

Groton Daily Independent

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-KAREN MUELLER COOMBS



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Spotlight on Groton Area Staff



Name: Sydney Kurtz

Position: High School Special Education Teacher

Length of Employment: 2019-Present

As part of Groton Area High School's Special Education program, there are various staff members who assist special needs students with their classwork and studying. Each student has different strengths and weaknesses and may require different tools or strategies to grasp the concepts benign taught in the classroom. As such, the faculty who work with special needs students must be able to adapt, improvise, and overcome difficulties alongside the student. Sydney Kurtz is a respected member of the faculty who work in the Learning Lab section of the high school. She exemplifies the idea that teachers who work with special needs students, no matter their background or experience, must be able to adapt to whatever roles

they take on.

Before working at Groton Area High School, Mrs. Kurtz spent five years working at the Teddy Bear Day-care in Groton. After her work at the daycare, she worked as a nanny for various families for eight years, and spent two years after that as a 7th Grade Special Education teacher at Simmons Middle School. After her work at Simmons, Mrs. Kurtz began her tenure at the Groton Area High School, where she has just finished her third year.

Mrs. Kurtz fills a variety of roles in the school, but there are certain duties she excels with. The primary part of her duties as a Special Education teacher is working with 9th and 10th Grade students who are on an IEP Plan or 504 Plan. She assists these students with daily work from their classes, along with providing the accommodations outlined on their 504 or IEP plan. Mrs. Kurtz also participates in various meetings, works with the 11th grade students in Algebra I, and assists students who are learning remotely by gathering their daily work and streaming their classes to them through Zoom.

When she is not working at school, Sydney spends her free time with her husband and daughter. She also enjoys travelling to the lake, visiting her family in Rapid City, and cheering on her husband while he coaches. Mrs. Kurtz and her husband are excitedly awaiting another child, due to arrive in August.

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



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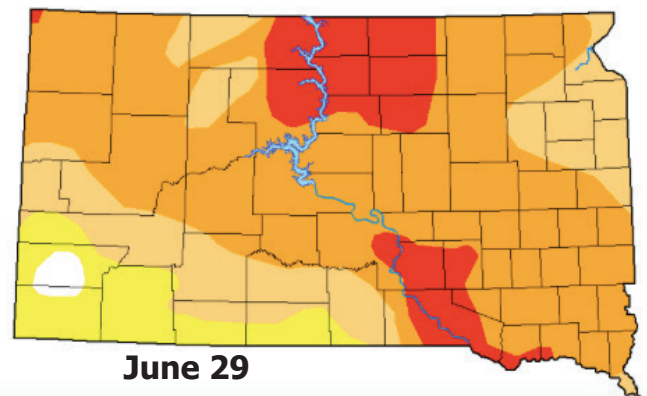
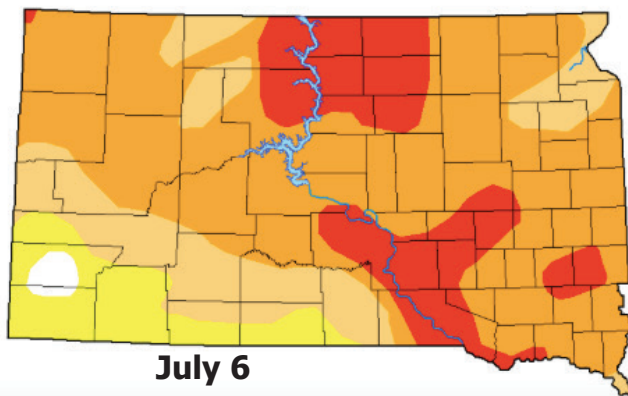
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



High Plains

Another hot, dry week across the northern tier of the region, coupled with isolated showers, brought a mix of degradations and improvements. Drought expanded in parts of Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska that missed out on the heaviest rainfall. Soils remain dry with USDA reporting that 92% of South Dakota and 76% of North Dakota's topsoil moisture is short to very short, leading to limited hay production and stunted crop growth. Land enrolled in the Conservation Program has been opened to haying and grazing in some areas and producers are needing to monitor toxicity levels in hay and water supplies. Drought conditions improved in parts of Wyoming and eastern Nebraska, as showers over the last two weeks helped erase rainfall deficits, improve streamflow, and replenish soil moisture. In North Dakota, rainfall is finally helping to chip away at the long-term drought that has plagued the state since fall of 2020.

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Spike in suicides in South Dakota causing fears of emerging mental-health crisis

Danielle Ferguson

South Dakota News Watch

A significant spike in the number of suicides in South Dakota in the first three months of 2021 has put the state on pace for a record year for suicide deaths and has prevention experts worried that a long-range mental-health crisis may be emerging.

New data from the state Department of Health show that from January through March 2021, 59 people died by suicide in South Dakota. By comparison, 28 suicide deaths were reported in the first three months of 2020, and 40 suicide deaths occurred in the first three months of 2019.

If the pace of deaths in early 2021 continues, the state would see a record 236 suicides in 2021, a 27% increase in deaths compared to 2020, when there were 186 suicide deaths, and a 70% jump over 2010, when 139 people died by suicide.

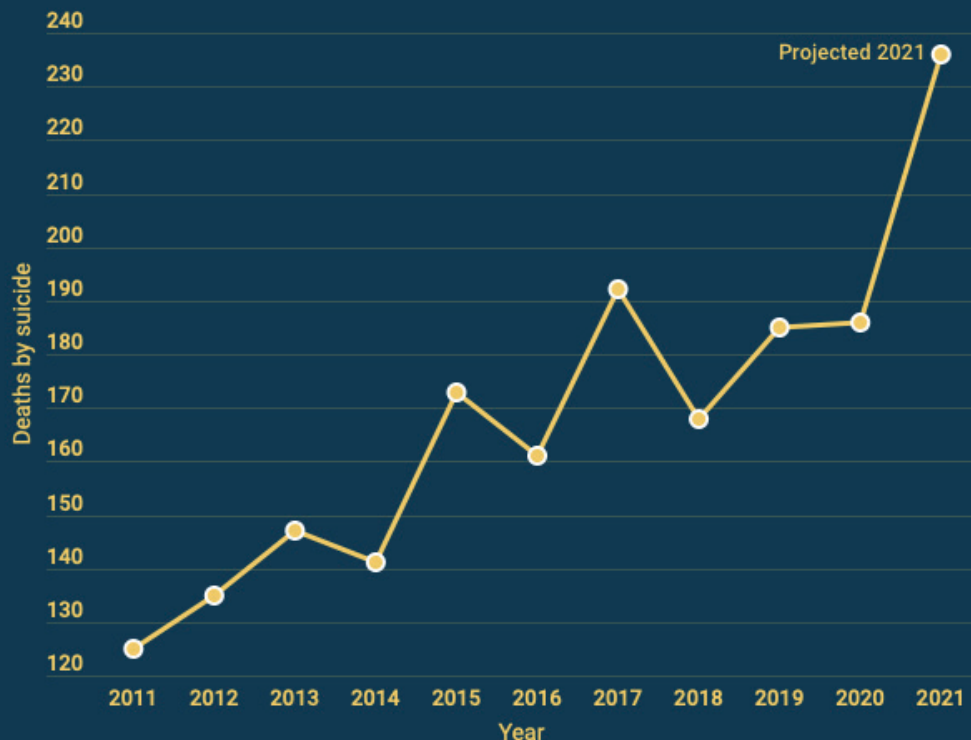
State officials have not yet reported data regarding age, gender, ethnicity and location of the 2021 suicide deaths, but prevention experts are increasingly concerned that young adults and health-care workers may be at higher risk and that school-age children face the greatest risk.

Lingering stress from the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with existing mental-health conditions are seen as possible causes for the rise in suicides in early 2021.

State prevention experts were surprised by the rapid rise in suicides because the rest of the nation saw declining suicide deaths in 2020 and because

South Dakota deaths by suicide

If current pace of suicides for 2021 continues, the state could see 236 suicides by the end of the year.



Source: South Dakota Department of Health 2021 Provisional Mortality Report

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Thomas Otten

the number of suicides in South Dakota in 2020 and 2019 went virtually unchanged.

In South Dakota, 186 people died by suicide in 2020, compared with 185 in 2019 and 168 in 2018. Suicide is the the ninth-leading cause of death in South Dakota, but it is the second-leading cause among residents ages 15 to 34, according to the Helpline Center, a statewide suicide prevention agency.

Pennington County, home to Rapid City, has seen a significant number of suicides so far in 2021, with 21 deaths reported in the first six months of the year compared to 34 deaths in all of 2020, according to a local suicide prevention organization.

Meanwhile, requests for help related to suicide are also up so far this year. The Helpline Center has received 1,163 suicide-related calls from across South Dakota in the first six months of this year, compared to 941 calls at this time last year.

More people were admitted to Avera Behavioral Health over the past 12 months than during that same time frame in previous years. Normally, about 6,000 admissions are made each fiscal year. From July 2019 to June 2020, there were about 5,300 admissions. From July 2020 to June

2021, there were more than 6,700 people admitted.

Most of those admitted to the hospital have made a plan or intend to die by suicide, said Thomas Otten, assistant vice president for behavioral health services at Avera Health.

"That's a pretty good indication that there are more attempts at suicide happening in our region," he said.

The first quarter 2021 mortality data does not include information from the Indian Health Service, which did not respond to a data request for this story. Historically, however, the suicide rate for Native American residents of South Dakota is estimated to be about 2.5 times higher than the rate for caucasians, according to the department of health.

Suicide prevention specialists say they saw a recent rise in attempts and deaths by suicide among people in their 20s and 30s. In Pennington County alone, 12 of the 34 people who died by suicide last year were in the 20-39 age group, according to the Front Porch Coalition.

While specific age data for the last year was not yet available, advocates say they've seen more children with suicidal thoughts over the past year. Multiple new programs aimed at youth suicide prevention and training for youth on how to detect warning signs have started across the state in response.

The Helpline Center recently started mental health training for students in grades 10-12 to learn about suicide warning signs. The Front Porch Coalition and Rapid City Police Department started a program in the fall that works with children who are considered at high risk for suicide or with those who know someone who died by suicide.

"Kids particularly had a difficult time with COVID-19," said Otten. "Their friends were taken away from them. Doing school all online is a very different experience than doing it in person. A lot of kids struggled with those kinds of things."

In South Dakota, hospitals typically see a dip in youth admissions during the summer months. That has yet to happen this year.

"Our population has not dipped as much in the summer as



Katy Sullivan

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usually we expect," said Katy Sullivan, director of Monument Health Behavioral Health Center. "We expect youth admissions to decrease in summer, when they're outside and not in school, but we're not seeing that dip with our teen and child population."

Mental health professionals say some South Dakotans have been coping with financial, physical and emotional tolls wrought by the pandemic on top of existing mental health conditions, and lingering stigma around seeking help could put more people's mental health in jeopardy.

Deaths by suicide typically increase within two years of a natural disaster, which could include the pandemic that began in January 2020 and is still causing illnesses and deaths, said Bridget Swier, director of communications and outreach at the Front Porch Coalition, a suicide prevention and support group in Pennington County.

"Generally, when a natural disaster hits, the community rallies together, neighbors help each other out, and we find ways to help each other. That sense of community was strong during the pandemic, but toward the end, as people go back to their lives, that sense of togetherness isn't as strong," Swier said. "I think we're just beginning to see long-lasting impacts in regard to mental health."

Now that people in South Dakota and across the country are re-entering into what many consider a "normal life" in the post-pandemic era, the transition can be difficult for people who experienced any kind of loss during the pandemic, such as losing a job, losing a loved one to COVID-19 or losing friends over political arguments.

"We can't expect people to go back to living like it's 2019," said Sheri Nelson, Suicide Prevention Director at the Helpline Center.

The jump in suicides in the winter months of January through March in South Dakota is somewhat unusual compared to typical patterns of depression, one expert said.

Suicide deaths typically increase in the springtime and taper off in the summer, experts said. There are psychological and physical aspects to the spring that can exacerbate mental health conditions. Spring is usually a time for rejuvenation after a long, cold winter. But for people with mental health concerns, seeing others enjoy a fresh start may make them feel even worse for not being happier after winter.

"Those who may have spent the winter depressed find themselves, in the spring, still depressed, but with the energy and motivation to take their own life," Adam Kaplin, Johns Hopkins psychiatrist, said in a recent Johns Hopkins publication.

Deaths by suicide across the nation decreased last year. According to preliminary statistics published by the National Center for Health Statistics in March 2021, there were 44,814 suicides reported in 2020, compared with 47,511 in 2019 and 48,344 in 2018.

Detailed national data about suicide deaths and attempts usually lag about two years behind the current date, but smaller-scale studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that more people were showing symptoms of depression or anxiety and having suicidal thoughts last year, despite a decrease in the number of suicides.

A CDC study released in August 2020, however, showed that 10% of people said they had suicidal thoughts within the past 30 days. In 2018, a similar survey found that 4% of people said they had con-



Sheri Nelson, suicide prevention director for the Helpline Center, shows the new 211 app for cell phones. Users can look up mental health help specific to their county, and anyone can also call 211 or the state suicide hotline at 1-800-273-8255 at any time for help. Photo: Danielle Ferguson, South Dakota News Watch

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The 211 Helpline Center has a variety of publications aimed at helping people in crisis.

Photo: Danielle Ferguson, South Dakota News Watch

sidered suicide in the previous 12 months.

Even though nationally fewer people were reported to have died by suicide last year, experts say that doesn't indicate a decrease in rates of suicidal thoughts or other mental health issues.

"There wasn't a dip in suicidality. There was a dip in reports and people coming into the hospital," Sullivan said. "More people were trying to deal with things on their own. They didn't want to come to the hospital and risk an exposure to COVID-19."

More healthcare professionals were in need of mental health aid over the last year and a half, advocates said. Medical professionals already had higher rates of suicide risk than most other professions before the pandemic. That risk was exacerbated by increased workloads and fear of COVID-19 infection. Because of that increased risk, Avera recently started a hotline specific to healthcare professionals, where any healthcare worker can get free confidential conversations over the phone.

Many who called into the Helpline Center said they didn't want to burden friends or family with their problems, Nelson said. That and a negative stigma around receiving help for mental health issues could have contributed to the decrease in people who reached out.

Negative stigma around mental health and suicide is particularly strong in the Midwest, Swier said. The stigmatization often prevents people from seeking help, especially men in their 40s, one of the most prevalent groups of people who die by suicide in South Dakota.

"We're hard workers. We pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. We don't talk about our feelings and we get our work done," Swier said. "If there's stigma, who is going to be comfortable saying, 'I'm having a tough time?'"

Swier said individuals who want to be supportive can educate themselves on the warning signs of suicide and support suicide prevention organizations. Suicide prevention is "everyone's business," Swier said.

"If you are struggling, it's OK to reach out and get help," Nelson said. "There is help out there. It's normal to talk about mental illness, to talk about addiction, to talk about suicide. We want to get rid of that stigma so people will come forward."

HOW TO GET HELP IN A CRISIS

Here are some resources to get help for yourself or someone else who may be considering suicide.

The Helpline Center: Callers across the state can obtain county-specific resource information and be connected to a suicide hotline.

Call: 211 or 1-800-273-8255

Text: Text your zip code to 898211

Front Porch Coalition: 605-348-6692

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 (TALK)

Crisis Text Line: Text CONNECT to 741741

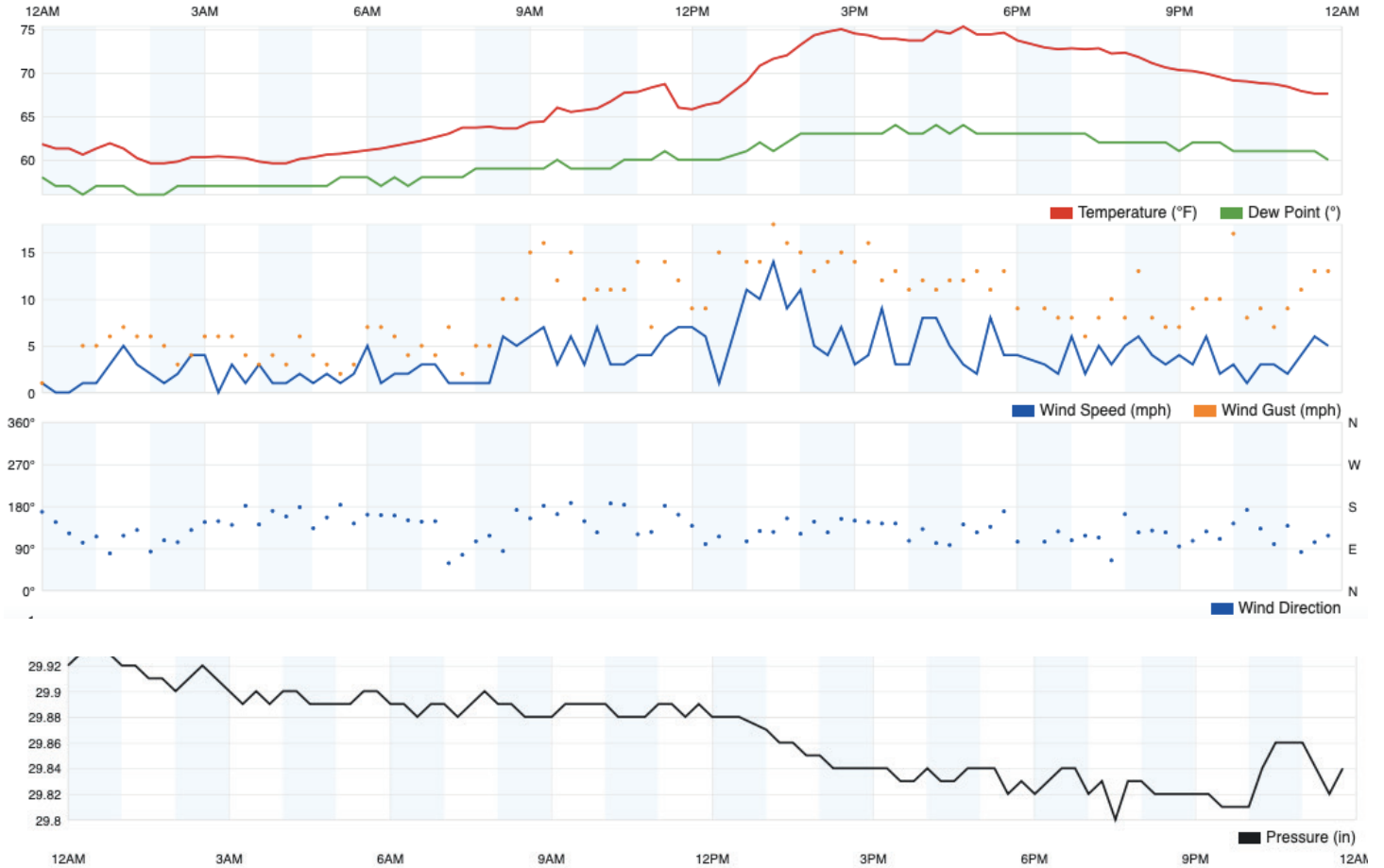
Trans Lifeline: 1-877-565-8860

The Trevor Project: 1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678678

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
 30%	 40%	 40%	 20%	
Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Slight Chance T-storms then Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 80 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 79 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 84 °F

Timing Out Precipitation Chances

	7/9 Fri						7/10 Sat								7/11 Sun						
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm
Aberdeen	38	30	17	20	20	25	34	42	42	39	38	22	17	4	4	1	1	1	1	1	1
Britton	29	26	18	23	21	17	29	33	32	27	26	13	12	3	3	1	2	2	2	2	2
Eagle Butte	10	10	10	17	28	45	67	64	55	40	37	26	18	3	3	0	2	2	2	2	4
Eureka	23	20	17	27	32	37	63	62	56	41	38	21	16	3	3	1	2	2	2	2	2
Gettysburg	17	11	16	21	23	27	46	65	63	49	47	29	21	4	4	1	1	1	1	0	3
Kennebec	10	9	10	11	24	28	55	66	66	63	63	44	31	10	10	2	2	1	1	1	2
McIntosh	27	22	19	34	34	46	55	53	46	36	34	12	11	2	2	0	2	2	2	2	5
Milbank	18	21	18	14	13	8	16	23	25	26	26	19	16	5	5	2	2	2	3	3	3
Miller	12	10	10	10	18	23	41	51	51	50	50	35	24	5	5	1	1	1	1	0	1
Mobridge	28	14	18	27	28	34	56	63	61	46	43	21	16	3	3	1	2	2	2	2	3
Murdo	8	9	10	13	42	53	62	64	63	57	56	41	29	8	8	1	2	2	2	2	2
Pierre	9	10	10	12	26	32	51	64	63	55	54	38	25	5	5	1	1	1	1	0	3
Redfield	20	16	14	12	18	25	37	44	44	42	42	29	21	5	5	1	1	1	1	0	1
Sisseton	17	19	17	20	17	10	20	27	26	22	21	13	12	3	3	1	2	2	2	2	2
Watertown	21	19	17	13	12	9	17	28	29	30	30	22	18	6	6	2	2	2	2	2	2
Wheaton	16	21	18	19	16	9	17	20	19	15	14	11	11	3	3	1	2	2	2	2	2

* Table values in %

**Created: 2 am CDT Fri 7/9/2021

***Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.

Updated: 7/9/2021 3:11 AM Central



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

In the current weather pattern we are in, the main highlight is rain chances over the next 36 hours or so. There are a couple of areas of low pressure that will exert some influence on the region today through Saturday, in the form of isolated to widely scattered showers and thunderstorms today, and then scattered to numerous coverage of showers with embedded thunder later tonight into Saturday. Things should dry out for Sunday into the beginning of the next work week, and temperatures do not appear to stray very far from July climate normals during the next few days.

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Today in Weather History

July 9, 1938: A deadly, estimated F4 tornado moved ESE across the eastern edge of Andover to the north of Bristol. Seventeen buildings were destroyed at Andover, and at least one home was completely swept away. Seven homes and a church also suffered damage. One person was killed at the western edge of Andover, and a couple died in a house at the southern side of town. About two hours later, another estimated F4 tornado moved ENE from 2 miles northeast of White, South Dakota in Brookings County to Hendricks, Minnesota. Only one person was injured from this storm.

July 9, 1972: Wind gusts up to 89 mph caused considerable damage in the Pierre and Oahe Dam area. A drive-in movie screen was destroyed. A camper trailer was turned over pinning seven members of a family inside. Five of them were hospitalized. Numerous trees were uprooted at the Oahe Dam campground. A tourist information building was caved in. Hail broke out car windows on ten vehicles.

July 9, 2009: Severe storms developed over Fall River County and moved eastward across southwestern and south central South Dakota. The thunderstorms produced large hail and strong wind gusts. Two tornadoes were observed in Todd County, and two tornadoes touched down in southern Tripp County. A small EF-1 tornado tracked across Dog Ear Township from 311th Avenue to near the intersection of 289th Street and 312th Avenue, on a little over a one-mile track. The storm blew down large cottonwood trees.

July 9, 2013: A pair of severe storms moved across northeastern South Dakota during the evening hours of the 9th. These storms caused extensive damage to crops, mainly west of Frederick in Brown County where beans and corn fields were destroyed. As the storms moved from Barnard, through Columbia, and into the Groton area, the hail increased to baseball size. There was also some structural damage to siding along with broken windows.

1860 - A hot blast of air in the middle of a sweltering summer pushed the mercury up to 115 degrees at Fort Scott and Lawrence, KS. (David Ludlum)

1882 - Ice formed on the streets of Cheyenne, WY, during a rare summer freeze. (David Ludlum)

1936 - The temperature hit an all-time record high of 106 degrees at the Central Park Observatory in New York City, a record which lasted until LaGuardia Airport hit 107 degrees on July 3rd in 1966. (The Weather Channel)

1968 - Columbus, MS received 15.68 inches of rain in 24 hours to establish a record for the state. (The Weather Channel)

1979: Hurricane Bob was born in the Gulf of Mexico, becoming the first Atlantic Hurricane to be given a male name.

