as he defeated Jimmy Connors, 6-1, 6-1, 5-7, 6-4.

In 1977, Pakistan's army, led by General Mohammad Zia ul-Haq, seized power from President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (ZUL'-fih-kahr ah-LEE' BOO'-toh). (Bhutto was executed in 1979.)

In 2003, Serena Williams beat sister Venus 4-6, 6-4, 6-2 for her second straight Wimbledon title.

In 2009, a bankruptcy judge ruled that General Motors Corp. could sell the bulk of its assets to a new company, clearing the way for the automaker to emerge from bankruptcy protection.

In 2015, the first pope from Latin America, Francis, landed in Ecuador, returning to South America for the first time bearing a message of solidarity with the region's poor.

Ten years ago: A jury in Orlando, Florida, found Casey Anthony, 25, not guilty of murder, manslaughter and child abuse in the 2008 disappearance and death of her 2-year-old daughter, Caylee.

Five years ago: The FBI recommended no criminal charges for Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server, but Director James Comey's scathing criticism of her "extremely careless" handling of classified material revitalized Republican attacks. President Barack Obama heartily vouched for Hillary Clinton's trustworthiness and dedication, making his first outing on the campaign stump for his former secretary of state with an appearance in Charlotte, North Carolina. Republican Donald Trump praised former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's ruthlessness, saying in Raleigh, North Carolina, that while Saddam was a "bad guy," he "killed terrorists. He did that so good."

One year ago: A French bus driver was violently beaten and kicked in the head after he asked four passengers to wear masks that were required because of the coronavirus pandemic; the driver died days later. A statue of abolitionist Frederick Douglass was ripped from its base in Rochester, N.Y., on the anniversary of a speech he delivered there in 1852; the damaged statue was found 50 feet away.

Today's Birthdays: Singer-musician Robbie Robertson is 78. Julie Nixon Eisenhower is 73. Rock star Huey Lewis is 71. Baseball Hall of Fame pitcher Rich "Goose" Gossage is 70. Country musician Charles Ventre is 69. Singer-songwriter Marc Cohn is 62. Actor John Marshall Jones is 59. Actor Dorian Wilson is 59. Actor Edie Falco is 58. Actor Jillian Armenante is 57. Actor Kathryn Erbe (er-BEE') is 56. Actor Michael Stuhlbarg (STOOL'-bahrg) is 53. Country musician Brent Flynn (Flynnville Train) is 52. Rapper RZA (RIH'-zuh) is 52. R&B singer Joe is 48. Rock musician Bengt Lagerberg (The Cardigans) is 48. Actor Dale Godboldo is 46.

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Rapper Bizarre is 45. Rapper Royce da 5'9" is 44. Rock singer Jason Wade (Lifehouse) is 41. Actor Ryan Hansen is 40. Country musician Dave Haywood (Lady A) is 39. Rock musician Nick O'Malley (Arctic Monkeys) is 36. Actor Jason Dolley is 30. California Angels pitcher and designated hitter Shohei Ohtani is 27.