1987 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in Michigan. A tornado near Munising, MI, destroyed part of a commercial dog kennel, and one of the missing dogs was later found unharmed in a tree top half a mile away. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Twenty-three cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Alpena, MI, and Buffalo, NY, suffered through their sixth straight day of record heat. The percentage of total area in the country in the grips of severe to extreme drought reached 43 percent, the fourth highest total of record. The record of 61 percent occurred during the summer of 1934. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Morning thunderstorms produced very heavy rain in southern Lower Michigan and northern Indiana. Up to 5.6 inches of rain was reported in Berrien County, MI. Sioux Falls SD reported a record high of 108 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1997: Torrential rains in the Carpathian Mountains caused severe flooding in the Czech Republic, Poland, and German. In all, 104 people died as a result of the deluge. In the aftermath, authorities from each country blamed the others for the extent of the disaster.

2007: The Argentine capital experiences its first major snowfall since June 22, 1918, as wet snow spreads a thin white mantle over the area. The storm hits on Argentina's Independence Day holiday thus adding to a festive air. Thousands of Argentines cheer the event, throwing snowballs in the streets. Local radio stations dust off an old tango song inspired by the 1918 snowfall: What a night!

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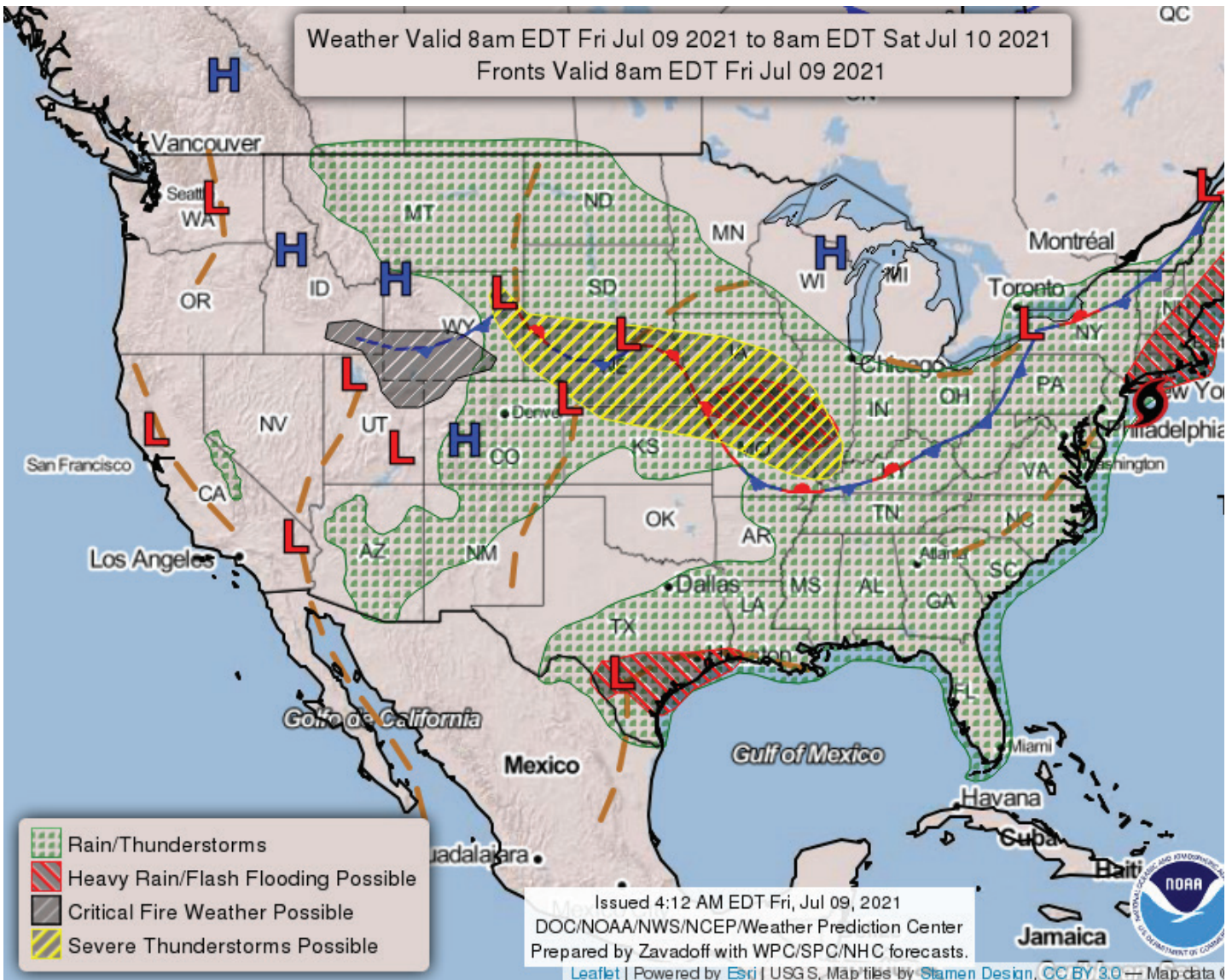
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 75 °F at 4:54 PM
Low Temp: 60 °F at 4:23 AM
Wind: 18 mph at 1:26 PM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 115° in 1936
Record Low: 42° in 1981
Average High: 85°F
Average Low: 60°F
Average Precip in July.: 0.94
Precip to date in July.: 0.68
Average Precip to date: 11.95
Precip Year to Date: 5.43
Sunset Tonight: 9:23 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:56 a.m.



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STAY CLOSE: AVOID DISASTER

"That sure was close, Mom," said Little George.

"What do you mean?" asked his mother.

"Well, I got three days behind in my prayers and when I heard the thunder and saw the lightning, I prayed really hard and got caught up and now I'm not afraid."

We all allow "gaps" to develop in our prayer life. When things are going the way we want them to go and there are no serious problems to deal with, it's easy to "let up" on the time we spend with God in prayer.

This life style is not uncommon. In fact, the Psalmist came to the same conclusion when he wrote, "But as for me, it is good to be near God."

We have all met people in life that keep everyone at a distance. Whether they don't want to know us or they don't want us to know them may never be clear. But we feel the separation and there is not much, if anything, we can do about it. So, we move on.

But with God, it is different. We can get as close to Him as we desire. In fact, we all know that drawing close to God is something that He wants us to do. His gracious invitation "come to me" is always available.

Life is like an "incline." If we are not walking upward toward Him, we are slipping downward and away from Him. My mother once said to me, "Larry, if you are not as close to God as you once were, you are the one who has moved." And she added, "If you draw close to Him, He will get closer to you."

God not only waits for us to come to Him, but constantly calls: "Come to Me."

Prayer: Lord, may we feel Your presence each moment of every day and stay closer to You than our best friend. Help me to make You my "best friend." In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: But as for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign Lord my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do. Psalm 73:28

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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

2 tribal members join voter lawsuit against South Dakota

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Two Native American people announced Thursday they were joining a lawsuit against South Dakota alleging that state agencies failed to offer voter registration services.

The two tribal members, along with the Lakota People's Law Project, said they were asking a federal district judge to allow them to join a lawsuit that alleges state agencies are breaking federal law by not providing ample opportunities to register to vote or update voter registration information at places like motor vehicle and public assistance offices near Native American reservations.

Federal law requires the agencies to help people register to vote at those kinds of offices, including ones that provide public assistance or serve people with disabilities. The Oglala Sioux Tribe and the Rosebud Sioux Tribe initiated the legal challenge last year.

The state has denied those allegations in court documents and asked that the lawsuit be dismissed.

The tribes have argued that state practices already make it difficult for Native American people to register to vote. They alleged that they have documented instances in which people tried to register their votes at state agency offices but were turned away.

"Native voters in South Dakota have found it harder and harder to perform the simple act of registering to vote," said Rosebud Sioux Tribe President Rodney M. Bordeaux in a statement. "As the number of registered voters plummets, the state has done nothing to fix this systemic problem."

Kimberly Dillon, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, joined the lawsuit after alleging that she attempted to vote in a 2020 election but was turned away at the polls because she was not registered to vote. She said that she had tried to register to vote on two occasions at state offices.

The other person joining the lawsuit, Standing Rock Sioux tribal member Hoksila White Mountain, argues in court documents that his campaign for mayor of McLaughlin, a city on the tribe's reservation, was hurt by state voter registration practices. He alleges city officials rejected his petition to qualify for the ballot because some of the signatories were not registered to vote in the county, even though they should have been given opportunities to register to vote at state agency offices.

Secretary of State Steve Barnett declined to comment, saying it was pending litigation.

Midco® Invests \$500 Million in Next Gen Fiber

SIOUX FALLS, S.D.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Jul 8, 2021--

Midco is leaping ahead with Fiber Forward, an expansive investment that uses the company's robust fiber network and next gen fiber tech to bring 10 Gig (10G) speeds to the region.

"Fiber Forward is an investment in people. This transformative fiber upgrade will benefit the many folks that we serve," said Midco President & CEO Pat McAdaragh. "Two years ago, we announced our vision to bring 10G to everyone. It will provide fast symmetrical speeds, low latency, unmatched reliability, and rock-solid security. After much research and testing, we're set to deploy a mix of next gen fiber technologies to our customers."

Fiber Forward will begin this year and deliver fiber upgrades, enhanced product offerings, and increased performance.

"Just a few short years ago, a 100 Mbps internet connection was considered amazingly fast. Yet, we continued to innovate, deploying gigabit to our Midco footprint," said Jon Pederson, Midco's Chief Technology Innovation Officer. "The pandemic then turned the world upside down, forcing people to work and learn from home. It created an intense need for video conferencing and other high demand applications. Our network performed remarkably well, due in large part to that gigabit upgrade. We know technical innovation will accelerate. Fiber Forward ensures our network can support whatever revolutionary technology comes our way."

SD Supreme Court: Teen didn't make terrorist threats

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A student who uttered the word "bomb" at school and said he wanted to kill someone while holding a pair of scissors shouldn't have been found delinquent, the South Dakota Supreme Court has ruled.

KELO-TV reported that the court ruled unanimously Wednesday to reverse Circuit Judge Kent Shelton's finding that the 15-year-old student's actions didn't meet the legal standards for making a terrorist threat.

According to the ruling, the student was sent to the principal's office at his high school in January 2020 for "egging on" a student with a behavioral issue.

An office assistant said she heard the boy say the word "bomb" as he was walking in and out of the office, said something about killing someone, grabbed a pair of scissors and said he could just kill someone. He then put the scissors down, laughed, said he was only kidding, sat down, left, came back and laid on the floor, the assistant said.

The court's ruling does not name the high school and refers to the student only as I.T.B.

Justice Scott Myren wrote that police didn't find any explosive devices, not enough context exists around the student saying "bomb" to determine he was threatening violence and only one person heard him make the remarks while holding the scissors.

New B-21 bomber headed to Ellsworth Air Force Base

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The U.S. Air Force's new B-21 Raider bomber will be stationed first at a base near Rapid City.

The bomber will be stationed at Ellsworth Air Force Base sometime in the mid-2020s, the Rapid City Journal reported Wednesday. According to the Air Force, the bomber will be tested at Edwards Air Force Base in California before it becomes active at Ellsworth.

The B-21 is intended to replace the B-1 Lancer and B-2 Spirit bombers to form a two-bomber fleet of B-21s and modified B-52s.

The Air Force awarded the B-21 design and manufacturing contract to Northrop Grumman in 2015. Plans call for constructing at least 100 B-21s at an average cost of about \$639 million each.

Wyoming governor weighs border assistance in Arizona, Texas

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — Wyoming is looking at how it might send National Guard troops or other help to bolster security at the Mexico border, Gov. Mark Gordon said.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey, who like Gordon are Republicans, wrote other governors last month seeking help dealing with what they called a "crisis" at the border.

"We will continue to evaluate available resources to support this effort to protect our country without compromising public safety here in Wyoming," Gordon said in a statement Wednesday.

Gordon already has offered "aerial assets valued up to \$250,000" but it was determined that might not be the best approach, according to the statement.

North and South Dakota have announced they would each send 125 troops. In both states, the effort is being funded by federal money, though a private donation paid for an earlier contingent of 50 South Dakota troops.

With Wyoming's potential mission undefined, how any aid might be paid for also was unclear, the Casper Star-Tribune reported.

"There will not be any private funds as far as we know. Funding is an open question," Gordon spokesman Michael Pearlman said. "We do have the funds to do this. We wouldn't make the offer unless we had the funds."

A Democratic state lawmaker questioned the expenditure after a year of major budget cuts amid the coronavirus pandemic and a downturn in revenue from the fossil fuel industries.

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"Of all the things we spend money on while initiating budget cuts, sending anything to the border isn't one that helps Wyoming," said Rep. Mike Yin, D-Jackson, who is a member of the Legislature's Joint Revenue Committee.

Illegal border crossings have increased this year, prompting Republican criticism of President Joe Biden. About 3,000 Guard members from several states already are involved in a federal mission at the border.

Fatal shooting by deputies near Rapid City deemed justified

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The fatal shooting of a suburban Rapid City man by Pennington County sheriff's deputies has been deemed to be a justified use of deadly force, according to South Dakota's Division of Criminal Investigation.

The DCI on Thursday released a summary of its investigation into the fatal shooting of 24-year-old Ty Stilwell in Rapid Valley on May 14.

According to investigators, deputies were called to a domestic disturbance by a relative who said Stilwell was intoxicated and physically and verbally fighting with family members. When deputies arrived, they found Stilwell armed with a rifle.

Deputies said Stilwell refused commands to drop the weapon, yelled profanities, then raised and shouldered the gun in the direction of the person who had called 911. Stilwell was shot as a result, the DCI said.

The investigation and summary have been reviewed and deemed justified by Minnehaha County State's Attorney Daniel Haggar.

The Meade County Sheriff's Office and South Dakota Highway Patrol assisted in the investigation.

Ted Turner to give land to nonprofit but keep paying taxes

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Media mogul and billionaire bison rancher Ted Turner is donating an 80,000-acre ranch he owns in western Nebraska to his own nonprofit agriculture ecosystem research institute and says he might do the same with four other ranches in Nebraska's Sand Hills.

But he'll continue to pay taxes on the land, much to the relief of local officials and Nebraska leaders, the Omaha World-Herald reported Thursday.

"I believe that local property taxes provide essential support for services on which our ranches and communities depend," Turner, 82, said in a news release last week announcing the new institute. "The Institute will continue to pay its share of taxes to support the local communities."

State officials had feared Turner — Nebraska's largest landowner with nearly 500,000 acres of western Nebraska ranchland — might turn over the land to a nonprofit and remove vast tracts of land from property tax rolls.

The prospect of such a large amount of land removed from tax rolls "would be painful," said state Sen. Tom Brewer, of Gordon.

The news release from Turner Enterprises Inc. and Turner Ranches announced the launch of the Turner Institute of Ecoagriculture, which expects to work in conjunction with South Dakota State University to conduct research and develop strategies to conserve ecosystems while raising bison and generating income off grazing lands.

Turner's bison ranches already focus on sustainable practices, including rotational grazing. There also has been a focus on studying and preserving endangered species, as well as wildlife habitat projects.

Turner is the founder of 24-hour news cable network CNN. He announced in 2018 that he was suffering from Lewy body dementia. The disease causes Alzheimer's-like symptoms along with movement and other problems.

AG: Tribal-issued medical pot cards should be honored

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Attorney General's Office says law enforcement should honor tribal-issued medical marijuana identification cards held by non-tribal members off the reservation, a view

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not shared by Gov. Kristi Noem's administration and the state Highway Patrol.

Last week, Noem's administration guided law enforcement officers not to honor Native American tribes' medical marijuana ID cards if they are not issued to tribal members. The governor's office said troopers who encounter 3 ounces or less of marijuana in the field would still make arrests of non-tribal members with tribal-issued medical marijuana cards.

The Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe opened the state's first marijuana dispensary after the medical cannabis law took effect July 1 and planned to issue ID cards to anyone with a certified medical condition. The state doesn't plan to begin issuing medical marijuana cards until November.

Tim Bormann, chief of staff for Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg, said the tribe's ID cards are valid under state law because they are medically certified.

Borman cited the law that states "a valid written certification issued within the previous year shall be deemed a registry identification card for a qualifying patient."

Borman also said many state's attorneys have already made their position clear that they will not be prosecuting possession of any amount of marijuana equal to, or less than 3 ounces. So, a secondary question, Borman said, is whether those same state's attorneys would go through the steps to prosecute a low level misdemeanor charge relating to tribal-issued ID cards.

Vatican: Pope to deliver Sunday blessing from Rome hospital

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis is walking, working and has celebrated Mass at a Rome hospital where he also will deliver his weekly Sunday blessing while recovering from intestinal surgery, the Vatican said Friday.

The Vatican's daily medical update said that Francis' temperature was normal again following the slight fever he ran Wednesday evening. It said his treatment and recovery at Gemelli Polyclinic were proceeding as planned.

Francis, 84, had half of his colon removed July 4 for what the Vatican said was a "severe" narrowing of his large intestine. He is expected to stay at Gemelli, which has a special suite reserved for popes, through the week, assuming there are no complications.

The statement said Francis would deliver his noontime Sunday blessing from the 10th floor of the hospital, an appointment that will recall the practice of St. John Paul II, who also delivered the Angelus prayer and greetings from the hospital's 10th floor during his occasional stays.

During one stay in 1996, John Paul quipped that after so many visits, Gemelli had become the "Vatican No. 3," after St. Peter's and the papal summer estate in Castel Gandolfo.

Francis, for his part, was continuing to eat regularly and walk in the corridor after the three-hour surgery Sunday, the Vatican said. It said he had resumed working, "alternating it with moments of reading texts."

He celebrated Mass in the papal private apartment on Thursday afternoon, "attended by all those assisting him during his hospitalization," the Vatican said.

The Argentine pope has enjoyed relatively robust health, though he lost the upper part of one lung in his youth because of an infection. He also suffers from sciatica, or nerve pain, that makes him walk with a pronounced limp.

John Paul's first stay at Gemelli was after he was shot during a May 13, 1981 assassination attempt in St. Peter's Square. He returned in subsequent years for broken bones suffered in falls, an appendectomy, and respiratory and throat problems.

The Polish pope, who suffered from Parkinson's disease, died at the Vatican on April 2, 2005.

Keeping up attacks, some Iraq militias challenge patron Iran

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA and SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iran's expeditionary Quds Force commander brought one main directive for Iraqi militia faction leaders long beholden to Tehran, when he gathered with them in Baghdad last month: Maintain calm, until after nuclear talks between Iran and the United States.

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But he was met with defiance. One of the six faction leaders spoke up in their meeting: They could not stay quiet while the death of his predecessor Qassim Soleimani and senior Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in a U.S. drone strike went unavenged.

Militia attacks have only been increasing against the U.S. in military bases in both Iraq and Syria. Three missile attacks in the last week alone resulted in minor injuries, stoking fears of escalation.

The details from Esmail Ghaani's visit, confirmed to The Associated Press by three Shiite political officials and two senior militia officials, demonstrate how Iranian-aligned Iraqi militia groups are asserting a degree of independence, sometimes even flouting orders from Tehran. Iran now relies on Lebanon's Hezbollah for support in reining them in, and there is potential that Iran's new president could play a role in doing the same.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private meetings.

Iran's influence, sustained by ideological ties and military support, has frayed because of the U.S. killing of Soleimani and al-Muhandis last year, because of differing interests and because of financial strains in Tehran. With nuclear talks restarting following U.S. President Joe Biden's inauguration this year, these differences have come to the fore.

"Iran isn't the way it used to be, with 100% control over the militia commanders," said one Shiite political leader.

Increasing rocket and drone attacks targeting American troops in Iraq and Syria have alarmed Western and coalition officials. There have been at least eight drone attacks targeting the U.S. presence since Biden took office in January, as well as 17 rocket attacks, according to coalition officials.

The attacks are blamed on the Iranian-backed militias that make up the bulk of Iraq's state-supported Popular Mobilization Forces. The Biden administration has responded by twice targeting Iraqi militia groups operating inside Syria, including close to the Iraqi border.

"What is taking place now is when Ghaani asks for calm, the brigade leaders agree with him. But as soon as he leaves the meeting, they disregard his recommendations," said another Shiite political leader.

The loudest of the defiant militia voices has been Qais al-Khazali, leader of the Asaib Ahl al-Haq faction, which also maintains a political party. On June 17, only days after Ghaani's meetings with the militias, he said in a televised address that they would continue to target the U.S. "occupier" and that they will not take into consideration nuclear talks.

"And that decision is an Iraqi one," he said.

The coalition has formally ended combat operations and reduced troop levels significantly in the last year. Only 2,500 U.S. troops remain in Iraq and discussions are ongoing with NATO to transfer to an advisory mission. Iraq still needs coalition support in surveillance and intelligence gathering and airstrikes against Islamic State group targets.

Some argue the ongoing attacks benefit Iran by maintaining pressure on the U.S.

During talks with Shiite political officials during his visit, Ghani said Iran doesn't interfere in their political work, but that military matters were different. "These must be approved by the Revolutionary Guard," one political leader recounted him saying.

Still, Ghaani did not reprimand the militia groups during the meeting. Instead, he told them he understood their concerns.

Iran has struggled to fill in the gap left in the absence of Soleimani and al-Muhandis, who were commanding figures able to push factions into line and resolve disputes among them.

"Ghaani has a different style and capabilities," said Michael Knights, a fellow at The Washington Institute. He has a looser framework, establishing broad red lines on some matters, while "other things are 'don't ask, don't tell,'" he said.

Along with asking for less, cash-strapped Iran has been giving less as well. Assistance to the groups has been significantly downgraded since U.S. sanctions began crippling Iran's economy last year.

Divisions among factions have deepened, with growing competition among militias and Shiite politicians. Ghaani came to meet the militia leaders to mend tensions that were sparked weeks earlier when Iraqi

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authorities arrested a paramilitary commander, Qassim Musleh, prompting a standoff between PMF fighters and security forces. Ghaani brought a letter from Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, criticizing the PMF for its reaction, saying it weakened their position.

To apply pressure on the factions, Iran has come to rely on Hezbollah leader Hasan Nasrallah in Lebanon, a figure the militias highly respect. Almost weekly, various factional leaders hold face-to-face meetings with him in Lebanon, said Shiite political leaders.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, elected in June, also may be a unifying figure for the militias, which hold him in high esteem, political and militia officials said. When Raisi visited Baghdad in February, he met with PMF commanders and told them, in fluent Arabic, "Our flesh is your flesh, and our blood is your blood." Ghaani communicates with brigade leaders through an interpreter.

"The resistance will grow in power and will see its best of times due to the election victory of Raisi," said Abu Alaa al-Walaa, commander of Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada, in a recent interview.

African American spelling bee champ makes history with flair

By BEN NUCKOLS Associated Press

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. (AP) — Zaila Avant-garde understood the significance of what she was doing as she stood on the Scripps National Spelling Bee stage, peppering pronouncer Jacques Bailly with questions about Greek and Latin roots.

Zaila knew she would be the first African American winner of the bee. She knew Black kids around the country were watching Thursday night's ESPN2 telecast, waiting to be inspired and hoping to follow in the footsteps of someone who looked like them. She even thought of MacNolia Cox, who in 1936 became the first Black finalist at the bee and wasn't allowed to stay in the same hotel as the rest of the spellers.

But she never let the moment become too big for her, and when she heard what turned out to be her winning word — "Murraya," a genus of tropical Asiatic and Australian trees — she beamed with confidence. It was over.

Declared the champion, Zaila jumped and twirled with joy, only flinching in surprise when confetti was shot onto the stage.

"I was pretty relaxed on the subject of Murraya and pretty much any other word I got," Zaila said.

The only previous Black champion was also the only international winner: Jody-Anne Maxwell of Jamaica in 1998. The bee, however, has still been a showcase for spellers of color over the past two decades, with kids of South Asian descent dominating the competition. Zaila's win breaks a streak of at least one Indian-American champion every year since 2008.

Zaila has other priorities, which perhaps explains how she came to dominate this year's bee. The 14-year-old from Harvey, Louisiana, is a basketball prodigy who owns three Guinness world records for dribbling multiple balls simultaneously and hopes to one day play in the WNBA or even coach in the NBA. She described spelling as a side hobby, even though she routinely practiced for seven hours a day.

"I kind of thought I would never be into spelling again, but I'm also happy that I'm going to make a clean break from it," Zaila said. "I can go out, like my Guinness world records, just leave it right there, and walk off."

Many of top Scripps spellers start competing as young as kindergarten. Zaila only started a few years ago, after her father, Jawara Spacetime, watched the bee on TV and realized his daughter's affinity for doing complicated math in her head could translate well to spelling. She progressed quickly enough to make it to nationals in 2019 but bowed out in the preliminary rounds.

That's when she started to take it more seriously and began working with a private coach, Cole Shafer-Ray, a 20-year-old Yale student and the 2015 Scripps runner-up.

"Usually to be as good as Zaila, you have to be well-connected in the spelling community. You have to have been doing it for many years," Shafer-Ray said. "It was like a mystery, like, 'Is this person even real?'"

Shafer-Ray quickly realized his pupil had extraordinary gifts.

"She really just had a much different approach than any speller I've ever seen. She basically knew the

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definition of every word that we did, like pretty much verbatim," he said. "She knew, not just the word but the story behind the word, why every letter had to be that letter and couldn't be anything else."

Sometimes she knew more than she let on. Part of her strategy, she said, was to ask about roots that weren't part of the word she was given, just to eliminate them from consideration.

Only one word gave her trouble: "nepeta," a genus of mints, and she jumped even higher when she got that one right than she did when she took the trophy.

"I've always struggled with that word. I've heard it a lot of times. I don't know, there's just some words, for a speller, I just get them and I can't get them right," she said. "I even knew it was a genus of plants. I know what you are and I can't get you."

Zaila — her dad gave her the last name Avant-garde in tribute to jazz musician John Coltrane — is a singular champion of a most unusual bee, the first in more than 25 months. Last year's bee was canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic, and this one was thoroughly modified to minimize risk to kids and their families.

Most of the bee was held virtually, and only the 11 finalists got to compete in person, in a small portion of a cavernous arena at the ESPN Wide World of Sports complex in Florida that also hosted the NBA playoff bubble last year. The in-person crowd was limited to spellers' immediate family, Scripps staff, selected media — and first lady Jill Biden, who spoke to the spellers and stayed to watch.

Sometimes it was so quiet in the arena that the only sound was the unamplified voice of ESPN host Kevin Negandhi as he spoke into a TV microphone.

The format of the bee, too, underwent an overhaul after the 2019 competition ended in an eight-way tie. Scripps' word list was no match for the top spellers that year, but this year, five of the 11 finalists were eliminated in the first onstage round. Then came the new wrinkle of this year's bee: multiple-choice vocabulary questions. All six remaining spellers got those right.

Zaila won efficiently enough — the bee was over in less than two hours — that another innovation, a lightning-round tiebreaker, wasn't necessary.

She will take home more than \$50,000 in cash and prizes. The runner-up was Chaitra Thummala, a 12-year-old from Frisco, Texas, and another student of Shafer-Ray. She has two years of eligibility remaining and instantly becomes one of next year's favorites. Bhavana Madini, a 13-year-old from Plainview, New York, finished third and also could be back.

"Zaila deserved it. She's always been better than me," Chaitra said. "I could review a lot more words. I could get a stronger work ethic."

DeSantis parts with Trump in response to Surfside tragedy

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN and STEVEN SLOAN Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — When the coronavirus ravaged Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis defiantly bucked mask mandates. He later cracked down on protesters advocating racial justice, blasted President Joe Biden on immigration, jumped into the fight over transgender athletes and signed sweeping legislation to toughen voting rules.

But after a deadly building collapse, the Republican governor is largely hitting pause on the culture wars.

In the two weeks since a 12-story condo tower in this coastal community suddenly crumbled, killing at least 64 people, DeSantis has stood somberly with local officials, including Democrats, as they assessed the damage. He nodded in agreement when Biden visited and hailed their joint appearance as a sign that those with opposing political views can work together in a crisis. And he even skipped a rally in Sarasota headlined by former President Donald Trump, whose early endorsement was crucial in helping DeSantis win the governor's race in 2018.

Since that victory, DeSantis has often taken his cues from Trump. But as he prepares for a reelection bid next year that could propel him into a presidential campaign, the tragedy in Surfside is exposing voters to a different side of the governor. He's still the conservative populist who rarely parts with Trump. But unlike the former president, DeSantis is showing that he can tone down some of his most extreme

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partisan rhetoric during a disaster.

"The governor has been decisive. He's been constant. He's been collaborative," Miami-Dade County Mayor Danielle Levine Cava, a Democrat who has sparred with DeSantis in the past, said in an interview. "Hats off to the governor for how he has supported us in this crisis."

Charles Burkett, the nonpartisan mayor of Surfside, called the level of cooperation "astounding, even surprising."

Of course, DeSantis isn't ushering in a new era of bipartisanship or a Republican return to reality-based rhetoric. The governor has dodged direct questions on whether Biden's victory in last year's election was fair. A day after the collapse, DeSantis promoted an unusual plan to deploy officers from Florida to the southern border, a move Democrats dismiss as political theater.

Still, DeSantis' actions present a sharp contrast with Trump. The former president often threatened to withhold aid to Democratic officials who criticized him, including Govs. Gavin Newsom of California and Andrew Cuomo of New York. At other times, he appeared insensitive or clumsy in his response to people's suffering. During a visit to hurricane damaged Puerto Rico, for instance, Trump tossed rolls of paper towels into a crowd of residents.

Mac Stipanovich, a former Republican campaign strategist, said DeSantis is "less frightening than Trump" to some voters even as he steadily courts the former president's base.

DeSantis "has a finely tuned sense of what is the best red meat, on any given day, to throw to the MAGA base and he does it with some skill and no shame," Stipanovich said. "Soon as we're beyond the window of this tragedy, everybody will be at each other's throats once again."

Indeed, the debate could swiftly move to how the state and local governments manage aging infrastructure. Officials in Miami-Dade County are moving forward with a 30-day audit of buildings that are more than 40 years old. DeSantis has questioned the necessity of a statewide review of older buildings.

While effective responses to catastrophes can help burnish a governor's political reputation, the boost can sometimes prove fleeting. Former Govs. Jeb Bush of Florida and Chris Christie of New Jersey were widely praised for their response to devastating storms. But Trump, who never held political office before running for president, defeated both men for the 2016 Republican nomination.

DeSantis' handling of the tragedy appears to have caught some Democrats off guard, leaving them with no unified response.

Rep. Charlie Crist, a Democrat hoping to challenge DeSantis next year, didn't respond to requests for comment on the governor's response to the collapse. Nikki Fried, Florida's Democratic agriculture commissioner who has also announced a bid for governor, praised local officials, Biden and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. But she knocked DeSantis for wading into the politically charged immigration debate by sending Florida law enforcement to the border with Mexico.

"Although the Florida Division of Emergency Management has been working around the clock to support search and rescue efforts, it was unfortunate that Governor DeSantis diverted first responders to the southern border during this incredibly difficult time for the Miami community and our entire state," she said.

Rep. Val Demings, a Democrat challenging GOP Sen. Marco Rubio, said she was "glad to see productive partnership between local, state, and federal officials as we work to save lives."

"In times of crisis," she said, "we need to set partisanship aside and do what's right for our communities."

DeSantis is gaining national attention at a critical juncture for Republicans. While Trump decides whether to run again in 2024, those with presidential ambitions are making aggressive moves to position themselves as his heir should he opt against a campaign.

For now, Trump remains happy to be aligned with DeSantis. But several people in touch with the former president and his team said he has paid close attention as DeSantis has wooed donors at Trump's Mar-a-Lago club in South Florida and gained traction in some conservative circles. If DeSantis' popularity rises and he threatens Trump's status as the undisputed leader of the party, many Republicans privately expect Trump to turn on the governor.

Friction between the two spilled into the public for the first time last week when Trump rebuffed DeSantis' entreaties to postpone the rally in Sarasota. Trump, who opened his remarks with a moment of

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silence for the victims in Surfside and their families, told the conservative network Newsmax that he and DeSantis had "mutually agreed" that the governor should skip the rally.

Trump has sought to keep the upper hand in the relationship, bringing up his early endorsement in several recent interviews. He has also said he would consider DeSantis as a potential running mate if he chose to run again for president.

For his part, DeSantis has said he is focused more on winning reelection next year than the 2024 contest. He is one of the few leading Republicans who has not yet visited Iowa, home to the leadoff presidential caucuses and a state dominated by conservative evangelicals who can sway the GOP's direction.

DeSantis has instead spent part of his summer traveling to political fundraisers in states including Pennsylvania and California. Tony Krvaric, who helped arrange an event on DeSantis' behalf in San Diego, said the excitement surrounding the governor was "sky high" and his response to the collapse has further helped his reputation.

"He's handled it professionally and with empathy," Krvaric said.

Diverse England team wins fans in nation eager for good news

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Hannah Kumari has been an English soccer fan since childhood, but she never wanted to fly an England flag. Until now.

Kumari is one of millions of fans ecstatic that England's men's team has reached the final of a major tournament for the first time since it won the World Cup in 1966. But like many British people of color, she's had an ambivalent relationship with symbols of Englishness.

Yet embracing them has come more easily thanks to the young, multi-ethnic squad that is on the cusp of triumph in the European Championships. After beating Denmark 2-1 in a semifinal on Wednesday that was watched by half the country's population, England faces Italy in the final at London's Wembley Stadium on Sunday.

"When I woke up this morning I thought, 'I'm going to buy a St. George's flag to hang out the window for Sunday,'" Kumari, who was born and raised in England to an Indian mother and Scottish father, said the day after the Denmark game.

"I've never owned an England shirt," the actor-writer said.

"Something has definitely changed," she said. "I feel almost like that team has given me permission to feel like I can wear an England shirt."

The last few years have been hard on England and the rest of the United Kingdom. Britain's exit from the European Union — a decision driven in part by a backlash against immigration left the country scratchy and divided. During the coronavirus pandemic, more than 128,000 people have died in the U.K., the highest toll in Western Europe.

Euro 2020 — the name is a year out of date due to the pandemic — has provided a much-needed jolt of excitement and fun. Millions weary of lockdowns and bad news are backing a team whose members speak out against racism, take a knee before games, support LGBT pride, campaign against poverty and, crucially, win games.

For decades, supporting England has been synonymous with dashed hopes. The lyrics of the country's most popular soccer anthem, "Three Lions," originally released in 1996, evokes England's 1966 triumph and the long drought that followed: "Thirty years of hurt, never stopped me dreaming."

Those 30 years have become 55, but once again England is dreaming.

The country's hopes rest on a team very different from the all-white squad of 1966. A poster created by the Museum of Migration showed what the England team would look like if players without a parent or grandparent born abroad were excluded: Just three of the 11 starting players remained.

Missing were stars who included team captain Harry Kane, whose father is Irish; Marcus Rashford, whose mother is from Saint Kitts; Jamaica-born Raheem Sterling; and Buyako Saka, a Londoner with

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Nigerian parents.

The team is known less for wild off-the-pitch antics than for social responsibility, epitomized by 23-year-old Rashford's campaign against child poverty, which convinced the government to restore free lunches for thousands of poor children.

Last week, Kane, 27, wore a rainbow armband to support LGBT pride during England's match against Germany.

The players may be young multi-millionaires, but they celebrate their local as well as international roots. Rashford's childhood in a working-class Manchester community inspires his anti-poverty work; Calvin Phillips is a proud son of the northern city of Leeds; Sterling calls himself the "boy from Brent," after the London borough where he grew up.

For some, their success is helping to make Englishness a source of pride rather than awkwardness.

The English make up 56 million of the U.K.'s 67 million inhabitants, but English patriotism and the country's red-and-white St. George flag were long shunned by liberal-minded Britons, associated with football hooligans and narrow-minded "Little Englanders." Britishness was regarded as a more welcoming identity by many U.K.-born and foreign-born citizens alike.

England's rugby, cricket and soccer teams have done much to strip the English flag of its negative associations in recent years. The increasing prominence of Scottish and Welsh flags and symbols as those countries gained more political autonomy over the last two decades has also made many people reflect on what English identity means.

"There has been an enormous intergenerational shift towards a civic and inclusive English identity that crosses ethnic and faith grounds," said Sunder Katwala, director of the equality think-tank British Future. "Most migrants to Britain haven't identified as English, but interestingly, their children have."

Katwala said sports teams and tournaments don't drive social change but "ratify that shift that has been happening in society."

"It's changed the public conversation about what is English," he said.

Not everyone thinks the national soccer team represents all that is best about England. Some conservative commentators have derided the players as uncomfortably "woke." Team members have been booed by some fans while taking a knee against racism before games. Home Secretary Priti Patel has criticized the kneeling, calling it "gesture politics," and declined to condemn the booing.

Victory has silenced much of the criticism, at least temporarily. Politicians have jumped on the England bandwagon. Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who has often criticized protests over racism and Britain's imperial past, attended Wednesday's game, awkwardly wearing an England jersey over his dress shirt. He's under pressure to declare a national holiday if England wins the final on Sunday.

Some have compared Britain's political leaders unfavorably to the national team's understated manager, Gareth Southgate, who forged his young players into England's most cohesive squad in many years.

If the tournament has been therapeutic for England, it is also redemptive for the 50-year-old Southgate. He played for England in the 1990s, and his failed penalty kick during the Euros semi-final in 1996 handed victory to Germany.

Opposition Labour Party lawmaker Thangam Debbonaire urged Johnson to study at "the Gareth Southgate school of leadership."

"The British people will be asking themselves who they want to lead them. Do they want someone who works hard and has a relentless focus on embodying British values, or do they want the current prime minister?" Debbonaire said in the House of Commons.

Southgate addressed the team's critics in an open letter at the start of the tournament, saying his players would not "stick to football" and keep quiet about social issues.

"I have a responsibility to the wider community to use my voice, and so do the players," he wrote. "It's clear to me that we are heading for a much more tolerant and understanding society, and I know our lads will be a big part of that."

Tropical storm sparks tornado warnings in trek up East Coast

By RUSS BYNUM and CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — Severe weather from Tropical Storm Elsa spurred tornado warnings in Delaware and New Jersey early Friday as the system moved over the mid-Atlantic states and into the northeastern United States.

Overnight in coastal New Jersey, a 78 mph (126 kph) wind gust was recorded in Ludlam Bay, and a 71 mph (114 kph) gust was recorded in Beach Haven — both appeared to be “associated with nearby tornadoes,” the National Hurricane Center said in a 5 a.m. update.

Elsa had maximum sustained winds of 50 mph (80 kph), forecasters said. It was located 5 miles (8 kilometers) east of Atlantic City, New Jersey, and 175 miles (280 kilometers) southwest of Montauk Point, New York.

The system was already blamed for one death in Florida on Wednesday. And Elsa previously sparked a damaging tornado in Georgia.

A tropical storm warning Friday morning stretched along parts of the East Coast from New Jersey to Massachusetts. Forecasters said Elsa was moving northeast at 31 mph (50 kph).

The hurricane center said rainfall totals between 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 centimeters) were expected through Friday for eastern mid-Atlantic states and into New England. Isolated totals up to 6 inches (15 centimeters) were possible. There was a risk of considerable flash and urban flooding.

The tropical storm was expected to cross over the Northeast by the afternoon and move over Atlantic Canada by the night and Saturday. No significant change in strength was expected during the day, and Elsa is forecast to become a post-tropical cyclone by Friday night.

On Wednesday, nine people were injured in coastal Camden County, Georgia, when a tornado struck a campground for active-duty service members and military retirees. Eight of those hurt had to be taken to hospitals, Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base spokesperson Chris Tucker said.

The EF-2 tornado flipped over multiple RVs, throwing one of the overturned vehicles about 200 feet (61 meters) into a lake, the National Weather Service said in a preliminary report early Thursday after its employees surveyed the damage.

Sergio Rodriguez, who lives near the RV park, said he raced to the scene fearing friends staying at the park might be hurt.

“There were just RVs flipped over on their sides, pickup trucks flipped over, a couple of trailers had been shifted and a couple of trailers were in the water” of a pond on the site, Rodriguez said in a phone interview.

Authorities in Jacksonville, Florida, said one person was killed Wednesday when a tree fell and struck two cars. A spokesperson for the Naval Air Force Atlantic Office said Thursday that a sailor assigned to Patrol and Reconnaissance Squadron 16 in Jacksonville was killed.

In South Carolina, a Coast Guard Air Station Savannah crew rescued a family that became stranded Wednesday on Otter Island after their boat drifted off the beach. The group was flown to a hospital in good health, a Coast Guard news release said.

The National Weather Service in Morehead City, North Carolina, tweeted that a tornado was spotted near Fairfield on Thursday afternoon.

Scattered power outages were being reported along Elsa’s path Friday morning, with about 24,000 homes and businesses without electricity from Delaware to Massachusetts, according to the website poweroutages.us.

Elsa is the earliest fifth-named storm on record, said Brian McNoldy, a hurricane researcher at the University of Miami.

2 US men, ex-Colombia soldiers held in Haiti assassination

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By EVENS SANON, DÁNICA COTO and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Seventeen suspects have been detained so far in the stunning assassination of Haiti's president, and Haitian authorities say two are believed to hold dual U.S.-Haitian citizenship and Colombia's government says at least six are former members of its army.

Léon Charles, chief of Haiti's National Police, said Thursday night that 15 of the detainees were from Colombia.

The police chief said eight more suspects were being sought and three others had been killed by police. Charles had earlier said seven were killed.

"We are going to bring them to justice," the police chief said, the 17 handcuffed suspects sitting on the floor during a news conference on developments following the brazen killing of President Jovenel Moïse at his home before dawn Wednesday.

Colombia's government said it had been asked about six of the suspects in Haiti, including two of those killed, and had determined they were retired members of its army. It didn't release their identities.

The head of the Colombian national police, Gen. Jorge Luis Vargas Valencia, said President Iván Duque had ordered the high command of Colombia's army and police to cooperate in the investigation.

"A team was formed with the best investigators ... they are going to send dates, flight times, financial information that is already being collected to be sent to Port-au-Prince," Vargas said.

The U.S. State Department said it was aware of reports that Haitian Americans were in custody but could not confirm or comment.

The Haitian Americans were identified by Haitian officials as James Solages and Joseph Vincent. Solages, at age 35, is the youngest of the suspects and the oldest is 55, according to a document shared by Haiti's minister of elections, Mathias Pierre. He would not provide further information on those in custody.

Solages described himself as a "certified diplomatic agent," an advocate for children and budding politician on a website for a charity he started in 2019 in south Florida to assist people in the Haitian coastal town of Jacmel. On his bio page for the charity, Solages said he previously worked as a bodyguard at the Canadian Embassy in Haiti.

Canada's foreign relation department released a statement that did not refer to Solages by name but said one of the men detained for his alleged role in the killing had been "briefly employed as a reserve bodyguard" at its embassy by a private contractor. He gave no other details.

Calls to the charity and Solages' associates at the charity either did not go through or weren't answered.

Meanwhile, Taiwan's foreign ministry said Haitian police had arrested 11 armed suspects who tried to break into the Taiwanese embassy early Thursday. It gave no details of the suspects' identities or a reason for the break-in.

"As for whether the suspects were involved in the assassination of the President of Haiti, that will need to be investigated by the Haitian police," Foreign Affairs spokesperson Joanne Ou told The Associated Press in Taipei.

Police were alerted by embassy security guards while Taiwanese diplomats were working from home. The ministry said some doors and windows were broken but there was no other damage to the embassy.

Haiti is one of a handful of countries worldwide that maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan instead of the rival mainland Chinese government in Beijing.

In Port-au-Prince, witnesses said a crowd discovered two suspects hiding in bushes, and some people grabbed the men by their shirts and pants, pushed them and occasionally slapped them. An Associated Press journalist saw officers put the pair in the back of a pickup and drive away as the crowd ran after them to a police station.

"They killed the president! Give them to us! We're going to burn them," people chanted outside Thursday.

The crowd later set fire to several abandoned cars riddled with bullet holes that they believed belonged to the suspects. The cars didn't have license plates, and inside one was an empty box of bullets and some water.

Later, Charles urged people to stay calm and let his officers do their work. He cautioned that authorities

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needed evidence that was being destroyed, including the burned cars.

Officials have given out little information on the killing, other than to say the attack was carried out by "a highly trained and heavily armed group."

Not everyone was buying the government's description of the attack. When Haitian journalist Robenson Geffrard, who writes for a local newspaper and has a radio show, tweeted a report on comments by the police chief, he drew a flood of responses expressing skepticism. Many wondered how the sophisticated attackers described by police could penetrate Moïse's home, security detail and panic room and escape unharmed but then be caught without planning a successful getaway.

A Haitian judge involved in the investigation said Moïse was shot a dozen times and his office and bedroom were ransacked, according to the Haitian newspaper Le Nouvelliste. It quoted Judge Carl Henry Destin as saying investigators found 5.56 and 7.62 mm cartridges between the gatehouse and inside the house.

Moïse's daughter, Jomarlie Jovenel, hid in her brother's bedroom during the attack, and a maid and another worker were tied up by the attackers, the judge said.

Interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph, who assumed leadership of Haiti with the backing of police and the military, asked people to reopen businesses and go back to work as he ordered the reopening of the international airport.

Joseph decreed a two-week state of siege after the assassination, which stunned a nation already in crisis from some of the Western Hemisphere's worst poverty, widespread violence and political instability.

Haiti had grown increasingly unstable under Moïse, who had been ruling by decree for more than a year and faced violent protests as critics accused him of trying to amass more power while the opposition demanded he step down.

The U.N. Security Council met privately Thursday to discuss the situation in Haiti, and U.N. special envoy Helen La Lime said afterward that Haitian officials had asked for additional security assistance.

Public transportation and street vendors remained scarce Thursday, an unusual sight for the normally bustling streets of Port-au-Prince.

Marco Destin was walking to see his family since no buses, known as tap-taps, were available. He was carrying a loaf of bread for them because they had not left their house since the president's killing out of fear for their lives.

"Every one at home is sleeping with one eye open and one eye closed," he said. "If the head of state is not protected, I don't have any protection whatsoever."

Gunfire rang out intermittently across the city hours after the killing, a grim reminder of the growing power of gangs that displaced more than 14,700 people last month alone as they torched and ransacked homes in a fight over territory.

Robert Fatton, a Haitian politics expert at the University of Virginia, said gangs were a force to contend with and it isn't certain Haiti's security forces can enforce a state of siege.

"It's a really explosive situation," he said.

Halfway there: Suns beat Bucks for 2-0 lead in NBA Finals

By BRIAN MAHONEY AP Basketball Writer

PHOENIX (AP) — The ball went from Chris Paul to Devin Booker and didn't stop moving until Deandre Ayton scored after every Suns player had touched it.

The 10-pass sequence was the prettiest play of the NBA Finals and the kind the one-man show Bucks couldn't dream of.

"We actually talked about that play right after the game, me and Mikal (Bridges), and he was like, 'I think that was the most pumped I've ever been after a play,'" Booker said. "And I was like, me too."

Imagine the feeling if his team gets two more wins.

Booker scored 31 points, Paul had 23 and the Suns beat Milwaukee 118-108 on Thursday night to take a 2-0 series lead.

The Suns have never been closer to an NBA title. Not bad for a team whose coach told them earlier

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this season had the league's sorriest starting unit, forcing the players to figure things out.

"We did and we're going to keep it going," Paul said.

Booker made seven 3-pointers and the Suns went 20 for 40 behind the arc. Bridges scored 27 points, and Paul finished with eight assists.

The Suns surged ahead late in the first half, withstood Giannis Antetokounmpo's all-around effort to bring the Bucks back, and walked off winners again as fans swung orange rally towels all around them.

Antetokounmpo had 42 points and 12 rebounds in his second game back after missing two games because of a hyperextended left knee.

The Suns never even had a lead in the NBA Finals until their 118-105 victory in Game 1. They dropped the first two games in both 1976 and 1993, their only other appearances, and didn't win more than two games in either series.

They've already got two this time and will go after a third Sunday in Milwaukee, which will host the NBA Finals for the first time since 1974.

"We know what the deal is," Antetokounmpo said. "We've got to go back home and protect home."

Jrue Holiday played more aggressively but didn't shoot a whole lot better than in Game 1, scoring 17 points but hitting only 7 for 21. Khris Middleton was 5 for 16, forcing Antetokounmpo to carry an even heavier load on his sore left leg.

It adds up to the Bucks having to overcome a 2-0 deficit for the second time this postseason. They did it against the Brooklyn Nets in the Eastern Conference semifinals, but had some help when first James Harden and then Kyrie Irving were injured.

Now they are facing a Suns team loaded with weapons all over the lineup, and showed off all of them in their highlight play.

They whipped the ball all around the perimeter for the final basket of the first half. It went from Paul to Booker to Jae Crowder to Bridges, back to Crowder to Paul, then over to Crowder and once again Bridges. He then finally fed it inside to Ayton, who scored while being fouled with 14.9 seconds left for a 56-45 lead at the break.

The Bucks could only dream of having that many guys involved. Antetokounmpo's 15 field goals were more than twice as many as any other Milwaukee player.

Phoenix opened a 65-50 lead with a good start to the third, but Antetokounmpo — and pretty much only Antetokounmpo — kept the game from getting away from the Bucks. He scored 20 of the Bucks' 33 points in the third, the first 20-point period in the finals since Michael Jordan against the Suns in 1993.

"Nothing Giannis does surprises me anymore. He's got the nickname Freak for a reason," Bucks guard Pat Connaughton said. "I will say it's incredible what he's been able to do, and it hasn't happened without time he's put in to get himself ready, get his body better and continue to do the things that he does to be a two-time MVP."

Milwaukee got it all the way down to six in the fourth, but Paul nailed a 3-pointer and Bridges had a basket to quickly push the lead back to double digits.

Milwaukee outscored Phoenix 20-0 in the paint in the first quarter, but eight of the Suns' nine baskets were 3-pointers and they were behind just 29-26.

Only two fouls — both on the Suns — were called in a clean quarter. Antetokounmpo took the only two free throws, making one and shooting an airball on the second as fans continued counting, as they have in Bucks' road games during the playoffs to show that he often doesn't appear to shoot them within the allotted 10 seconds.

It was tied at 41 with just under five minutes left in the half before the Suns surged ahead with precision offense and some shutdown defense. They finished with a 15-4 run, the Bucks managing just a pair of baskets by Antetokounmpo.

He tried to fire up his teammates with some screaming on the bench during a timeout, but he couldn't put the ball into the basket for them. The Bucks were a dismal 6 for 25 in the period, missing 10 of their 12 3-point tries.

TIP-INS

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Bucks: Middleton finished with 11 points. ... Holiday was 4 for 14 in Game 1. ... Antetokounmpo had his 13th game with at least 20 points and 10 rebounds in this postseason. Only Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who had 15 in 1974 and 14 in 1971, had more for the Bucks.

Suns: Booker has 490 points, second-most for any player in his first postseason. Rick Barry scored 521 in 1967. .. The Suns are 14-4 in this postseason.

COIN TOSS

Abdul-Jabbar had some fun with a video on social media calling to mind the important shared history between the teams who came into the NBA together in 1968. The Bucks won a coin toss in 1969 that allowed them to select the future Hall of Famer with the No. 1 pick in the draft.

In the video, Abdul-Jabbar, wearing a Milwaukee No. 33 T-shirt, flips a coin.

"Bucks in 6," he then said. "Fear the Deer."

CROWDER COMEBACK

Crowder had 11 points and 10 rebounds, shooting 4 for 8. He missed all eight attempts in Game 1.

Q&A with Georgia Gov. Kemp: Voters 'know what the truth is'

By BILL BARROW and JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Four years can be a lifetime in politics. Especially in Georgia.

Brian Kemp won the 2018 Republican primary for Georgia governor propelled by grassroots conservatives and a late endorsement from then-President Donald Trump. Kemp went on to defeat Democrat Stacey Abrams in the general election.

Now, Democrats are riding high on President Joe Biden's win in the state. Trump and his ardent supporters are fuming with Kemp for certifying Biden's victory. And Republicans are reeling from losing two Senate seats.

Still, Kemp is readying to go for it again — he may even get a rematch against Abrams. Ahead of his Saturday reelection campaign launch, The Associated Press talked to Kemp about the race ahead, Abrams, Trump and the new Georgia political landscape. The interview has been condensed for length and clarity.

AP: What's your bottom-line argument about your accomplishments and what's left to do?

KEMP: I think just our resiliency to fight through COVID, but also the record. We have so many good things to talk about, the great economy, still the No. 1 state in the country for business. We're setting records right now and have been during the global pandemic with economic development. We have the lowest unemployment rate of the 10 most populous states in the country. That's a testament to us trying to do two things: protect lives and livelihoods.

We also have a great agenda that we pushed on education. We have the largest teacher pay raise in state history. We've done away with ridiculous amounts of high-stakes testing that was stressing our kids, our parents and our educators. Public safety is a huge issue. People are scared to death, especially in the city of Atlanta. We've done as much as anybody in the country when it comes to not only ending human trafficking, but also supporting the victims. We want to continue doing that work.

AP: Coming out of 2020, you're trying to shore up your Republican support. Are you concerned you'll face the same problems on the right that hurt Sen. Kelly Loeffler and Sen. David Perdue?

KEMP: I, for one, learned a lot of lessons looking at the 2020 cycle. There were some really bad things that happened in my eyes as a Republican at the national level. But there were some really good things that happened here in Georgia at the legislative level and around the country when you look at the gains the congressional Republicans made in the House. It's because those members campaigned on the issues that people care about, and that's exactly what I'm going to be doing, reminding people what I ran on (and) what I have delivered on.

AP: From your view as a former secretary of state and sitting governor, was President Biden legitimately elected? Did he legitimately win Georgia?

KEMP: Well, he's currently serving as president, so I would say yes. But look, my role — and I'm going

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to always do this — I'm going to follow the law and the Constitution. It's bigger than any party. It's bigger than any politician, certainly bigger than me. I think if we ever get away from that in this country, it'll be a very bad day that we may never recover from, and I think a lot of conservatives like myself are now waking up to that fact.

AP: Does it hurt you politically if (former University of Georgia and NFL player) Herschel Walker runs for Senate and President Trump comes to Georgia to criticize you?

KEMP: I learned in politics a long time ago, you can't control what other people are doing. I'm focused on what I can control, what I can do. I love Herschel Walker. The guy's a Georgia icon. He's been a friend, still is, and a supporter of mine. I have no idea what Herschel's going to do. I think he might be the only one that really knows what he's going to do himself. ... I think he certainly could bring a lot of things to the table. But as others have mentioned, there's also a lot of questions out there on that.

As far as President Trump, he did some great things for our country. And I supported and really fought (for) and defended a lot of his policies. I know he feels very strongly about the election. (But) I had to follow the law and the Constitution. I did what I thought was right, and I did what I thought Georgians wanted me to do.

AP: For some conservative voters, their frustrations with you go back to your appointing Sen. Loeffler and not Trump's choice when (former Sen.) Johnny Isakson retired. Do you regret that?

KEMP: No, not at all. She's a very conservative person. I felt like (having) a female at the top of the ticket going into the 2020 election would be helpful with suburban and urban voters that the party had been looking for a long time. That obviously didn't play out because of a bloody primary and a lot of other things. But look, she did a great job as our senator. I think she brought a lot of things to the table that the party still needs. It was just a very unique situation going into that runoff.

AP: How do you put the coalition back together?

KEMP: Remind people of what we've done, because a lot of people are so frustrated with things that they heard on the internet or somebody said that weren't necessarily true. I'm enjoying talking to some of those people and setting the record straight or at least letting them hear my side of the story. (Democrats) want to take us in a completely different direction. They just don't want to flare off on a little bit of a tangent ... they want to do a 180.

AP: Since you brought up the other side, Stacey Abrams narrowed Democrats' midterm gap in 2018. Now she'd have a national fundraising base and four more years of registering new voters. If it's a rematch, are you the favorite or underdog? How do you compete alongside her national celebrity?

KEMP: There's two ways to run: unopposed and scared. So I'm running scared and hard. I'm not concerned about being a national celebrity. And I'm certainly not concerned with what she or anybody else is doing. I got too much to do every day to worry about that.

AP: You've asked the state school board to ban teaching critical race theory. What should Georgia students learn about slavery and segregation? Do you believe problems from those systems remain?

KEMP: They need to learn factual history, and they don't need to be indoctrinated. I've always agreed with former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice: We can't run from our history, we have to learn from it, embrace it and be better for it in the future. But it needs to be truthful history and not somebody's political agenda.

AP: Some of the narratives, especially outside Georgia, caricature you as a central casting Southern governor from another era. Does that bother you, or does it work for your politics?

KEMP: I can't really control what they're casting me as, but I know what the truth is. And I think Georgians, at least a lot more of them than in November 2018, know what the truth is versus what they were saying. (Democrats') whole campaign was I was a racist and I'm a vote suppressor. Well, obviously that's not true. We've done some historic things there. One of them is appointing John King, first Hispanic constitutional officer ever in the state of Georgia (as) insurance commissioner, first Asian and Asian female to the state Supreme Court, first African American female superior court judge in Gwinnett County. So, the record is there for people to know that that is just a lie.

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Look, I am a hardworking country guy, (been) in agriculture and farming. I'm proud of the rural roots that I've developed over the years. I tell people all the time I've been on the back of a backhoe, but I've also been in the boardroom. That's actually good for our state because parts of our state are very different, (and) you need somebody that can relate and resonate with all of those factions.

QAnon has receded from social media -- but it's just hiding

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

On the face of it, you might think that the QAnon conspiracy has largely disappeared from big social media sites. But that's not quite the case.

True, you're much less likely to find popular QAnon catchphrases like "great awakening," "the storm" or "trust the plan" on Facebook these days. Facebook and Twitter have removed tens of thousands of accounts dedicated to the baseless conspiracy theory, which depicts former President Donald Trump as a hero fighting a secret battle against a sect of devil-worshipping pedophiles who dominate Hollywood, big business, the media and government.

Gone are the huge "Stop the Steal" groups that spread falsehoods about the 2020 U.S. presidential elections. Trump is gone as well, banned from Twitter permanently and suspended from posting on Facebook until 2023.

But QAnon is far from winding down. Federal intelligence officials recently warned that its adherents could commit more violence, like the deadly Capitol insurrection on Jan. 6. At least one open supporter of QAnon has been elected to Congress. In the four years since someone calling themselves "Q" started posting enigmatic messages on fringe internet discussions boards, QAnon has grown up.

That's partly because QAnon now encompasses a variety of conspiracy theories, from evangelical or religious angles to alleged pedophilia in Hollywood and the Jeffrey Epstein scandal, said Jared Holt, a resident fellow at the Atlantic Council's DFRLab who focuses on domestic extremism. "Q-specific stuff is sort of dwindling," he said. But the worldviews and conspiracy theories that QAnon absorbed are still with us.

Loosely tying these movements together is a general distrust of a powerful, often leftist elite. Among the purveyors of anti-vaccine falsehoods, adherents of Trump's "Big Lie" that the 2020 presidential election was stolen, and believers in just about any other worldview convinced that a shadowy cabal secretly controls things.

For social platforms, dealing with this faceless, shifting and increasingly popular mindset is a far more complicated challenge than they've dealt with in the past.

These ideologies "have cemented their place and now are a part of American folklore," said Max Rizzuto, another researcher at DFRLab. "I don't think we'll ever see it disappear."

Online, such groups now blend into the background. Where Facebook groups once openly referenced QAnon, you'll now see others like "Since you missed this in the so called MSM," a reference to the mainstream media. This page boasts more than 4,000 followers who post links to clips of Fox News' Tucker Carlson and links to articles from right-wing publications such as Newsmax and the Daily Wire.

Subjects range from allegedly rampant crime to unfounded claims of widespread election fraud and an "outright war on conservatives." Such groups aim to draw followers in deeper by directing them to further information on less-regulated sites such as Gab or Parler.

When DFRLab analyzed more than 40 million appearances of QAnon catchphrases and related terms on social media this spring, it found that their presence on mainstream platforms had declined significantly in recent months. After peaks in the late summer of 2020 and briefly on Jan. 6, QAnon catchphrases have largely evaporated from mainstream sites, DFRLab found.

So while your friends and relatives might not be posting wild conspiracies about Hillary Clinton drinking children's blood, they might instead be repeating debunked claims such as that vaccines can alter your DNA.

There are several reasons for dwindling Q talk — Trump losing the presidential election, for instance. But the single biggest factor appears to have been the QAnon crackdown on Facebook and Twitter. Despite well-documented mistakes that revealed spotty enforcement, the banishment largely appears to have

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worked. It is more difficult to come across blatant QAnon accounts on mainstream social media sites these days, at least from the publicly available data that does not include, for instance, hidden Facebook groups and private messages.

But while QAnon groups, pages and core accounts may be gone, many of their supporters remain on the big platforms — only now they're camouflaging their language and watering down the most extreme tenets of QAnon to make them more palatable.

"There was a very, very explicit effort within the QAnon community to to camouflage their language," said Angelo Carusone, the president and CEO of Media Matters, a liberal research group that has followed QAnon's rise. "So they stopped using a lot of the codes, the triggers, the keywords that were eliciting the kinds of enforcement actions against them."

Other dodges may have also helped. Rather than parroting Q slogans, for instance, for a while earlier this year supporters would type three asterisks next to their name to signal adherence to the conspiracy theory. (That's a nod to former Trump national security adviser Michael Flynn, a three-star general).

Facebook says it has removed about 3,300 pages, 10,500 groups, 510 events, 18,300 Facebook profiles and 27,300 Instagram accounts for violating its policy against QAnon. "We continue to consult with experts and improve our enforcement in response to how harm evolves, including by recidivist groups," the company said in a statement.

But the social giant will still cut individuals posting about QAnon slack, citing experts who warn that banning individual Q adherents "may lead to further social isolation and danger," the company said. Facebook's policies and response to QAnon continue to evolve. Since last August, the company says it has added dozens of new terms as the movement and its language has evolved.

Twitter, meanwhile, says it has consistently taken action against activity that could lead to offline harm. After the Jan. 6 insurrection, the company began permanently suspending thousands of accounts that it said were "primarily dedicated" to sharing dangerous QAnon material. Twitter said it has suspended 150,000 such accounts to date. Like Facebook, the company says its response is also evolving.

But the crackdown may have come too late. Carusone, for instance, noted that Facebook banned QAnon groups tied to violence six weeks before it banned QAnon more broadly. That effectively gave followers notice to regroup, camouflage and move to different platforms.

"If there were ever a time for a social media company to take a stand on QAnon content, it would have been like months ago, years ago," DFRLabs' Rizzuto said.

'Overdue': Biden sets Aug. 31 for US exit from Afghanistan

By ZEKE MILLER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden says the U.S. military operation in Afghanistan will end on Aug. 31, delivering an impassioned argument for exiting the nearly 20-year war without sacrificing more American lives even as he bluntly acknowledged there will be no "mission accomplished" moment to celebrate.

Biden pushed back against the notion the U.S. mission has failed but also noted that it remains unlikely the government would control all of Afghanistan after the U.S. leaves. He urged the Afghan government and Taliban, which he said remains as formidable as it did before the start of the war, to come to a peace agreement.

"We did not go to Afghanistan to nation build," Biden said in a Thursday speech from the White House's East Room. "Afghan leaders have to come together and drive toward a future."

The administration in recent days has sought to frame ending the conflict as a decision that Biden made after concluding it's an "unwinnable war" and one that "does not have a military solution." On Thursday he amplified the justification of his decision even as the Taliban make rapid advances in significant swaths of the country.

"How many more, how many more thousands of American daughters and sons are you willing to risk?" Biden said to those calling for the U.S. to extend the military operation. He added, "I will not send another

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generation of Americans to war in Afghanistan, with no reasonable expectation of achieving a different outcome."

The new withdrawal date comes after former President Donald Trump's administration negotiated a deal with the Taliban to end the U.S. military mission by May 1. Biden after taking office announced U.S. troops would be out by the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attack, which al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden plotted from Afghanistan, where he had been given refuge by the Taliban.

With U.S. and NATO ally forces rapidly drawing down in the past week, there was growing speculation that U.S. combat operations have already effectively ended. But by setting Aug. 31 as the drawdown date, the administration nodded to the reality that the long war is in its final phase, while providing itself some cushion to deal with outstanding matters.

The administration has yet to complete talks with Turkey on an arrangement for maintaining security at the Kabul airport and is still ironing out details for the potential evacuation of thousands of Afghans who assisted the U.S. military operation.

Biden said that prolonging U.S. military involvement, considering Trump had already agreed to withdraw U.S. troops, would have led to an escalation of attacks on American troops and NATO allies.

"The Taliban would have again begun to target our forces," Biden said. "The status quo was not an option. Staying meant U.S. troops taking casualties. American men and women. Back in the middle of a civil war. And we would run the risk of having to send more troops back in Afghanistan to defend our remaining troops."

The president added that there is no "mission accomplished" moment as the U.S. war comes to an end. "The mission was accomplished in that we got Osama bin Laden and terrorism is not emanating from that part of the world," he said. U.S. forces killed bin Laden in 2011.

U.S. forces this week vacated Bagram Airfield — the U.S. epicenter of the conflict to oust the Taliban and hunt down the al-Qaida perpetrators of the 2001 terrorist attacks that triggered the war.

Remaining U.S. troops are now concentrated in Kabul, the capital. The Pentagon said the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Scott Miller, is expected to end his tour of duty this month as final arrangements are made for a reduced U.S. military mission.

Biden, answering questions from reporters after his remarks on Thursday, said that Kabul falling to the Taliban would not be an acceptable outcome. The president also pushed back against the notion that such a scenario was certain.

"Do I trust the Taliban? No," Biden said. "But I trust the capacity of the Afghan military, who is better trained, better equipped and more competent in terms of conducting war."

To be certain, the West hopes Taliban gains will be confined mostly to rural areas, with the Afghan government and its allies retaining control of the cities where much of Afghanistan's population resides. And while the Taliban remain a major power in Afghanistan, the government's supporters hope that Afghans will work out the Taliban role in the post-U.S. Afghanistan power structure more through political than military means, partly through the inducements of international legitimacy, aid and other support.

Asked by a reporter whether rampant corruption within the Afghan government contributed to the failure of achieving the sort of stability that his predecessors and American military commanders envisioned, Biden didn't exactly dismiss the notion. "The mission hasn't failed — yet."

Biden continues to face pressure from congressional lawmakers to offer further detail on how he intends to go about assisting thousands of Afghans who helped the U.S. military as translators, drivers and in other jobs. Many are fearful they will be targets of the Taliban once the U.S. withdrawal is complete.

The White House says the administration has identified U.S. facilities outside of the continental United States, as well as third countries, where evacuated Afghans would potentially stay while their visa applications are processed. Biden added that 2,500 Afghans have been granted special immigrant visas since he took office in January.

Still, the president faced Republican criticism following his speech.

"The Taliban is gaining more ground by the day, and there are targets on the backs of our people and

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our partners," said Rep. Michael McCaul of Texas, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "But rather than taking the opportunity to reassure the American people there are sufficient plans in place to keep American diplomats and our Afghan partners safe, President Biden only offered more empty promises and no detailed plan of action."

John Kirby, chief Pentagon spokesman, said Thursday that the U.S. military is considering several overseas bases around the world as possible temporary locations for those Afghans awaiting a visa. So far, he said, the numbers of those who have decided to leave Afghanistan are not so high that they can't be handled with a range of installations.

"Our message to those women and men is clear," Biden said. "There is a home for you in the United States if you so choose. We will stand with you, just as you stood with us."

Biden noted that as a senator he was skeptical about how much the U.S. could accomplish in Afghanistan and had advocated for a more narrowly tailored mission. He was somewhat opaque in answering whether the cost of the war was worth it, but argued that the U.S. objectives were completed long ago.

"We went for two reasons: one, to bring Osama bin Laden to the gates of hell, as I said at the time," Biden said. "The second reason was to eliminate al-Qaida's capacity to deal with more attacks on the United States from that territory. We accomplished both of those objectives. Period."

"That's why I believe this is the right decision and quite frankly overdue."

Democrats bet on early Latino outreach to avoid '20 pitfalls

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

KISSIMMEE, Fla. (AP) — On a sweaty recent Thursday afternoon, Alex Berrios was instructing his team on how to get people to register to vote. Extend your hand, he said; it makes folks more likely to stop. Smile a lot, that works, too. But immediately take no for an answer so you don't seem too pushy.

Berrios, co-founder of a new nonprofit, Mi Vecino, or "My Neighbor" has a lot riding on developing the right pitch. His group, which works out of a cramped office in the shadow of Disney World, is targeting Latino would-be voters. He was role-playing how best to approach them in front of Walgreens, amid games of dominoes at a senior center or outside El Bodegon, a supermarket chain specializing in Colombian products.

Fifteen months before the midterm elections, groups like his are mobilizing across the country — both Democrats who have enjoyed a historic Latino allegiance and Republicans emboldened by gains in 2020 — all trying to lock down the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population.

The stakes are high, particularly for Democrats who are counting on Latino votes as a vital part of a winning coalition for cycles to come. And few places are as central to that effort as Florida.

"We're not selling cars here," said Berrios, a onetime boxer who has "fighter" tattooed on his arm and is now vice chairman of the Palm Beach County Democratic Party. "We're not going anywhere. We're in the community and we're staying."

Even as Joe Biden flipped heavily Hispanic Arizona to Democratic to clinch the presidency last November, he underperformed with many Latino voters elsewhere. And his party lost congressional seats where Spanish is often more common than English, from Miami's Little Havana to South Texas' sparsely populated borderlands to the high desert north of Los Angeles.

Nationally, Biden won Latinos by a 59-38 percent margin over Donald Trump, but that was 17 percentage points lower than Hillary Clinton's 66-28 percent margin in 2016, according to Pew Research Center data.

Republicans say they gained ground with Latinos because Democrats, with their increasingly left-leaning positions, are proving soft on issues like socialism and border security.

But Democrats say a problem for them was that they waited until just before the election to intensify outreach to Latino communities.

"It's very transactional. Campaigns, they come and they start 30-60 days before an election, then they're gone," said Berrios, who left Biden's campaign after raising concerns about lagging engagement with Hispanic voters.

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Berrios says Mi Vecino is trying to change that. And the party has begun an expensive, intensive effort to reach Latinos and other voters of color long before the 2022 elections.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee is investing more than \$1 million on 48 organizing directors around the country designed to bolster "strategic outreach and build trust" with minority communities in midterm battleground districts, including in Florida and Texas.

Matt Barreto was the Biden campaign's pollster in charge of Latino message and research and noted that he was only brought on last July, a few months before the election.

"We did what we could," Barreto said.

He and other top Democratic advisers are now leading Building Back Together, a play on Biden's "Build Back Better" post-pandemic campaign slogan, to promote the administration through television and digital advertising.

The initiative first targeted Arizona and Florida as well as two other states with sizeable and growing Latino populations, Nevada and Pennsylvania.

Barreto says the "always on" approach relentlessly communicates with Latinos and has tailored messages for those from different backgrounds, including distinct narrator accents for audiences in different parts of the country.

He pointed to recent Gallup polling putting Biden's approval rating among Hispanics at higher than that of all voters, suggesting the campaign is working.

Others, though, are less optimistic.

"The truth is, the money, it hasn't come as early as it needs to come," said Giulianna Di Lauro, Florida director of the Hispanic political advocacy group Poder Latinx.

"Once these people are registering, we need to find a way to plug them in and engage them on the issues that we care about," said Di Lauro, whose group is now leading community meetings around key issues.

Democrats say that's especially vital along Florida's I-4 Corridor, which runs 130 miles from Tampa to Daytona Beach and bisects theme-park dotted Orlando and Kissimmee. It's heavily Puerto Rican but also Colombian-American and, most recently, has seen an influx of Venezuelan immigrants fleeing their country's political and economic upheaval.

Florida's surging population could also see the area gain a congressional seat — making it an even more important battleground.

Cecilia Gonzalez was one of Berrios' trainees and moved to Kissimmee four years ago from Barinas, Venezuela. She said the U.S. could be on a similar path toward her homeland's collapse, if "we don't stop electing the wrong people and giving them too much power."

"We've got to stop being a plate on the table and get a seat at the table," Gonzalez said of Latino voters.

Republicans aren't just sitting quietly and watching.

The Republican National Committee says it's making a seven-figure commitment for outreach to communities of color, including opening regional engagement centers in key congressional districts. The first was inaugurated last month in Orange County, California.

"Hispanics all across the country are Republicans," said Florida Sen. Rick Scott, who heads the GOP's campaign arm for the 2022 midterms. "If Republicans reach out to them, we're going to win."

Scott was governor before winning his Senate seat and advocated for Puerto Ricans leaving the island after Hurricane Maria's devastation in 2017 to settle in Florida over objections from party officials in Washington who warned the new voters could make the state more blue. Republicans have only done better in statewide elections since.

More Latino voters aren't always a boon to Democrats in other parts of the country, either. Abel Prado, executive director of the Democratic advocacy group Cambio Texas in the Rio Grande Valley, said selling empathic positions like expanding health care access is often tougher than simply counting on Trump's personality and his boasting about disrupting traditional politics.

With Trump not on the 2022 ballot, many of his supporters may simply stay home, Prado said.

His organization estimates that getting voter turnout to 65% of registered Rio Grande Valley voters is

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a "16-20 month endeavor," which means it should have started already — but it largely hasn't.

"There are conversations about talking about how to start changing," Prado said with a laugh.

Still, some conservative groups already have achieved the kind of ever-active Latino outreach campaigns Democrats envision. The Libre Initiative has offices in South Texas and around the country, including near Orlando's airport.

It advocates for issues like increased school choice and free market economics under the slogan "Limited Government, Unlimited Opportunities" and conducts continuous door-knocking efforts to identify would-be voters. Libre also provides nonpartisan civic assistance, offering free English classes, as well as Spanish-language instruction on health, obtaining U.S. citizenship and entrepreneurship.

Democrats "have treated Latinos, for a while now, as get out the vote targets and took them for granted, used them as props," said Libre Initiative President Daniel Garza.

Prado said Democratic activists in Texas have begun trying to emulate some of Libre's work through "deep canvassing," a process that seeks to have longer, ongoing conversations with people to find out what motivates them — both politically and otherwise.

That's the kind of multi-year campaign former gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams launched in Georgia, which saw both of its Senate seats flip Democratic in January. Ex-Senate and presidential candidate Beto O'Rourke heads an organization trying to emulate Abrams' success in Texas.

But such efforts take time and aren't cheap — and that doesn't delight donors looking for immediate results, Prado said: "This isn't the stock market where you buy 500 shares of something and triple your money in three weeks."

Montana town of grizzly attack a popular stop for cyclists

By AMY BETH HANSON and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

HELENA Mont. (AP) — A tiny western Montana town where a grizzly bear pulled a woman from her tent and killed her this week welcomes visitors year-round to the mountain valley community along the banks of a river made famous by the movie "A River Runs Through It."

They come to Ovando to fish, hike, camp and float the river in the summer and to snowmobile, cross country ski or snow shoe in the winter.

The warmer months also bring bicyclists traversing the scenic Great Divide Mountain Bike Route, which this year runs nearly 2,500 miles (4,023 kilometers) from northern Montana to southern New Mexico.

A break in the long-anticipated ride on that route is what brought Leah Davis Lokan, 65, of Chico, California, to the town on Monday for an overnight stay, her friends said.

She and her party were camped near the town's post office and museum when a grizzly bear pulled her out of her tent and killed her early Tuesday, officials said. It was the second time the bear was at the campsite that night, they said.

Wildlife officials spent Thursday trying to find and kill the approximately 400-pound (181-kilogram) bear, but came up empty for a third straight day.

The sheriff closed the informal campsites around town at least until Sunday and the town opened up a fire station and church for cyclists to sleep inside. The town already had an old jail that had been remodeled with some cots for campers, said Kathleen Loendoerfer, who owns the Blackfoot Angler fishing shop with her husband, Travis Thurmond.

Ovando sees about 1,000 cyclists per year who are traveling the Great Divide route, Schoendoerfer estimated, with varying numbers staying overnight.

The route loosely follows the Continental Divide, at times zig-zagging over it on gravel roads, dirt roads and trails and some single tracks, said Dillon Key, who works at Great Divide Cyclery in Helena. There are also some highway miles.

The route is "absolutely gorgeous" through Montana, taking riders over mountain passes and through big, open meadows, Key said.

"A lot of the towns on the route, small towns in the middle of the mountains, tend to be really welcom-

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ing to divide riders coming through," Key said. "There's a couple farms and ranches along the way that allow riders to come stay with them. It's kind of a communal feeling to it. Everyone's really welcoming."

Lokan, a registered nurse who had worked at a hospital in Chico, California, would have fit right in, said Mike Castaldo, president of the Chico Cycling Club.

"She had a really good spirit. She always had a smile on her face. Always lit up when she saw you. Always gave you a big hug," said Castaldo, who knew Lokan for about 15 years. "But I think most of her identity was, you know, outside on the bike, enjoying the outdoors was her thing."

She participated in mountain bike races and was a road cyclist and experienced outdoorswoman.

"I think she was competitive, but that was secondary to the journey or the adventure she was on that particular day," he said Thursday.

Lokan had been looking forward to the Montana bike trip for months, said Mary Flowers, another friend from Chico. Lokan had taken long-distance bike trips and on this one was accompanied by her sister and a friend, Flowers said.

"She was talking about her summer plans — this wonderful wild adventure, riding her bike on, I don't know, a 400-mile trip or something," Flowers said. "A woman in her 60s, and she's doing this kind of stuff — she had a passion for life that was out of the ordinary."

Another friend remembered Lokan as a free spirit with many friends.

"She always greeted you with a smile. She was one of those people that was always up for an adventure and always made you to feel like you were the center of her attention at all times," said Leesa Stefano, who met Lokan when Stefano moved to Sandpoint, Idaho, in 2006 and got involved in a bicycling club to which Lokan belonged.

Stefano said Lokan was the type of person who would find a way to check in with everyone at some point to make sure friends knew they were still part of her life.

"We were all really excited for her, because we know what it meant," Stefano said about the bike ride. "We couldn't wait to hear the stories. It's considered an epic ride."

Lokan and two others were camping when a bear startled them at 3 a.m. Tuesday before wandering off, Montana wildlife officials said. The bicyclists removed food from their tents, stored it and went back to sleep, officials said.

About 4:15 a.m., the sheriff's office received a 911 call after two people in a tent near the victim's were awakened by sounds of the attack, Powell County Sheriff Gavin Roselles said. They discharged their bear spray, and the bear ran away.

Lokan was "well versed in what she was doing. She knew the dangers," Castaldo said, suggesting she may have let her guard down while camping in a town, rather than along the trail.

"The fact that it was right in town — that's pretty messed up," Thurmond told the Missoulian.

People who camp in grizzly bear country — whether deep in the woods or in a developed campground — are advised to keep food and scented products like toothpaste away from their campsites at all times and to cook elsewhere.

If a bear comes through a campsite, it's important to stay on lookout for the animal to return, said Greg Lemon, spokesperson for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Wildlife officials initially used helicopter flights to search for the grizzly. They also set up large traps — made out of culverts and baited with roadkill — in and around Ovando. That included traps near a chicken coop that the bear raided the night Lokan was killed, as well as near the campsite.

Investigators obtained DNA left by the bear in the attack and could compare it with any bruin they are able to trap. Bear specialists and game wardens also were stationed near the traps to shoot the animal if the opportunity arises, said Greg Lemon, spokesperson for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

"Our best chance would be if the bear comes back and tries to get another chicken or some more food around town," Lemon said.

The wardens feel they could easily identify the bear, which was recorded on a store's surveillance camera in the minutes after its first visit to Lokan's campsite, Lemon said.

"If they saw that bear at the trap and had a clear shot at it, they might choose to do that."

Tropical storm pounds East Coast after killing 1 in Florida

By RUSS BYNUM and CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — Tropical Storm Elsa carved a destructive and soaking path up the East Coast after killing at least one person in Florida and spinning up a tornado at a Georgia Navy base that flipped recreational vehicles upside-down and blew one of them into a lake.

Elsa's winds strengthened Thursday to 50 mph (85 kph), as the storm dropped heavy rains on parts of North Carolina and Virginia, the U.S. National Hurricane Center said in an update. Elsa was passing over the eastern mid-Atlantic states on Thursday night and was expected to move near or over the northeastern United States on Friday.

No significant change in strength is expected through Friday, and Elsa is forecast to become a post-tropical cyclone by Friday night, the center said.

Tropical storm warnings were in effect along the coast from North Carolina to Massachusetts. There was a chance Long Island in New York would see sustained tropical storm-force winds late Thursday night and into Friday morning, the National Weather Service in New York warned.

The National Weather Service in Morehead City, North Carolina, tweeted that a tornado was spotted near Fairfield on Thursday afternoon. A tornado warning had been issued for Hyde County and surrounding counties.

Elsa seemed to spare Florida from significant damage, though it still threatened flooding downpours and caused several tornado warnings.

Authorities in Jacksonville, Florida, said one person was killed Wednesday when a tree fell and struck two cars. A spokesperson for the Naval Air Force Atlantic Office said Thursday that a sailor assigned to Patrol and Reconnaissance Squadron 16 in Jacksonville was killed.

Forecasters reported 50 mph (80 kph) wind gusts in the city. The tree fell during heavy rains, according to Capt. Eric Prosswimmer of the Jacksonville Fire Rescue Department.

Nine people were injured Wednesday evening in coastal Camden County, Georgia, when a tornado struck a campground for active-duty service members and military retirees at Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base. Eight of those hurt were taken to hospitals, base spokesperson Chris Tucker said. Some have since been released and others were kept for observation, he said.

The EF-2 tornado flipped over multiple RVs, throwing one of the overturned vehicles about 200 feet (61 meters) into a lake, the National Weather Service said in a preliminary report early Thursday after its employees surveyed the damage.

Tucker said about a dozen recreational vehicles at the campground were damaged. Some buildings were also damaged on the base, which is the East Coast hub for the Navy's fleet of submarines armed with nuclear missiles. Tucker said there was no damage to submarines or any other "military assets."

Sergio Rodriguez, who lives near the RV park, said he raced to the scene fearing friends staying at the park might be hurt.

"There were just RVs flipped over on their sides, pickup trucks flipped over, a couple of trailers had been shifted and a couple of trailers were in the water" of a pond on the site, Rodriguez said in a phone interview.

In South Carolina, a Coast Guard Air Station Savannah crew rescued a family that became stranded on Otter Island on Wednesday after their boat drifted off the beach due to Elsa. A man, his wife and daughter, and three cousins were hoisted into a helicopter and taken to Charleston Executive Airport in good health Wednesday night, the Coast Guard said in a news release.

The hurricane center said rainfall totals between 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 centimeters) were expected through Friday for eastern Mid-Atlantic states and into New England. Isolated totals up to 6 inches (15 centimeters) were possible. There was a risk of "considerable" flash and urban flooding.

More than 7 inches (18 centimeters) of rain was recorded at a weather station near Gainesville, Florida, the weather service reported.

Scattered power outages were being reported along Elsa's path Thursday night, with about 45,000 homes and businesses without electricity from Virginia to Massachusetts, according to the website powerroutages.us.

Elsa is the earliest fifth-named storm on record, said Brian McNoldy, a hurricane researcher at the University of Miami.

Recovery workers vow not to let up in Florida condo collapse

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — Rescue workers now focused on finding remains instead of survivors in the rubble of a Florida condominium collapse vowed Thursday to keep up their search for victims until they cleared all the debris at the site.

Earlier, a fire official told family members at a meeting that crews "will not stop working until they've gotten to the bottom of the pile and recovered every single of the families' missing loved ones," Surfside Mayor Charles Burkett said at an evening news conference. He did not identify the official, but said the families were grateful.

"This is exactly the message the families wanted to hear," he said.

As the search continued, a Paraguayan official disclosed late Thursday that rescuers had found in the rubble the bodies of Sophia López Moreira, the sister of Paraguay's first lady Silvana Abdo, and López Moreira's husband Luis Pettengill and the youngest of their three children.

That South American nation's foreign minister, Euclides Acevedo, told Paraguay's ABC Cardinal radio station that the two other children and the family assistant are still missing.

"We ask people for their solidarity and a prayer," he said. "In the face of a tragedy, Paraguayan people must show their traditional solidarity."

During the day, the death toll rose to 64, with another 76 people unaccounted for, Miami Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said earlier. Detectives are still working to verify that each of those listed as missing was actually in the building when it collapsed.

Levine Cava said teams paused briefly atop the pile to mark the two-week anniversary of the disaster, but there was no let-up in the pace or number of rescuers at the site.

"The work continues with all speed and urgency," she said. "We are working around the clock to recover victims and to bring closure to the families as fast as we possibly can."

The painstaking search for survivors shifted to a recovery effort at midnight Wednesday after authorities said they had come to the agonizing conclusion that there was "no chance of life" in the rubble of the Champlain Towers South condo building in Surfside.

"When that happened, it took a little piece of the hearts of this community," said U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, whose congressional district includes Surfside.

Michael Stratton, whose wife, Cassie, has not officially been confirmed dead, said friends and family had accepted "the loss of a bright and kind soul with an adventurous spirit." He was talking on the phone with his wife right when the building collapsed, and she described shaking before the phone went dead, he has told Denver's KDVR-TV.

"This wasn't the miracle we prayed for, but it was not for lack of trying by rescue crews whose tireless bravery will never be forgotten," he said in a statement Thursday.

Wasserman Schultz and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis pledged financial assistance to families of the victims, as well as to residents of the building who survived but lost all their possessions.

In addition to property tax relief for residents of the building, DeSantis said, the state government will work toward channeling an outpouring of charitable donations to families affected by the collapse. Levine Cava said crews were also collecting and cataloguing numerous personal items, including legal documents, photo albums, jewelry, and electronic goods that they would seek to reunite families with.

The Rev. Juan Sosa of St. Joseph Catholic Church met with other spiritual leaders at the collapse site, where heavy machinery worked in the rubble and mourners left flowers and photos. He said faith leaders hope to bring peace to the grieving families.

"I'm hoping that they have some closure as we continue to pray for them," he said.

The change from search and rescue to recovery was somber. Hours before the transition Wednesday, rescue workers stood at solemn attention, and clergy members hugged local officials, many of them sobbing.

Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Chief Alan Cominsky said Wednesday he expects the recovery effort will take several more weeks. He added crews are now using heavier equipment, expediting the removal of debris.

"We are expecting the progress to move at a faster pace," he added.

Hope of finding survivors was briefly rekindled after workers demolished the remainder of the building, allowing access to new areas of debris.

Some voids where survivors could have been trapped did exist, mostly in the basement and the parking garage, but no one was found alive. Instead, teams recovered more than a dozen additional victims.

No one has been pulled out alive since the first hours after the 12-story building fell on June 24.

Meanwhile, authorities are launching a grand jury investigation into the collapse. And at least six lawsuits have been filed by families.

Pfizer to seek OK for 3rd vaccine dose; shots still protect

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Pfizer is about to seek U.S. authorization for a third dose of its COVID-19 vaccine, saying Thursday that another shot within 12 months could dramatically boost immunity and maybe help ward off the latest worrisome coronavirus mutant.

Research from multiple countries shows the Pfizer shot and other widely used COVID-19 vaccines offer strong protection against the highly contagious delta variant, which is spreading rapidly around the world and now accounts for most new U.S. infections.

Two doses of most vaccines are critical to develop high levels of virus-fighting antibodies against all versions of the coronavirus, not just the delta variant -- and most of the world still is desperate to get those initial protective doses as the pandemic continues to rage.

But antibodies naturally wane over time, so studies also are underway to tell if and when boosters might be needed.

On Thursday, Pfizer's Dr. Mikael Dolsten told The Associated Press that early data from the company's booster study suggests people's antibody levels jump five- to 10-fold after a third dose, compared to their second dose months earlier.

In August, Pfizer plans to ask the Food and Drug Administration for emergency authorization of a third dose, he said.

Why might that matter for fighting the delta variant? Dolsten pointed to data from Britain and Israel showing the Pfizer vaccine "neutralizes the delta variant very well." The assumption, he said, is that when antibodies drop low enough, the delta virus eventually could cause a mild infection before the immune system kicks back in.

But FDA authorization would be just a first step -- it wouldn't automatically mean Americans get offered boosters, cautioned Dr. William Schaffner, a vaccine expert at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. Public health authorities would have to decide if they're really needed, especially since millions of people have no protection.

"The vaccines were designed to keep us out of the hospital" and continue to do so despite the more contagious delta variant, he said. Giving another dose would be "a huge effort while we are at the moment striving to get people the first dose."

Hours after Pfizer's announcement, U.S. health officials issued a statement saying fully vaccinated Americans don't need a booster yet.

U.S. health agencies "are engaged in a science-based, rigorous process to consider whether or when a booster might be necessary," the FDA and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a joint statement. That work will include data from the drug companies, "but does not rely on those data exclu-

sively," and any decision on booster shots would happen only when "the science demonstrates that they are needed," the agencies said.

Currently only about 48% of the U.S. population is fully vaccinated — and some parts of the country have far lower immunization rates, places where the delta variant is surging. On Thursday, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the CDC director, said that's leading to "two truths" — highly immunized swaths of America are getting back to normal while hospitalizations are rising in other places.

"This rapid rise is troubling," she said: A few weeks ago the delta variant accounted for just over a quarter of new U.S. cases, but it now accounts for just over 50% — and in some places, such as parts of the Midwest, as much as 80%.

Also Thursday, researchers from France's Pasteur Institute reported new evidence that full vaccination is critical.

In laboratory tests, blood from several dozen people given their first dose of the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccines "barely inhibited" the delta variant, the team reported in the journal *Nature*. But weeks after getting their second dose, nearly all had what researchers deemed an immune boost strong enough to neutralize the delta variant — even if it was a little less potent than against earlier versions of the virus.

The French researchers also tested unvaccinated people who had survived a bout of the coronavirus, and found their antibodies were four-fold less potent against the new mutant. But a single vaccine dose dramatically boosted their antibody levels — sparking cross-protection against the delta variant and two other mutants, the study found. That supports public health recommendations that COVID-19 survivors get vaccinated rather than relying on natural immunity.

The lab experiments add to real-world data that the delta variant's mutations aren't evading the vaccines most widely used in Western countries, but underscore that it's crucial to get more of the world immunized before the virus evolves even more.

Researchers in Britain found two doses of the Pfizer vaccine, for example, are 96% protective against hospitalization with the delta variant and 88% effective against symptomatic infection. That finding was echoed last weekend by Canadian researchers, while a report from Israel suggested protection against mild delta infection may have dipped lower, to 64%.

Whether the fully vaccinated still need to wear masks in places where the delta variant is surging is a growing question. In the U.S., the CDC maintains that fully vaccinated people don't need to. Even before the delta variant came along, the vaccines weren't perfect, but the best evidence suggests that if vaccinated people nonetheless get the coronavirus, they'll have much milder cases.

"Let me emphasize, if you were vaccinated, you have a very high degree of protection," Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government's top infectious disease expert, said Thursday.

In the U.S., case rates have been rising for weeks and the rate of hospitalizations has started to tick up, rising 7% from the previous seven-day average, Walensky told reporters Thursday. However, deaths remain down on average, which some experts believe is at least partly due to high vaccination rates in people 65 and older — who are among the most susceptible to severe disease.

2 Haitian Americans detained in slaying of Haiti president

By EVENS SANON, DÁNICA COTO and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Two men believed to be Haitian Americans — one of them purportedly a former bodyguard at the Canadian Embassy in Port au Prince — have been arrested in connection with the assassination of Haiti's president, Haitian officials said Thursday.

James Solages and Joseph Vincent were among 17 suspects detained in the brazen killing of President Jovenel Moïse by gunmen at his home in the pre-dawn hours Wednesday. Fifteen of them are from Colombia, according to Léon Charles, chief of Haiti's National Police. He added that three other suspects were killed by police and eight others are on the run. Charles had earlier said seven were killed.

"We are going to bring them to justice," he said as the 17 suspects sat handcuffed on the floor during a press conference Thursday night.

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Late Thursday, Colombia's government said six of the suspects in Haiti, including two of those killed, were retired member of Colombia's army, though it didn't release their identities.

The head of the Colombian national police, Gen. Jorge Luis Vargas Valencia, said President Iván Duque had instructed the high command of Colombia's army and police to cooperate in the investigation.

"A team was formed with the best investigators ... they are going to send dates, flight times, financial information that is already being collected to be sent to Port-au-Prince," Vargas said.

The oldest suspect is 55 and the youngest, Solages, is 35, according to a document shared by Mathias Pierre, Haiti's minister of elections.

He would not provide additional details about Solages' background, nor provide the name of the second Haitian American. The U.S. State Department said it was aware of reports that Haitian Americans were in custody but could not confirm or comment.

Solages described himself as a "certified diplomatic agent," an advocate for children and budding politician on a website for a charity he established in 2019 in south Florida to assist residents.

On his bio page for the charity, Solages said he previously worked as a bodyguard at the Canadian Embassy in Haiti. The Canadian Embassy didn't immediately comment; calls to the foundation and Solages' associates at the charity either did not go through or weren't answered.

Witnesses said two suspects were discovered Thursday hiding in bushes in Port-au-Prince by a crowd, some of whom grabbed the men by their shirts and pants, pushing them and occasionally slapping them.

Police arrested the men, who were sweating heavily and wearing clothes that seemed to be smeared with mud, an Associated Press journalist said. Officers put them in the back of a pickup truck and drove away as the crowd ran after them to the nearby police station.

Once there, some in the crowd chanted: "They killed the president! Give them to us. We're going to burn them!"

One man was overheard saying that it was unacceptable for foreigners to come to Haiti to kill the country's leader, referring to reports from Haitian officials that the perpetrators spoke Spanish or English.

The crowd later set fire to several abandoned cars riddled with bullet holes that they believed belonged to the suspects, who were white men. The cars didn't have license plates, and inside one of them was an empty box of bullets and some water.

At a news conference Thursday, Charles, the police chief, urged people to stay calm and let police do their work as he warned that authorities needed evidence they were destroying, including the burned cars.

Officials did not address a motive for the slaying, saying only that the attack, condemned by Haiti's main opposition parties and the international community, was carried out by "a highly trained and heavily armed group."

Not everyone was buying the government's description of the attack. When Haitian journalist Robenson Geffrard, who writes for a local newspaper and has a radio show, tweeted a report on the police chief's comments, he drew a flood of responses expressing skepticism. Many wondered how the sophisticated attackers described by police could penetrate Moïse's home, security detail and panic room and then escape unharmed but were then caught without planning a successful getaway.

Meanwhile, a Haitian judge involved in the investigation said that Moïse was shot a dozen times and his office and bedroom were ransacked, according to the Haitian newspaper Le Nouvelliste. It quoted Judge Carl Henry Destin as saying investigators found 5.56 and 7.62 mm cartridges between the gatehouse and inside the house.

Moïse's daughter, Jomarlie Jovenel, hid in her brother's bedroom during the attack, he said, and a maid and another worker were tied up by the attackers.

Interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph, who assumed leadership of Haiti with the backing of police and the military, asked people to reopen businesses and go back to work as he ordered the reopening of the international airport.

On Wednesday, Joseph decreed a two-week state of siege following Moïse's killing, which stunned a nation grappling with some of the Western Hemisphere's highest poverty, violence and political instability.

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Inflation and gang violence have spiraled upward as food and fuel grew scarcer in a country where 60% of Haitians earn less than \$2 a day. The increasingly dire situation comes as Haiti is still trying to recover from the devastating 2010 earthquake and Hurricane Matthew in 2016 following a history of dictatorship and political upheaval.

"There is this void now, and they are scared about what will happen to their loved ones," said Marlene Bastien, executive director of Family Action Network Movement, a group that helps people in Miami's Little Haiti community.

She called on the Biden administration to take a much more active role in supporting attempts at national dialogue in Haiti with the aim of holding free, fair and credible elections.

Meanwhile, the Security Council met Thursday to talk about the situation in Haiti, and U.N. special envoy Helen La Lime, speaking to reporters at U.N. headquarters from Port-Au-Prince, said Haiti made a request for additional security assistance.

Haiti had grown increasingly unstable under Moïse, who had been ruling by decree for more than a year and faced violent protests as critics accused him of trying to amass more power while the opposition demanded he step down.

Moïse had faced large protests in recent months that turned violent as opposition leaders and their supporters rejected his plans to hold a constitutional referendum with proposals that would strengthen the presidency.

According to Haiti's constitution, Moïse should be replaced by the president of Haiti's Supreme Court, but the chief justice died in recent days from COVID-19, leaving open the question of who might rightfully succeed to the office.

Joseph, meanwhile, was supposed to be replaced by Ariel Henry, a neurosurgeon who had been named prime minister by Moïse a day before the assassination.

Henry told the AP that he is the prime minister, calling it an exceptional and confusing situation. "I am the prime minister in office," he said.

On Thursday, public transportation and street vendors remained scarce, an unusual sight for the normally bustling streets of Port-au-Prince.

Marco Destin, 39, was walking to see his family since no buses, known as tap-taps, were available. He was carrying a loaf of bread for them because they had not left their house since the president's killing out of fear for their lives.

"Every one at home is sleeping with one eye open and one eye closed," he said. "If the head of state is not protected, I don't have any protection whatsoever."

Gunfire rang out intermittently across the city hours after the killing, a grim reminder of the growing power of gangs that displaced more than 14,700 people last month alone as they torched and ransacked homes in a fight over territory.

Robert Fatton, a Haitian politics expert at the University of Virginia, said gangs were a force to contend with and it isn't certain Haiti's security forces can enforce a state of siege.

"It's a really explosive situation," he said, adding that foreign intervention with a U.N.-type military presence is a possibility.

"Whether Claude Joseph manages to stay in power is a huge question. It will be very difficult to do so if he doesn't create a government of national unity."

Governor asks Californians to voluntarily cut water use

By ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Thursday asked people and businesses in the nation's most populous state to voluntarily cut how much water they use by 15% as the Western United States weathers a drought that is rapidly emptying reservoirs relied on for agriculture, drinking water and fish habitat.

The water conservation is not mandatory, but it demonstrates the growing challenges of a drought that

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will only worsen throughout the summer and fall and is tied to more intense wildfires and heat waves. Temperatures in parts of the region are spiking again this week as firefighters battle several wildfires in Northern California and other states but are less extreme than the record heat wave that may have caused hundreds of deaths in the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia in late June.

California's most important reservoirs are already at dangerously low levels and will likely reach historic lows later this year. Lake Oroville in Northern California is at 30% capacity, and state officials worry water levels could get so low they might have to shut down a hydroelectric plant later this year. Along the Russian River, officials fear Lake Mendocino could empty later this year.

"This is jaw-dropping, what's happening in the West Coast of the United States," Newsom said Thursday during a news conference at Lopez Lake, a reservoir in San Luis Obispo County formed by a dam on the Arroyo Grande Creek that is at 34% capacity.

A historic drought tied to climate change is gripping the U.S. West and comes just a few years after California declared its last dry spell over in 2016. The earlier drought in California depleted groundwater supplies and changed how people use water, with many people and businesses ripping out landscaping and replacing it with more drought-tolerant plants.

Compared to before the previous drought, urban water usage in California is down an average of 16%. But scientists say this drought is already hotter and drier than the earlier one, accelerating the impact on people and the environment.

California's Mediterranean climate means it doesn't get significant rain or snow until the winter. The state relies on snowmelt in the mountains to fill its reservoirs in the spring, which then provide water for farms, homes and fish throughout the year.

Some big storms in January made officials optimistic about avoiding water shortages this year. But the soil was so dry that instead of melting into runoff to fill rivers and reservoirs, much of the snow in the mountains instead seeped into the ground.

"What we didn't understand was we had this deepening and intensifying drought underground," said Karla Nemeth, director of the California Department of Water Resources. "It really is the speed at which the compounding effects of climate change in soil moisture and ambient temperatures have made this drought a very different kind of drought. It's no longer a slow-moving train wreck."

Given how low California's reservoirs already are, Nemeth said Newsom's request for people to use less water is about planning for next year. The Democratic governor is asking for voluntary conservation efforts, such as taking shorter showers, running dishwashers only when they are full and reducing the frequency of watering lawns.

Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla, executive director of Restore the Delta, called Newsom's response "too little, too late." She said her group and others warned the state at the end of 2020 to prepare for the drought. She said Newsom has been given "bad advice" by state officials.

"They let too much of the water out of the system for industrial agriculture users," she said. "Our water resources and public trust resources like salmon fisheries have been squandered for almonds and other unsustainable crops."

Farmers, meanwhile, have complained about their water allocations being severely cut this year. Nemeth said the state released water from Lake Oroville largely to satisfy water quality requirements in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, formed by those two river systems that feed into the San Francisco Bay.

"We released more than we had planned because much of that water never made it to the delta — it was diverted by other water users instead," she said.

Some local governments already have imposed mandatory water restrictions. And in Oregon, Gov. Kate Brown directed state agencies this week to stop watering lawns, washing windows at their offices and running fountains that don't recirculate water.

In Nevada, a new law bans nearly a third of grass in the Las Vegas area, targeting ornamental turf at places like office parks and street medians. The ban does not apply to single-family homes, parks and golf courses.

In California, Newsom also added nine more counties to an emergency drought proclamation, which now covers 50 of the state's 58 counties and 42% of the state's population.

Large cities, including Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco, are not included in the proclamation. But Newsom is still asking people who live in heavily populated areas to reduce their water consumption because they rely on rivers and reservoirs in drought-stricken areas for much of their supply.

Counties included in the proclamation are eligible for various state actions, including suspension of some environmental regulations.

The newly added counties are Inyo, Marin, Mono, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz.

Report: 2 Seattle police officers broke law during DC riots

By MARTHA BELLISLE The Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Two Seattle police officers who were in Washington, D.C., during the Jan. 6 insurrection were illegally trespassing on Capitol grounds while rioters stormed the building, but they lied about their actions, a police watchdog said in a report released Thursday.

"They were both standing in the immediate vicinity of the Capitol Building in direct view of rioters lining the steps and climbing the walls," the Office of Police Accountability said in its report, citing video evidence. "OPA finds it unbelievable that they could think that this behavior was not illegal, contrary to their claims at their OPA interviews."

After the release of the OPA report, Chief Adrian Diaz said he will hold accountable any Seattle Police Department officer involved in the insurrection, including disciplinary action up to and including termination. He said he would make a decision within 30 days.

The four officers who were cleared by the OPA are on active duty, but the two found to have violated the law and policy have been placed on administrative leave, police spokesperson Valerie Carson said.

The OPA Discipline Committee, which includes the officers' chains of command, employment counsel and OPA Director Andrew Myerberg, recommended that the two officers be terminated.

The two were among a group of six Seattle officers who traveled to D.C. to attend President Donald Trump's "Stop the Steal" rally. Their trip became public after one of the officers posted a photo on Facebook of herself and a former officer at the demonstration. Four other officers later admitted that they were in D.C. on Jan. 6, too, but they said they had not participated in the riot.

The Office of Police Accountability launched an investigation to determine whether the officers violated the law or department policy. Their names have not been released because of contract restrictions with the City of Seattle. The officers also filed a lawsuit that sought to keep their names withheld from public records requests. That case is being appealed to the Washington Supreme Court.

The officers told investigators that they went to the Capitol to support Trump and hear him speak. Most said that they went back to their hotel after the rally and learned about the insurrection on the news.

But the OPA, using records, text messages, photographs, bank records and interviews with federal law enforcement, determined that two officers violated department policies and Washington, D.C., laws.

Seattle City Council President M. Lorena Gonzalez said the two officers should be fired.

"Their participation in activities intended to undermine the lawful and legitimate results of our electoral system and diminish the integrity of our democracy, is unacceptable," she said in a statement. "Additionally, there should be disciplinary action and accountability for the four other officers who participated in the reprehensible events on January 6."

The first officer, a man, said he and the other officer, a woman, left the rally and decided to go to the Capitol "because President Trump had asked people to be there." He said he was exercising his First Amendment rights and was supporting "a free and fair election."

The female officer said, while at the Capitol, she saw people "peacefully standing on the lawn and around the building" but couldn't see the Capitol steps.

But the FBI provided OPA investigators with three still photographs taken from a video of the two of-

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officers on the side of the Capitol as rioters were climbing scaffolding and surrounding the building.

The FBI said the person shooting the video turned to the male officer and asked "well f(asterisk)(asterisk)(asterisk), doing it?" Man with the camera then turned to face the building and a male off camera said: "Thinking about it."

While shooting the video, the officers were standing in an area that was clearly marked off limits.

"While they smiled and looked at the Capitol Building, as captured by the video stills, rioters defiled the seat of American democracy and assaulted numerous fellow officers," the OPA said. "That they, as SPD officers, were direct witnesses to the acts that were going on around them, including the scaling of the Capitol Building walls, but did and said nothing, compounds this."

The video also undermines their claims that they didn't know they were trespassing, the OPA report said.

"Not only were there signs posted in that area, but there were ongoing violent acts, the use of less-lethal tools by law enforcement officers, and multiple other signs that being in that location was inappropriate and impermissible," the report said.

The activities of a third officer were more difficult to confirm, the OPA said. He said he was in the grassy area with the first two officers for about 15 minutes but left to get food. Investigators said it was possible he was trespassing, but they didn't have video evidence.

"By the same token, OPA could not find evidence to exonerate this employee," the report said. "Accordingly, OPA recommended a finding of not sustained — inconclusive."

The investigation found that the other three officers did not violate the law or department policies.

"Absent any illegal acts, the officers' presence at this rally was absolutely protected by the Constitution," Myerberg said. "OPA found this to be the case even if the views held by the officers and expressed at the rally were contrary to the majority view in Seattle or, for that matter, the views held by Myerberg as the factual decider in this case."

Purdue Pharma exit plan gains steam with OK from more states

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma's plan to reorganize into a new entity that helps combat the U.S. opioid epidemic got a big boost as 15 states that had previously opposed the new business model now support it.

The agreement from multiple state attorneys general, including those who had most aggressively opposed Purdue's original settlement proposal, was disclosed late Wednesday night in a filing in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in White Plains, N.Y. It followed weeks of intense mediations that resulted in changes to Purdue's original exit plan.

The new settlement terms call for Purdue to make tens of millions of internal documents public, a step several attorneys general, including those for Massachusetts and New York, had demanded as a way to hold the company accountable.

Attorneys general for both states were among those who agreed to the new plan, joining about half the states that had previously approved it.

In a joint online news conference Thursday, some of the attorneys general who signed on noted that their states are in line to get more money faster to fund drug treatment and prevention.

But they continued to express ire with the company and especially members of the wealthy Sackler family who own the company and have not accepted any blame. "No one is happy with the settlement," New York Attorney General Letitia James said. "Can the Sacklers do more? Hell yeah, they can do a lot better, but it should first begin with an apology."

North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein noted Thursday that the deal includes about \$1.5 billion more than it initially did.

In a statement, members of the Sackler family called the support of more states "an important step toward providing substantial resources for people and communities in need."

Still, nine states and the District of Columbia did not sign on. One of the holdouts, Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson complained: "This settlement plan allows the Sacklers to walk away as billionaires

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with a legal shield for life.”

A 10th attorney general, West Virginia’s Patrick Morrissey, opposes the deal on separate grounds: That his state would get shorted when the money is allocated. He reiterated that position Thursday.

Purdue said in a statement that it will try to build “even greater consensus” for its plan.

Purdue sought bankruptcy protection in 2019 as a way to settle about 3,000 lawsuits it faced from state and local governments and other entities. They claimed the company’s continued marketing of its powerful prescription painkiller contributed to a crisis that has been linked to nearly 500,000 deaths in the U.S. over the last two decades.

The court filing came from a mediator appointed by the bankruptcy court and shows that members of the Sackler family agreed to increase their cash contribution to the settlement by \$50 million. They also will allow \$175 million held in Sackler family charities to go toward abating the crisis.

In all, Sackler family members are contributing \$4.5 billion in cash and assets in the charitable funds toward the settlement. They are not admitting any wrongdoing and no court has found any by a family member.

The agreement also prohibits the Sackler family from obtaining naming rights related to their charitable donations until they have paid all the money owed under the settlement and have given up all business interests related to the manufacturing or sale of opioids.

Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, who had been the first attorney general to sue members of the Sackler family, praised the modified deal in a statement early Thursday. She pointed to the \$90 million her state would receive and the way the company could waive attorney-client privilege to release hundreds of thousands of confidential communications with lawyers about its tactics for selling opioids and other matters.

“While I know this resolution does not bring back loved ones or undo the evil of what the Sacklers did, forcing them to turn over their secrets by providing all the documents, forcing them to repay billions, forcing the Sacklers out of the opioid business, and shutting down Purdue will help stop anything like this from ever happening again,” Healey said.

Purdue’s plan also calls for members of the Sackler family to give up ownership of the Connecticut-based company as part of a sweeping deal it says could be worth \$10 billion over time. That includes the value of overdose-reversal drugs the company is planning to produce.

Money from the deal is to go to government entities, which have agreed to use it to address the opioid crisis, along with individual victims and their families.

Most groups representing various creditors, including victims and local governments, had grudgingly supported the plan. But state attorneys general until now were deeply divided, with about half of them supporting the plan and half fighting against it.

The attorneys general who had opposed the plan said they didn’t like the idea of having to rely on profits from the continued sale of prescription painkillers to combat the opioid epidemic. The revised deal lets state and local governments opt out of receiving those funds. Attorneys general also said the deal didn’t do enough to hold Sackler family members accountable or to make public documents that could help explain the company’s role in the crisis.

Last month, Massachusetts’ Healey told The Associated Press, “The Sacklers are not offering to pay anything near what they should for the harm and devastation caused to families and communities around this country.”

The support from additional states comes less than two weeks before the deadline to object formally to Purdue’s reorganization plan and about a month before a hearing on whether it should be accepted.

With just nine states and the District of Columbia remaining opposed to the plan, it makes it more likely the federal bankruptcy judge will confirm the deal.

Activists also dislike it, and two Democratic members of Congress have asked the U.S. Department of Justice to oppose it. Reps. Carolyn Maloney of New York and Mark DeSaulnier of California said in a statement Thursday that allowing Sackler family members “to obtain legal immunity through Purdue’s

bankruptcy would be a tragic miscarriage of justice." The Justice Department has not weighed in.

Last year, the company pleaded guilty to federal criminal charges and agreed to pay \$225 million to the federal government.

In a separate civil settlement announced at the same time, Sackler family members agreed to pay the federal government \$225 million, while admitting no wrongdoing.

The opioid crisis includes overdoses involving prescription drugs as well as illegal ones such as heroin and fentanyl. Purdue's bankruptcy case is the highest-profile piece of complicated nationwide litigation against drugmakers, distribution companies and pharmacies.

Trials against other companies in the industry are playing out in California, New York and West Virginia, and negotiations are continuing to settle many of the claims.

FDA trims use of contentious Alzheimer's drug amid backlash

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A month after approving a controversial new Alzheimer's drug, U.S. health regulators on Thursday signed off on new prescribing instructions that are likely to limit its use.

The Food and Drug Administration said the change is intended to address confusion among physicians and patients about who should get the drug, which has faced an intense public backlash since its approval last month.

The new drug label emphasizes that the drug, Aduhelm, is appropriate for patients with mild symptoms or early-stage Alzheimer's but has not been studied in patients with more advanced disease. That's a big change from the original FDA instructions, which said simply that the drug was approved for Alzheimer's disease in general.

Drugmaker Biogen announced the change in a release Thursday, stating that the update is intended to "clarify" the patient group studied in the company trials that led to approval. The FDA first approached the company about narrowing the label and OK'd the language.

"Hearing these concerns, FDA determined that clarifications could be made to the prescribing information to address this confusion," the agency said in an emailed statement. Despite the update, the FDA added that "some patients may benefit from ongoing treatment" if they develop more advanced Alzheimer's.

When the drug was first approved, a top FDA official told reporters the drug was "relevant to all stages of Alzheimer's disease."

The FDA's OK last month quickly sparked controversy over Aduhelm's \$56,000-a-year price-tag and questionable benefits. Three of FDA's outside advisers resigned over the decision with Harvard researcher Dr. Aaron Kesselheim calling it the "worst drug approval decision in recent U.S. history."

On Thursday, Kesselheim tweeted that the change was "a welcome step" but added that the FDA and Biogen should do much more to combat "misperceptions about this drug."

Sweeping changes to drug labels are rare, particularly only a few weeks after approval.

"It's a responsible move by both the FDA and Biogen to maximize the safety while giving the drug the best chance to work," said Dr. Ronald Petersen of the Mayo Clinic, who has consulted for Biogen and other drugmakers. The drug's side effects include brain swelling and bleeding.

Aduhelm hasn't been shown to reverse or significantly slow the disease. But the FDA said that its ability to reduce clumps of plaque in the brain is likely to slow dementia. Many experts say there is little evidence to support that claim.

Biogen is required to conduct a follow-up study to definitively answer whether the drug slows mental decline. Other Alzheimer's drugs only temporarily ease symptoms.

Because of its price and broad approval some analysts have worried that Aduhelm could add tens of billions in new expenses to the U.S. health care system, particularly the federal government's Medicare program. Alzheimer's affects about 6 million Americans, the vast majority old enough to qualify for Medicare.

Two congressional committees in the House have launched an investigation into the FDA's review of the drug. And lawmakers in the Senate have called for hearings into the drug's cost and impact on federal

spending.

The narrower label may ease some of those concerns by shrinking the number of patients likely to get the drug, which requires monthly IVs. Many hospitals have already stated that they plan to limit the drug's use to patients with earlier stage disease. Doctors could still prescribe the drug for more advanced patients, though insurers might refuse to pay for it, citing the FDA label.

"It was pretty troubling that the previous label was so broad and included groups of patients in whom the drug had never been tested," said Dr. Suzanne Schindler of Washington University in St. Louis. "I think this is a positive change because it better reflects the patients in whom the drug was actually studied."

Wall Street analysts said the change wouldn't significantly impact projected sales for Biogen. Michael Yee of Jefferies said in a research note that the company already planned to target the drug for the 1 million to 2 million Americans with mild Alzheimer's.

With fans back, ballpark workers enjoy chance to return

By NOAH TRISTER AP Baseball Writer

A suite attendant at the Miami Marlins' home ballpark, Lisa Eckstein had a chance to reconnect with a familiar face when she returned to work this season.

"I have a guest I've taken care of for 18 years," she said. "Their initial reaction was to come and hug me because we're like family — and then we're doing the elbow thing."

It would be premature to say the scene at major league ballparks has completely returned to normal, but there's no question this season has been a step in that direction — perhaps most crucially for the people who work there. With fans back in the stands and concessions being sold, ballpark employees had a chance to return after the pandemic hit many of them hard.

"For some of my coworkers it was pretty tough, because that was their only job," said Eugenia Mays, who has worked at Coors Field in Denver for about two decades. "So unemployment was kicked in, food stamp was kicked in, and you just have to learn how to budget and how to do things off of that point. Some got other jobs, some had to buddy up with others to live together."

After a significantly shortened 2020 season, baseball returned this year with at least some fans attending in person. All teams have now opened their parks to full capacity.

Delaware North, a concessionaire that operates at 11 big league ballparks, says it has recalled around 8,000 employees and hired around 3,000 new ones since Jan. 1 at those parks.

"We are continuing to recruit additional associates who have worked for Delaware North to come back and are seeing more do so now that they see our safe and exciting operations are back in action," company spokesman Glen White said.

Eckstein recalled when the coronavirus crisis brought basketball and hockey to a standstill last year — and the start of the baseball season was postponed.

"We got an email that said go ahead and start your unemployment benefits because nobody knows what's happening," she said.

She described the unemployment system as a "nightmare" but said her union — Unite Here — was crucial in helping people navigate it.

Eckstein said she was apprehensive about going back to work this season. She hadn't been going out much, except for groceries, but she knew there would be safety precautions.

"We had discussions that we would be afforded the PPP that we needed ... that social distancing would occur, and if we had any difficulty, of course we always have someone to go back to besides the company, which would be the union," she said. "It's been very good as far as all that goes."

Marlene Patrick-Cooper is president of Unite Here Local 23, which has members in the Washington, D.C., area, home of Nationals Park. She said workers would have to wait in line to clock in to start their shifts — but an app on employees' phones helped alleviate that social distancing concern.

"They could use that as opposed to standing in line," she said.

Eckstein said she was vaccinated by the second homestand, which was a relief. She said most people

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in her department came back to work, although she wasn't sure if that was true in more cramped areas like concession stands.

Mays said some employees have had extra work because others didn't return.

"I would prep for Infield Greens — that's the salad bar," she said earlier this season. "Now, instead of prepping for just one place, I prep for two places. ... I ping-pong back and forth to make sure they're OK."

White said Delaware North is having challenges recruiting for openings, especially cooks and other culinary positions. The company has held job fairs at ballparks in places like Atlanta, Detroit, St. Louis, Cleveland and Texas. It has also looked to nonprofit organizations for help.

"It's an easy way for groups such as civic organizations, high school boosters, churches and other nonprofit groups to operate concessions at the stadium to raise funds for their respective organizations," White said.

With the season now about half over, ballparks have slowly started buzzing again. This year is still different, but for many employees, the past couple months have been a welcome respite after a tumultuous year.

"Employees, they seem to be pretty mellow, they're excited to be back," Mays said. "They just want to know, 'Hey, how you doing? How's your dog, how's your cat?' Everybody's all excited to be back — to see everybody."

With fans back, ballpark workers enjoy chance to return

By NOAH TRISTER AP Baseball Writer

A suite attendant at the Miami Marlins' home ballpark, Lisa Eckstein had a chance to reconnect with a familiar face when she returned to work this season.

"I have a guest I've taken care of for 18 years," she said. "Their initial reaction was to come and hug me because we're like family — and then we're doing the elbow thing."

It would be premature to say the scene at major league ballparks has completely returned to normal, but there's no question this season has been a step in that direction — perhaps most crucially for the people who work there. With fans back in the stands and concessions being sold, ballpark employees had a chance to return after the pandemic hit many of them hard.

"For some of my coworkers it was pretty tough, because that was their only job," said Eugenia Mays, who has worked at Coors Field in Denver for about two decades. "So unemployment was kicked in, food stamp was kicked in, and you just have to learn how to budget and how to do things off of that point. Some got other jobs, some had to buddy up with others to live together."

After a significantly shortened 2020 season, baseball returned this year with at least some fans attending in person. All teams have now opened their parks to full capacity.

Delaware North, a concessionaire that operates at 11 big league ballparks, says it has recalled around 8,000 employees and hired around 3,000 new ones since Jan. 1 at those parks.

"We are continuing to recruit additional associates who have worked for Delaware North to come back and are seeing more do so now that they see our safe and exciting operations are back in action," company spokesman Glen White said.

Eckstein recalled when the coronavirus crisis brought basketball and hockey to a standstill last year — and the start of the baseball season was postponed.

"We got an email that said go ahead and start your unemployment benefits because nobody knows what's happening," she said.

She described the unemployment system as a "nightmare" but said her union — Unite Here — was crucial in helping people navigate it.

Eckstein said she was apprehensive about going back to work this season. She hadn't been going out much, except for groceries, but she knew there would be safety precautions.

"We had discussions that we would be afforded the PPP that we needed ... that social distancing would occur, and if we had any difficulty, of course we always have someone to go back to besides the company,

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which would be the union," she said. "It's been very good as far as all that goes."

Marlene Patrick-Cooper is president of Unite Here Local 23, which has members in the Washington, D.C., area, home of Nationals Park. She said workers would have to wait in line to clock in to start their shifts — but an app on employees' phones helped alleviate that social distancing concern.

"They could use that as opposed to standing in line," she said.

Eckstein said she was vaccinated by the second homestand, which was a relief. She said most people in her department came back to work, although she wasn't sure if that was true in more cramped areas like concession stands.

Mays said some employees have had extra work because others didn't return.

"I would prep for Infield Greens — that's the salad bar," she said earlier this season. "Now, instead of prepping for just one place, I prep for two places. ... I ping-pong back and forth to make sure they're OK."

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Billionaire Blastoff: Rich riding own rockets into space

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Two billionaires are putting everything on the line this month to ride their own rockets into space.

It's intended to be a flashy confidence boost for customers seeking their own short joyrides.

The lucrative, high-stakes chase for space tourists will unfold on the fringes of space — 55 miles to 66 miles (88 kilometers to 106 kilometers) up, pitting Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson against the world's richest man, Blue Origin's Jeff Bezos.

Branson is due to take off Sunday from New Mexico, launching with two pilots and three other employees aboard a rocket plane carried aloft by a double-fuselage aircraft.

Bezos departs nine days later from West Texas, blasting off in a fully automated capsule with three guests: his brother, an 82-year-old female aviation pioneer who's waited six decades for a shot at space and the winner of a \$28 million charity auction.

Branson's flight will be longer, but Bezos' will be higher.

Branson's craft has more windows, but Bezos' windows are bigger.

Branson's piloted plane has already flown to space three times. Bezos' has five times as many test flights, though none with people on board.

Either way, they're shooting for sky-high bragging rights as the first person to fly his own rocket to space and experience three to four minutes of weightlessness.

Branson, who turns 71 in another week, considers it "very important" to try it out before allowing space tourists on board. He insists he's not apprehensive; this is the thrill-seeking adventurer who's kite-surfed across the English Channel and attempted to circle the world in a hot air balloon.

"As a child, I wanted to go to space. When that did not look likely for my generation, I registered the name Virgin Galactic with the notion of creating a company that could make it happen," Branson wrote in a blog this week. Seventeen years after founding Virgin Galactic, he's on the cusp of experiencing space for himself.

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"It's amazing where an idea can lead you, no matter how far-fetched it may seem at first."

Bezos, 57, who stepped down Monday as Amazon's CEO, announced in early June that he'd be on his New Shepard rocket's first passenger flight, choosing the 52nd anniversary of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin's moon landing.

He too had childhood dreams of traveling to space, Bezos said via Instagram. "On July 20th, I will take that journey with my brother. The greatest adventure, with my best friend."

Branson was supposed to fly later this year on the second of three more test flights planned by Virgin Galactic before flying ticket holders next year. But late last week, he leapfrogged ahead.

He insists he's not trying to beat Bezos and that it's not a race. Yet his announcement came just hours after Bezos revealed he'd be joined in space by Wally Funk, one of the last surviving members of the so-called Mercury 13. The 13 female pilots never made it to space despite passing the same tests in the early 1960s as NASA's original, all-male Mercury 7 astronauts.

Bezos hasn't commented publicly on Branson's upcoming flight.

But some at Blue Origin already are nitpicking the fact that their capsule surpasses the designated Karman line of space 62 miles (100 kilometers) up, while Virgin Galactic's peak altitude is 55 miles (88 kilometers). International aeronautic and astronautic federations in Europe recognize the Karman line as the official boundary between the upper atmosphere and space, while NASA, the Air Force, the Federal Aviation Administration and some astrophysicists accept a minimum altitude of 50 miles (80 kilometers).

Blue Origin's flights last 10 minutes by the time the capsule parachutes onto the desert floor. Virgin Galactic's last around 14 to 17 minutes from the time the space plane drops from the mothership and fires its rocket motor for a steep climb until it glides to a runway landing.

SpaceX's Elon Musk doesn't do quick up-and-down hops to the edge of space. His capsules go all the way to orbit, and he's shooting for Mars.

"There is a big difference between reaching space and reaching orbit," Musk said last week on Twitter.

Musk already has carried 10 astronauts to the International Space Station for NASA, and his company's first private spaceflight is coming up in September for another billionaire who's purchased a three-day, globe-circling ride.

Regardless of how high they fly, Virgin Galactic and Blue Origin already are referring to their prospective clients as "astronauts." More than 600 have reserved seats with Virgin Galactic at \$250,000. Blue Origin expects to announce prices and open ticket sales once Bezos flies.

Phil McAlister, NASA's commercial spaceflight director, considers it a space renaissance, especially as the space station gets set to welcome a string of paying visitors, beginning with a Russian actress and movie producer in October, a pair of Japanese in December and a SpaceX-delivered crew of businessmen in January.

"The way I see it is the more, the better, right?" McAlister said. "More, better."

This is precisely the future NASA wanted once the shuttles retired and private companies took over space station ferry flights. Atlantis blasted off on the last shuttle flight 10 years ago Thursday.

NASA's final shuttle commander, Chris Ferguson, who now works for Boeing on its Starliner crew capsule, is impressed that Branson and Bezos are launching ahead of customers.

"That's one surefire way to show confidence in your product is to get on it," Ferguson said at Thursday's 10th anniversary shuttle celebrations. "I'm sure that this was not a decision made lightly. I wish them both well. I think it's great."

Democrats bet on early Latino outreach to avoid '20 pitfalls

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

KISSIMMEE, Fla. (AP) — On a sweaty recent Thursday afternoon, Alex Berrios is instructing his team on how to get people to register to vote. Extend your hand, he says; it makes folks more likely to stop. Smile a lot, that works, too. But immediately take no for an answer so you don't seem too pushy.

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Berrios, co-founder of a new nonprofit, Mi Vecino, or "My Neighbor" has a lot riding on developing the right pitch. His group, which works out of a cramped office in the shadow of Disney World, is targeting Latino would-be voters. He was role-playing how best to approach them in front of Walgreens, amid games of dominoes at a senior center or outside El Bodegon, a supermarket chain specializing in Colombian products.

Fifteen months before the midterm elections, groups like his are mobilizing across the country — both Democrats who have enjoyed a historic Latino allegiance and Republicans emboldened by gains in 2020 — all trying to lock down the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population.

The stakes are high, particularly for Democrats who are counting on Latino votes as a vital part of a winning coalition for cycles to come. And few places are as central to that effort as Florida.

"We're not selling cars here," said Berrios, a onetime boxer who has "fighter" tattooed on his arm and is now vice chairman of the Palm Beach County Democratic Party. "We're not going anywhere. We're in the community and we're staying."

Even as Joe Biden flipped heavily Hispanic Arizona to Democratic to clinch the presidency last November, he underperformed with many Latino voters elsewhere. And his party lost congressional seats where Spanish is often more common than English, from Miami's Little Havana to South Texas' sparsely populated borderlands to the high desert north of Los Angeles.

Nationally, Biden won Latinos by a 59-38 percent margin over Donald Trump, but that was 17 percentage points lower than Hillary Clinton's 66-28 percent margin in 2016, according to Pew Research Center data.

Republicans say they gained ground with Latinos because Democrats, with their increasingly left-leaning positions, are proving soft on issues like socialism and border security.

But Democrats say a problem for them was that they waited until just before the election to intensify outreach to Latino communities.

"It's very transactional. Campaigns, they come and they start 30-60 days before an election, then they're gone," said Berrios, who left Biden's campaign after raising concerns about lagging engagement with Hispanic voters.

Berrios says Mi Vecino is trying to change that. And the party has begun an expensive, intensive effort to reach Latinos and other voters of color long before the 2022 elections.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee is investing more than \$1 million on 48 organizing directors around the country designed to bolster "strategic outreach and build trust" with minority communities in midterm battleground districts, including in Florida and Texas.

Matt Barreto was the Biden campaign's pollster in charge of Latino message and research and noted that he was only brought on last July, a few months before the election.

"We did what we could," Barreto said.

He and other top Democratic advisers are now leading Building Back Together, a play on Biden's "Build Back Better" post-pandemic campaign slogan, to promote the administration through television and digital advertising.

The initiative first targeted Arizona and Florida as well as two other states with sizeable and growing Latino populations, Nevada and Pennsylvania.

Barreto says the "always on" approach relentlessly communicates with Latinos and has tailored messages for those from different backgrounds, including distinct narrator accents for audiences in different parts of the country.

He pointed to recent Gallup polling putting Biden's approval rating among Hispanics at higher than that of all voters, suggesting the campaign is working.

Others, though, are less optimistic.

"The truth is, the money, it hasn't come as early as it needs to come," said Giulianna Di Lauro, Florida director of the Hispanic political advocacy group Poder Latinx.

"Once these people are registering, we need to find a way to plug them in and engage them on the issues that we care about," said Di Lauro, whose group is now leading community meetings around key

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issues.

Democrats say that's especially vital along Florida's I-4 Corridor, which runs 130 miles from Tampa to Daytona Beach and bisects theme-park dotted Orlando and Kissimmee. It's heavily Puerto Rican but also Colombian-American and, most recently, has seen an influx of Venezuelan immigrants fleeing their country's political and economic upheaval.

Florida's surging population could also see the area gain a congressional seat — making it an even more important battleground.

Cecilia Gonzalez was one of Berrios' trainees and moved to Kissimmee four years ago from Barinas, Venezuela. She said the U.S. could be on a similar path toward her homeland's collapse, if "we don't stop electing the wrong people and giving them too much power."

"We've got to stop being a plate on the table and get a seat at the table," Gonzalez said of Latino voters. Republicans aren't just sitting quietly and watching.

The Republican National Committee says it's making a seven-figure commitment for outreach to communities of color, including opening regional engagement centers in key congressional districts. The first was inaugurated last month in Orange County, California.

"Hispanics all across the country are Republicans," said Florida Sen. Rick Scott, who heads the GOP's campaign arm for the 2022 midterms. "If Republicans reach out to them, we're going to win."

Scott was governor before winning his Senate seat and advocated for Puerto Ricans leaving the island after Hurricane Maria's devastation in 2017 to settle in Florida over objections from party officials in Washington who warned the new voters could make the state more blue. Republicans have only done better in statewide elections since.

More Latino voters aren't always a boon to Democrats in other parts of the country, either. Abel Prado, executive director of the Democratic advocacy group Cambio Texas in the Rio Grande Valley, said selling empathic positions like expanding health care access is often tougher than simply counting on Trump's personality and his boasting about disrupting traditional politics.

With Trump not on the 2022 ballot, many of his supporters may simply stay home, Prado said.

His organization estimates that getting voter turnout to 65% of registered Rio Grande Valley voters is a "16-20 month endeavor," which means it should have started already — but it largely hasn't.

"There are conversations about talking about how to start changing," Prado said with a laugh.

Still, some conservative groups already have achieved the kind of ever-active Latino outreach campaigns Democrats envision. The Libre Initiative has offices in South Texas and around the country, including near Orlando's airport.

It advocates for issues like increased school choice and free market economics under the slogan "Limited Government, Unlimited Opportunities" and conducts continuous door-knocking efforts to identify would-be voters. Libre also provides nonpartisan civic assistance, offering free English classes, as well as Spanish-language instruction on health, obtaining U.S. citizenship and entrepreneurship.

Democrats "have treated Latinos, for a while now, as get out the vote targets and took them for granted, used them as props," said Libre Initiative President Daniel Garza.

Prado said Democratic activists in Texas have begun trying to emulate some of Libre's work through "deep canvassing," a process that seeks to have longer, ongoing conversations with people to find out what motivates them — both politically and otherwise.

That's the kind of multi-year campaign former gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams launched in Georgia, which saw both of its Senate seats flip Democratic in January. Ex-Senate and presidential candidate Beto O'Rourke heads an organization trying to emulate Abrams' success in Texas.

But such efforts take time and aren't cheap — and that doesn't delight donors looking for immediate results, Prado said: "This isn't the stock market where you buy 500 shares of something and triple your money in three weeks."

Japan bans fans at Tokyo-area Olympics venues due to virus

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By MARI YAMAGUCHI and STEPHEN WADE Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Fans will be banned from Tokyo-area stadiums and arenas when the Olympics begin in two weeks, the city's governor said Thursday after meeting with organizers of the pandemic-postponed games.

That means the Olympics will be a largely TV-only event, after the Japanese government put the capital under a COVID-19 state of emergency because of rising new infections and the highly contagious delta variant.

The declaration was made by Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, and the spectator ban was agreed to by Japanese Olympic organizers, the International Olympic Committee, the International Paralympic Committee, and the metropolitan government of Tokyo.

It was a serious blow for Japanese taxpayers and local organizers of the games, which already had been postponed from 2020 by the coronavirus. Hundreds of millions of dollars in ticket revenue will be lost, and that must be made up by the government. Fans also have endured months of uncertainty about whether the Olympics will go ahead.

"Many people were looking forward to watching the games at the venues, but I would like everyone to fully enjoy watching the games on TV at home," Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike said after the meeting. "It's gut-wrenching because many people looked forward to watching at the venues."

Fans from abroad were banned months ago, and the new measures will mean no spectators in stadiums and arenas around Tokyo — both indoor and outdoor venues.

The ban covers Tokyo and three surrounding prefectures — Kanagawa, Saitama and Chiba. A smattering of events in outlying areas, like baseball in the northeastern prefecture of Fukushima, will allow a limited number of fans.

The state of emergency begins July 12 and runs through Aug. 22. The Olympics, which open July 23 and run through Aug. 8, fall entirely under the emergency period, while the Paralympics open Aug. 24.

"Taking into consideration the impact of the delta strain, and in order to prevent the resurgence of infections from spreading across the country, we need to step up virus prevention measures," Suga said.

In principle, the July 23 opening ceremony at the new \$1.4 billion National Stadium will be without paying fans, although some dignitaries, sponsors, IOC officials and others will be allowed to attend.

"We will have to review the situation about the dignitaries and stakeholders," organizing committee President Seiko Hashimoto said of the opening ceremony.

"No fans was a very difficult decision," she added.

Hashimoto acknowledged some regrets, particularly about the decision coming so late.

"We had no choice but to arrive at the no-spectator decision," she said. "We postponed and postponed, one after another. I have done some soul-searching about that."

The emergency declaration made for a rude arrival for IOC President Thomas Bach, who landed Thursday in Tokyo for the games. He attended the virtual meeting on fans from his five-star hotel for IOC officials where he was self-isolating for three days.

"What can I say? Finally we are here," Bach said, sounding upbeat as he opened the late night meeting that ended close to midnight. "I have been longing for this day for more than one year."

Toshiro Muto, the CEO of the organizing committee, said many sponsors, federation officials and others would be considered to be "organizers" and thus would be allowed to attend venues. He said some might occupy public seating, but he said he did not know "the numerical details."

Organizers had expected to generate about \$800 million in ticket sales. Any shortfall — and it could be almost the entire amount — will have to be made up by Japanese government entities.

Japan is officially spending \$15.4 billion on the Olympics, and several government audits say it's much larger. All but \$6.7 billion is public money.

Two weeks ago, organizers and the IOC allowed venues to be filled to 50% of capacity, with crowds not to exceed 10,000. The state of emergency forced the late turnaround, which was always an option if infections got worse.

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On Thursday, Tokyo reported 896 new cases, up from 673 a week earlier. It's the 19th straight day that cases have topped the mark set seven days prior. New cases on Wednesday hit 920, the highest total since 1,010 were reported on May 13.

The main focus of the emergency is a request for bars, restaurants and karaoke parlors serving alcohol to close. A ban on serving alcohol is a key step to tone down Olympics-related festivities and keep people from drinking and partying. Tokyo residents are expected to face requests to stay home and watch the games on TV.

"How to stop people enjoying the Olympics from going out for drinks is a main issue," Health Minister Norihisa Tamura said.

The rise in infections also has forced the Tokyo city government to pull the Olympic torch relay off the streets, allowing it only on remote islands off the capital's coast.

"The infections are in their expansion phase and everyone in this country must firmly understand the seriousness of it," said Dr. Shigeru Omi, a top government medical adviser.

He urged authorities to take tough measures quickly ahead of the Olympics, with summer vacations approaching.

Omi has repeatedly called for a spectator ban, calling it "abnormal" to stage an Olympics during a pandemic.

A government COVID-19 advisory panel on Wednesday expressed concerns about the resurgence of infections.

"Two-thirds of the infections in the capital region are from Tokyo, and our concern is the spread of the infections to neighboring areas," said Ryuji Wakita, director-general of the National Institute of Infectious Diseases.

The Olympics are pushing ahead against most medical advice, partially because the postponement stalled the IOC's income flow. It gets almost 75% from selling broadcast rights, and estimates suggest it would lose \$3 billion to \$4 billion if the Olympics were canceled altogether.

About 11,000 Olympians and 4,400 Paralympians are expected to enter Japan, along with tens of thousands of officials, judges, administrators, sponsors, broadcasters and media. The IOC says more than 80% of Olympic Village residents will be vaccinated.

Nationwide, Japan has had about 810,000 cases and nearly 14,900 deaths. Only 15% of Japanese are fully vaccinated, still low compared with 47.4% in the United States and almost 50% in Britain.

Haddish, Shatner, Paisley join Discovery's 'Shark Week'

By MARK KENNEDY and ALICIA RANCILIO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Deep in the ocean, surrounded by sharks, Tiffany Haddish stayed cool. She drew on her land-based survival skills.

"I was as frightened around them as I am around like a pack of pit bull dogs," she said in an interview. "I feel like animals pick up on your energy. If you're in there being scared, they're like, 'Well, what you got? Why are you scared?' It's like being in the 'hood.'"

Haddish is among the celebrities signed on for this year's Shark Week, with a record 45 hours of programming on the Discovery Channel and streaming on discovery+ between July 11-18.

Joining Haddish are Brad Paisley, William Shatner, Eric Bana, Snoop Dogg, Eli Roth, Robert Irwin, Ian Ziering, Tara Reid and cast members from "Jackass." For Shark Week's 33rd year, there are documentaries, many specials and even a reality series for shark fans to sink their teeth into.

Howard Swartz, a senior vice president at Discovery Channel, said Shark Week was born as a counterpoint for those who developed a fear of sharks and a desire to eradicate them after seeing "Jaws."

"What has evolved over the last three plus decades is to show that they're not these mindless killing machines, that sharks are amazingly intelligent animals," Swartz said. "Equally important is how critical they are to the ecosystem, how critically important they are to the health of the oceans and therefore to life on our planet."

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"Star Trek" star Shatner boldly went where he really didn't want to go — diving with sharks. He suffers from galeophobia, a persistent fear of sharks, but he overcame it in "Expedition Unknown: Shark Trek."

"I think it's very healthy to be afraid of an animal that has an 18-inch jaw with three sets of teeth," he said in an interview. "It's designed to eat, not you necessarily, but to eat. And if you're mistaken to be part of its food chain, that's your problem."

Eli Roth, the horror filmmaker behind the bloody classic "Hostel," joined the documentary "Fin" to explain why millions of sharks have died to feed the continued demand for shark fin soup and other dishes. Bana narrates the doc "Envoy: Shark Cull," which focuses on official controversial shark control programs used in Australia.

Noah Schnapp from the sci-fi series "Stranger Things" suits up to search for the strangest sharks in the ocean, while Irwin comes face-to-face with a Great White for the first time. Even the online television and video star known as Dr. Pimple Popper is getting in on the act: Dr. Sandra Lee will explore the world of shark skin and see if it can help human skin issues.

Paisley puts his musical talents to the test to see how sound can attract or repel sharks, and Snoop Dogg narrates crazy shark moves — like the beasts making eye-popping leaps out of the water, prompting the rapper to call them "thirsty as hell" — in "Sharkadelic Summer 2."

For Haddish, her special about the reproduction of sharks — did you know female sharks have two uteruses? — will hopefully show how important to the planet sharks really are.

"We all need each other. It's like 'The Lion King' — the circle of life. We keep each other alive," she said. "No one on this planet for no reason."

Swartz says inviting celebrities onto Shark Week is a bit like when "Sesame Street" has on famous guest stars — they help attract a wider, intergenerational audience.

"At the end of the day, what the celebrities do for us is to bring people into the tent who might not normally come to Shark Week," he said. "Having said that, I will say you might be surprised at how many celebrities are fans of Shark Week."

Dr. James Sulikowski, a professor at Arizona State University, has been on Shark Week before but this time does something no one has ever done — perform an ultrasound on a wild tiger shark.

It was necessary since scientists are still trying to pinpoint where in the Bahamas tiger sharks give birth and how humans can protect the area. But first they needed to find a pregnant shark and that's where Sulikowski came in, calmly pushing his sonogram onto a shark's belly at the bottom of the ocean while dozens of her friends came to inspect.

"It was so many emotions all at once," he said in an interview. "It's chaos. It's terrifying. It's exhilarating. You're doing something that no one has ever done before. You're pushing the envelope. And right in the back of your mind it's like, 'You know what? I could be eaten.'"

"Mothersharker" — Sulikowski's wonderfully titled show — reveals another side to the often misunderstood animals. "These sharks are moms," he said. "These are animals that are nurturing their young, they're carrying them, they're protecting them. It's an aspect that most people don't realize."

Other shows include a special about an attempt to tag the last known South African Great White breeder and another that attempts to answer why in 2017 an entire Great White population disappeared overnight around South Africa's Seal Island. If you've ever wanted to see a submersible mechanical shark in action, you're in luck with "MechaShark."

Discovery is also marking the debut of its first Shark Week series. In "Shark Academy," eight men and women begin a six-week crash course to secure a crew spot on a shark expedition. And it wouldn't be Shark Week without a scientific look at "Sharknado" — Ian Ziering and Tara Reid explore whether a shark tornado is really possible.

Discovery's "Shark Week" has a rival — its programming coincides with National Geographic's "Shark-Fest," which has 21 hours of new content and 60 hours of enhanced and archival footage over six weeks, with Chris Hemsworth the biggest draw.

Both ventures share a common theme: To tease out at least a grudging respect for sharks. Or, as

Shatner said, "These animals require our respect and an intelligent fear, but not the panic."

Hungary activists vow to resist LGBT law, symbol of EU rift

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Activists in Hungary erected a 10-meter-high (30-foot-high) rainbow-colored heart opposite the country's neo-Gothic parliament on Thursday, vowing to wage a civil disobedience campaign against a new law that they say discriminates against LGBT people and that has raised questions about what values the European Union stands for.

The law, which came into effect Thursday, prohibits the display of content depicting homosexuality or sex reassignment to minors — but critics say its goal is to marginalize and stigmatize the LGBT community as the country marches steadily to the right under Prime Minister Viktor Orban. The law has drawn intense opposition in Hungary and from the EU and has become a significant battleground in the fight over what the bloc represents.

Orban and some other right-wing leaders of member states have been at the forefront of that fight, challenging the EU's traditional "liberal consensus" by refusing to accept migrants, cracking down on media plurality and limiting the independence of their judiciaries.

At the Thursday demonstration, rights groups said the Hungarian law denies thousands of LGBT young people crucial information and support, and violates national and international human rights standards.

"We think that the only path we can pursue is civil disobedience, and we will not change anything about our activities," Luca Dudits, a spokesperson for Hatter Society, Hungary's largest LGBT advocacy group, told The Associated Press.

One provision in the law bans organizations from holding educational programs on sexual orientation in schools unless they are approved by the government. But Dudits said Hatter Society will continue to provide teachers with training and educational materials, and offer their services to anyone regardless of age.

Dudits added that the law "stigmatizes LGBTQ people and actually puts LGBTQ youth more ... in danger of bullying and harassment in schools and in their families as well."

Many European leaders have demanded the law's repeal, saying it violates the bloc's values.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told the European Parliament in Strasbourg on Wednesday that the law was "a disgrace."

In a resolution adopted Thursday, EU lawmakers condemned "in the strongest possible terms" the new legislation in Hungary and said it constitutes a clear breach of fundamental rights.

They said the law is not a one-off case, but "rather constitutes another intentional and premeditated example of the gradual dismantling of fundamental rights in Hungary." The parliamentarians urged the European Commission to take swift action against Hungary unless it changes tack.

Speaking earlier in the day in Belgrade, Orban dismissed the EU criticisms, characterizing the controversy as a "debate about who decides how we will raise our children."

"Brussels bureaucrats have no place here," Orban said.

The debate over the law reflects a larger one within the 27-member EU, where a handful of countries are led by populist leaders who have pressed ahead with laws and policies that many in the bloc feel are anti-democratic or violate its founding values. On the one hand, critics of those policies want the EU to take action to protect their vision of the bloc as a progressive institution; on the other, such action raises uncomfortable questions about how much power Brussels should have over member states' own parliaments.

Orban's government — which next year faces elections expected to be the most competitive since his party returned to power in 2010 — is one of the faces of this rift. A champion of what he calls "illiberal democracy" and a conservative religious worldview, Orban has depicted his rejection of immigration as a fight to preserve Christian civilization, and has taken increasing control over Hungary's higher education system in an effort to instill conservative values.

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Along with Poland, Hungary's closest EU ally, Orban has repeatedly challenged the bloc over issues like migration, corruption and the rule of law. Last year, the two countries held up passage of the EU's budget and COVID-19 economic recovery package over provisions that would allow the withholding of payments to countries that fail to uphold democratic standards.

David Vig, director of Amnesty International Hungary which co-hosted Thursday's demonstration, called the recent legislation "fundamentalist," and echoed the European Parliament's call for action against Hungary's government, including the possible freezing billions of dollars in funding to the nation.

"We expect EU institutions to act firmly and the European Commission to start an infringement procedure ... because this is in clear contradiction not just with EU values, but also with binding EU law and the commission's LGBTQ strategy," Vig said.

But he said that must be done in way that "does not affect the human rights of everyday Hungarians."

Queen Elizabeth II visits set of TV soap 'Coronation Street'

LONDON (AP) — Queen Elizabeth II has visited the set of "Coronation Street" to mark the long-running television soap's 60th birthday.

The monarch was all smiles as she met Thursday with veteran cast and crew of the show, walked along the storied cobbled street and visited the studio where the interior of the Rovers Return pub is filmed.

It was the second time the queen, 95, has visited Coronation Street — the first time was in the early 1980s, at the show's original studios in Manchester.

She told the cast it was "really marvelous you've been able to carry on" during the pandemic, and took time to chat to backstage staff including writers, camera operators, set designers and sound engineers.

The show, which focuses on the lives of residents of the fictional northern English town of Weatherfield, is the world's longest-running drama series.

Actress Kate Spencer warned the queen the set's cobblestones were hard to walk on in heels, to which the monarch replied: "No, I know. I've been told. Probably better not."

Actor Bill Roache, who has played Ken Barlow for decades since the soap's early days, said the royal visit was a "wonderful bit of icing on the cake."

"She just smiles. She listens, she always has and she loves to be made to laugh," Roache said. "I've been lucky to meet her quite a few times and she's always charming, and a laugh is never far away."

Biden with few options to stabilize Haiti in wake of slaying

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press Writer

MIAMI (AP) — The last time Haiti was thrust into turmoil by assassination was 1915, when an angry group of rebels raided the French Embassy and beat to death President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam, ushering in weeks of chaos that triggered a nearly two-decade U.S. military intervention.

With the era of gunboat diplomacy long over, the U.S. is unlikely to deploy troops in the aftermath of the brazen slaying Wednesday of President Jovenel Moïse in an overnight raid at his home.

But the Biden administration may nonetheless find itself dragged into the country's increasingly violent political conflict, one that has been building — if largely ignored by Washington — for months and which is now expected to deepen further, with the immediate path forward blurred by intrigue.

"This will get the U.S.' full attention and that's already a big deal," said Amy Wilentz, the author of multiple books on Haiti. "Up until now, no matter who went to the Americans about Haitian governance and its problems under Moïse, they weren't interested in interfering in any way except to support him."

Moïse was a little-known banana exporter until former President Michel Martelly, barred by the constitution from seeking reelection, tapped him to run as his heir in 2015 elections marred by allegations of fraud.

Seen by many as a stand-in for Martelly's eventual comeback, he had been ruling by decree for more than a year after repeatedly postponing elections in a bitter standoff with opponents while desperate Haitians suffered at the mercy of violent gangs whose power has proliferated in recent years.

He nonetheless appeared to be on his way out, having set Sept. 26 to hold elections for president and

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parliament. The electoral timetable was backed by the Biden administration, though it rejected plans to hold a constitutional referendum — currently scheduled for the same day — that has been opposed by critics who say any vote organized by the government will be fundamentally flawed and lack credibility.

The Biden administration gave no indication of its next policy moves in the aftermath of Moïse's murder other than to say it will support an investigation to determine who was behind the slaying. So far, there are few clues.

But Moïse's allies say the president's recent decision to go after Haitian "oligarchs" who grew rich on state contracts in the electricity and other sectors earned him enemies who have the means to carry out such a well-organized attack, one that authorities say involved Spanish and English-speaking mercenaries posing as U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents.

Late Wednesday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke to acting Prime Minister Claude Joseph, a protégé of Moïse, to offer his condolences.

"It is still the view of the United States that elections this year should proceed," State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

The U.S. has influenced political events in Haiti throughout its history — deploying troops, funding development projects and boosting would-be leaders.

Its intervention following Sam's assassination in 1915 kicked off a ruinous, nearly two-decade U.S. occupation that saw the introduction of Jim Crow racial segregation laws in what was the first country in the world to ban slavery. The U.S. stood by anti-communist ally Francois Duvalier during his reign of terror during the Cold War. And Bill Clinton brokered a deal to restore President Jean-Bertrand Aristide following his removal in a 1994 coup.

In addition, members of the Haitian diaspora concentrated in the U.S. send home more than \$3 billion in remittances yearly, or around a third of the nation's gross domestic product.

But despite \$13 billion in international aid spent on state-building since the devastating 2010 earthquake, the country's democracy remains fragile, corruption rampant and inequality that has left millions struggling to eat is growing worse.

"The United States, for reasons that elude me, does not see that," said Monique Clesca, a Haitian writer and retired United Nations official from her home in the hills above the capital, not far from where the president was killed. "It's to the point that — I think I tweeted yesterday — is it because we are Black?"

To underscore her criticism of the U.S.' frequent neglect, Clesca referred to a shooting rampage just last week in Haiti's capital that was met with silence by Haiti's international partners. Fifteen people, including a journalist and a well-known political activist, were among the dead.

"I didn't hear Joe Biden. I didn't hear Boris Johnson," she said. "Where were they?"

Biden said he was shocked and saddened by Moïse's murder, condemning it as "heinous" act. But in a long Senate career focused on foreign policy, he showed little interest in getting bogged in Haiti's quagmire politics, taking distance from fellow Democrat Clinton's threats of an invasion to restore Aristide.

"If Haiti, a God-awful thing to say, if Haiti just quietly sunk into the Caribbean or rose up 300 feet, it wouldn't matter a whole lot in terms of our interest," he said in a 1994 interview with then PBS host Charlie Rose.

Wilentz said that absent a migration crisis, the Biden White House is likely to limit any involvement.

The Haiti turmoil comes as the US is withdrawing from Afghanistan and it would be hard if not impossible to get support for fresh US troops anywhere in the world right now, especially in a place like Haiti where there's little expectation that U.S. engagement would lead to political stability.

Still, Wilentz said U.S. officials should keep an eye on Joseph to see if he has the wherewithal and interest in organizing a democratic transition that brings stability to average Haitians.

"If not, they should be pushing him pretty hard to name an interim government and get out of the way," she said.

Her biggest fear, besides Martelly or another strongman stepping in to fill the void, is that the U.S. officials once again lose interest.

"The problem," she said, "is you can't do it with the Americans and you can't do it without them."

Cold weather virus in summer baffles docs, worries parents

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

The recent emergence of a virus that typically sickens children in colder months has baffled U.S. pediatricians and put many infants in the hospital with troublesome coughs and breathing trouble.

RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus, is a common cause of cold-like symptoms but can be serious for infants and the elderly. Cases dropped dramatically last year, with people staying home and social distancing, but began cropping up as pandemic restrictions eased.

"I've never seen anything like this before," Dr. Kate Dutkiewicz, medical director at Beacon Children's Hospital in South Bend, Indiana, said after treating two RSV-infected infants recently. Both needed oxygen treatment to help with breathing. "I've never seen cases in July, or close to July."

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a health advisory on June 10 about an increase in RSV cases across parts of the South. Cases have appeared in many other states, too.

LaRanda St. John grew worried when her 6-week-old son, Beau, developed a bad cough a few weeks ago. The Mattoon, Illinois mom has a medical background and suspected RSV when she opened his sleeper and saw his chest heaving with labored breathing.

"The doctors office couldn't get me in because they were flooded with people calling" about kids with similar symptoms, St. John said.

A positive test in the ER confirmed RSV. The infant developed a rapid heart rate and had to be hospitalized overnight. His 16-month-old sister, Lulabelle, also contracted the virus but was not as sick and didn't need hospitalization.

St. John said she wondered if it might be COVID-19 because it's the wrong season for RSV.

"I can't say I was relieved, because I know RSV is just as bad," she said.

Children infected with either virus usually develop only mild illness but for some, these infections can be serious.

Among U.S. kids under age 5, RSV typically leads to 2 million doctor-office visits each year, 58,000 hospitalizations and up to 500 deaths — higher than the estimated toll on kids from COVID-19.

Among adults aged 65 and up, RSV can lead to pneumonia and causes almost 180,000 hospitalizations and 14,000 deaths yearly. Cases in kids and adults usually occur in fall through early spring.

Off-season cases in Australia were a tip-off that the same might happen in the United States, said Dr. Larry Kociolek, an infectious disease specialist with Chicago's Lurie Children's Hospital.

Typically, infants are exposed to RSV during the first year of life, often when older siblings become infected in school and bring the virus home, Kociolek said. But, he added, "there were a lot of kids and babies who were not exposed to RSV in winter of 2020 and winter of 2021. That just leaves a much larger proportion of susceptible infants."

In infants, symptoms may include fussiness, poor feeding, fever and lethargy. Children may have runny noses, decreased appetite, coughs and wheezing.

But in very young infants and those born prematurely, the virus can cause small airways in the lungs to become swollen and filled with mucous. Babies who develop this condition, called bronchiolitis, may require hospitalization and oxygen or ventilator treatment.

There is no approved treatment for RSV, although a once-monthly injection of an antibody-based medicine is sometimes prescribed before and throughout RSV season to help prevent severe RSV lung problems in premature infants and other babies at risk for serious disease.

Reinfections are common but typically cause milder symptoms than the initial illness.

Kociolek said the recent unusual surge in cases could be partly due to more testing because of COVID-19 fears. In usual times, parents may dismiss RSV symptoms as nothing serious but now may fear they signal the pandemic virus.

RSV spreads through contact with airborne droplets from an infected person, but it's much more likely than COVID-19 to linger on skin and other surfaces including toys, which can also be a source of transmission.

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RSV is among reasons why daycare centers and preschools often have strict policies about keeping kids with coughs home from school.

"A lot of parents think, 'Oh well, it's just a cold, they're fine to go to school,'" said Diana Blackwell, director of children's programs at Auburn University-Harris Early Learning Center in Birmingham, Alabama.

Despite strict cleaning measures, several children at her center have become sick with RSV in recent weeks, including her own 4-month-old son. He had violent coughing spells and was prescribed medicine often used to treat breathing problems in asthma, but did not need to be hospitalized.

She called the summertime outbreak at her center "just weird."

"It didn't even cross my mind that it would end up being something like RSV," Blackwell said.

Dr. Mary Caserta, a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics' infectious diseases committee and a professor at the University of Rochester, said parents should be aware of the unusually timed virus activity and seek medical care if babies appear very ill or have trouble breathing.

RSV is one reason why pediatricians often caution parents of young babies to avoid crowds in winter cough and cold season.

"COVID has made people so hungry to be with other people that it would be hard now" to make the same recommendation, Caserta said.

Whether the unusual summertime virus activity foreshadows less-than-usual RSV this coming winter is uncertain, she said.

"I've given up in any way trying to forecast the future," Caserta said.

As global COVID-19 deaths top 4 million, a suicide in Peru

By FRANKLIN BRICENO, MARIA CHENG and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

AREQUIPA, Peru (AP) — On the last day of Javier Vilca's life, his wife stood outside a hospital window with a teddy bear, red balloons and a box of chocolates to celebrate his birthday, and held up a giant, hand-scrawled sign that read: "Don't give up. You're the best man in the world."

Minutes later, Vilca, a 43-year-old struggling radio journalist who had battled depression, jumped four stories to his death — the fifth suicide by a COVID-19 patient at Peru's overwhelmed Honorio Delgado hospital since the pandemic began.

Vilca became yet another symbol of the despair caused by the coronavirus and the stark and seemingly growing inequities exposed by COVID-19 on its way to a worldwide death toll of 4 million, a milestone recorded Wednesday by Johns Hopkins University.

At the hospital where Vilca died on June 24, a single doctor and three nurses were frantically rushing to treat 80 patients in an overcrowded, makeshift ward while Vilca gasped for breath because of an acute shortage of bottled oxygen.

"He promised me he would make it," said Nohemí Huanacchire, weeping over her husband's casket in their half-built home with no electricity on the outskirts of Arequipa, Peru's second-largest city. "But I never saw him again."

The number of lives lost around the world over the past year and a half is about equal to the population of Los Angeles or the nation of Georgia. It is three times the number of victims killed in traffic accidents around the globe per year. By some estimates, it is roughly the number of people killed in battle in all of the world's wars since 1982.

Even then, the toll is widely believed to be an undercount because of overlooked cases or concealment.

More than six months after vaccines became available, reported COVID-19 deaths worldwide have dropped to around 7,800 a day, after topping out at over 18,000 a day in January. The World Health Organization recorded just under 54,000 deaths last week, the lowest weekly total since last October.

While vaccination campaigns in the U.S. and parts of Europe are ushering in a period of post-lockdown euphoria, and children there are being inoculated so that they can go back to summer camp and school, infection rates are still stubbornly high in many parts of South America and Southeast Asia. And multitudes in Africa remain unprotected because of severe vaccine shortages.

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Also, the highly contagious delta variant is spreading rapidly, setting off alarms, driving up case counts in places and turning the crisis increasingly into a race between the vaccine and the mutant version.

The variant has been detected in at least 96 countries. Australia, Israel, Malaysia, Hong Kong and other places have reimposed restrictions to try to suppress it.

On Thursday, fans were banned from the upcoming Tokyo Olympics after Japan declared a state of emergency to slow rising infections. Spectators from abroad were prohibited months ago, but the new measures will apply to all fans. The games open on July 23.

The variants, uneven access to vaccines and the relaxation of precautions in some wealthier countries are "a toxic combination that is very dangerous," warned Ann Lindstrand, a top immunization official at WHO.

Instead of treating the crisis as a "me-and-myself-and-my-country" problem, she said, "we need to get serious that this is a worldwide problem that needs worldwide solutions."

While the U.S. missed President Joe Biden's goal of getting at least one shot into 70% of American adults by the Fourth of July, deaths nationwide are down sharply to around 225 per day, from a peak of over 3,400 per day in January.

And the U.S. economy has been roaring back, with growth this year forecast to be the fastest in almost seven decades. Even cruise ships, an early vector for the virus's spread, are resuming voyages after a hiatus of more than a year.

In Britain, despite persistent fears about the delta variant, Prime Minister Boris Johnson plans to lift all remaining restrictions this month. Britain this week recorded a one-day total of more than 30,000 new infections for the first time since January.

Elsewhere in Europe, tens of thousands of soccer fans in several cities were able to watch in person their national teams compete in the European Championship a year after the tournament was postponed, though attendance in some stadiums was severely restricted.

In parts of the developing world, it is a story of desperation.

In Latin America, just 1 in 10 people have been fully vaccinated, contributing to a rise in cases in countries such as Colombia, Brazil, Bolivia and Uruguay. Meanwhile, the virus is penetrating parts of Africa that were previously spared, contributing to a sharp rise in cases.

Peru has been one of the hardest hit by the virus, with the highest mortality of any country in the world as a percentage of its population.

In Arequipa, Vilca's suicide was splashed across the front pages of the tabloids in the city of 1 million. His widow said his death was a protest against the deteriorating conditions faced by COVID-19 patients.

Nationwide, Peru has just 2,678 intensive care beds for a population of 32 million — a trifling number even by the low standards of Latin America. Nor was Vilca among the lucky 14% of Peruvians who have received a single dose of the vaccine.

Across the country, a new routine has emerged as people spend their days scrambling to fill heavy, green oxygen tanks bought on the black market that are a lifeline for sick loved ones. Some businesses have tripled the price for oxygen, forcing many people to plunder their savings or sell belongings.

From the hospital where Vilca took his life, "he'd call and say they were all abandoned. Nobody was paying attention," his widow said, showing on her cellphone a photo her husband sent of himself in one of the rare moments he was lucky enough to have an oxygen mask.

Along with South America, which accounts for around 40% of the daily deaths from COVID-19, India has emerged as the other main driver of mortality. Even then, experts believe the roughly 1,000 deaths recorded daily in India are almost certainly an undercount.

In the state of Madhya Pradesh, with over 73 million people, one journalist found that that the spike in registered deaths from all causes in May alone was five times pre-pandemic levels and 67 times the official death toll from the virus for the month, which was 2,451.

Rich countries including Britain, the U.S. and France have promised to donate about 1 billion COVID-19 shots to help close the inequality gap. But experts say 11 billion are needed to immunize the world. Of the 3 billion doses that have been administered globally, less than 2% have been in the developing world.

"Pledging to provide 1 billion doses is a drop in the ocean," said Agnes Callemard, Amnesty Interna-

tional's secretary-general. She slammed politicians for opting for "more of the same paltry half-measures and insufficient gestures."

The U.N.-backed effort to distribute vaccines to poor countries, known as COVAX, has also faltered badly. Its biggest supplier, the Serum Institute of India, stopped exporting vaccines in March to deal with the epidemic on the subcontinent.

Meanwhile, countries including Seychelles, Chile and Bahrain, relying on Chinese-made vaccines, have seen outbreaks even after reaching relatively high levels of coverage, raising questions about the shots' effectiveness.

Dora Curry, an Atlanta-based director of health equity at the charity CARE, said she is deeply worried that while children in Germany, France and the U.S. are getting immunized, relief is slow to arrive for people far more vulnerable in poor countries.

"If there were a way I could give that dose to somebody in Uganda, I would," said Curry, who acknowledged she will probably have her 11-year-old daughter inoculated when she is eligible. "But this just speaks to the problems with the distribution system we have."

Families fostering migrant kids offer what shelters cannot

By JULIE WATSON Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Chris Umphlett and his family worked in small ways to help the 12-year-old girl from Honduras — who barely uttered a word when she arrived after crossing the Mexican border alone — feel comfortable in their Michigan home.

The couple and their four young children who live in the city of East Lansing invited her on walks and bike rides, and watched Disney movies with Spanish subtitles. A Honduran woman from their church made a home-cooked Honduran meal of meat and red beans and tres leches cake, which got a smile.

"I imagine her first introduction to the U.S. was probably not super friendly, was probably confusing," said Umphlett, 37, who works for a software company. "We tried to give her a better experience."

As a record number of children fled violence from Central America and crossed the Mexican border alone this spring, most were sent to large-scale emergency shelters that the Biden administration quickly opened at military bases, convention centers, and fairgrounds.

This 12-year-old was one of the lucky ones, instead placed with an American family while U.S. officials contacted and vetted her mother, who lives in Texas.

Transitional foster homes, where families are licensed to care for migrant children, are widely considered to be the best option for kids in U.S. custody, especially for minors who have been traumatized, are very young, pregnant or are teen parents and require extra emotional support.

Yet hundreds of transitional foster care beds at family homes and small group facilities are not being used, according to government data. Four providers told The Associated Press that they have licensed foster families ready to take children. Two providers said about a third of available beds over the past month were not used. The others declined to specify.

Providers say interest in fostering migrant kids is booming with Americans getting vaccinated and virus-related restrictions being lifted on daily life. They are urging the government to move more kids into foster homes.

"The United States rejected large-scale, institutional care for children more than 110 years ago, and we shouldn't accept it today for children who are seeking protection within our borders. Children belong in families," said Chris Palusky, head of Bethany Christian Services, which places migrant children in foster homes.

While there are not enough families licensed yet to take in the thousands of children in US custody, advocates say the homes could take many of the kids under the age of 12 and other vulnerable youth, such as pregnant teens, now at the government's unlicensed shelters. At the Los Angeles County fairgrounds in Pomona, last week there were some 300 children under the age of 12 among the nearly 1,400 minors housed there.

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The risk of psychological and emotional harm grows the longer kids are in shelters, according to a June 22 federal court filing by the attorneys monitoring the care of minors in U.S. custody as part of a long-standing court settlement.

At the end of May when about 500 transitional foster care beds were unoccupied, there were 5- and 6-year-old children who had spent more than a month at the shelters, according to the court filing.

"What a child receives at a shelter will never compare to the love of a parent caring for a child," said Kayla Park of Samaritas, the provider that connects the Umphlett family with migrant children. "They might tuck them in bed at night or maybe the family's children play with them. That kind of human interaction is so necessary and it can't be replicated in a shelter."

The Biden administration said it's not a matter of simply filling beds. Some siblings might have to go to a shelter to stay together or to have the space to quarantine if someone tests positive for the coronavirus, so there is a need to leave beds unoccupied to deal with circumstances as they arise, Health and Human Service Secretary Xavier Becerra told reporters last week.

"You take a hit trying to completely maximize your space," Becerra said when asked about the unoccupied licensed beds after visiting a shelter housing 800 children at Fort Bliss Army base near El Paso, Texas, that has been plagued by complaints.

Providers agree foster care is more complicated for placements because age and gender must be taken into account, especially in homes where the migrant kids might be sharing rooms with the family's children, like in the home of the Umphletts, who only accept girls 12 and younger.

And the pandemic restricted things further. Many families did not want to take a child directly from the border for fear of being exposed to the coronavirus.

Other families were not equipped to take in someone while they worked at home with kids doing virtual learning, like the Umphletts, who did not take anyone until March of this year.

But providers, like the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, are seeing a huge increase in families interested in fostering migrant kids, providing an opportunity to seize, said its director Krish O'Mara Vignarajah.

"I truly believe if we invest and focus on building out this network of prospective foster care parents, these homes can and should be the medium to long-term solution so we don't have to rely on influx facilities in the future," she said.

The Honduran girl stayed at the Umphlett home for one month until mid-April. Two months passed before Umphletts got another referral for another Central American child.

"I hope they are sending kids to foster homes before sending them to a convention center," Umphlett said. "A home with a family is always better than a mass camp, even if you're being well cared for and not neglected."

Umphlett's family saw a transformation in the shy Honduran girl during her stay. "At first she was so shy, she wouldn't take to anything," he said.

With time she opened up and joined in on bike rides and playing with Magna-Tiles, colorful magnetic blocks. The family speaks limited Spanish but used Google translate and body language to communicate. Two weeks after her arrival to their home, the girl not only cracked a smile but joked around with his wife.

The day she left, the girl who barely uttered a word when she arrived, hugged Umphlett and his wife. Still, it wasn't a tearful goodbye.

"We go into this with the mindset that the goal is to get you to your parent or family member as soon as possible," he said. "So it's a happy moment."

Fighter jets scramble, interrupt leaders in Lithuania

By JARI TANNER and LORNE COOK Associated Press

HELSINKI (AP) — A news conference at a NATO air base in Lithuania featuring Lithuania's president and Spain's prime minister got abruptly cut off Thursday when the pair of Spanish fighter jets serving as the leaders' backdrop were scrambled to monitor errant military aircraft in the skies above the Baltics.

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The Spanish government said an unidentified plane prompted the alert and briefly interrupted remarks by Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez. Spanish media reported that the plane was Russian, but the government's statement didn't specify.

A NATO official who spoke on customary condition of anonymity told The Associated Press later Thursday that Spain's jets took off "to identify two aircraft flying into the Baltic Sea area." The planes were two Russian Su-24 combat jets heading northeast, the official said.

"Those two Russian jets did not file a flight plan, did not have their flight transponder on, or talk to traffic controllers," the official said.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the two Su-24 bombers flew a regular training mission over neutral waters of the Baltic on Thursday. "The flight was performed in strict accordance with international rules of using airspace and without violation of any country's borders," the ministry said in a statement.

Amid Russia-West tensions, both Russia and NATO have regularly scrambled fighter jets to identify and shadow the other party's aircraft.

Nausėda and Sánchez were speaking with two Spanish air force Eurofighter Typhoons behind them at the base in the town of Siauliai when security officials suddenly interrupted the leaders as crews scrambled to get on the fighter jets, live footage from the press conference showed.

"Our press conference was interrupted by a real call....You see, everything works great. I can confirm that the fighter jets took off in less than 15 minutes" of receiving the alarm, Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT quoted Nausėda as saying after the incident. "Thanks to Pedro (Sánchez), we have really seen how our air policing mission works."

Sánchez told reporters when the news conference resumed: "We have seen a real case of what usually happens that precisely justifies the presence of Spanish troops with the seven Eurofighters in Lithuania."

The three Baltic nations — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — joined NATO in 2004 and have no fighter jets of their own. NATO has the responsibility of policing their airspace on a rotational four-month basis from the base in Siauliai and in Amari, Estonia.

Aircraft that member nations assign to NATO missions are on standby around the clock every day of the year. They were scrambled about 400 times in Europe last year, mostly in response to movements by Russian warplanes.

"This demonstrates once again the importance of NATO's air policing mission, which has been running for 60 years to keep our skies safe. It also shows the skills of our pilots and the close coordination among NATO allies," NATO spokesperson Oana Lungescu said.

Lithuanian Defense Minister Arvydas Anusauskas confirmed that an alarm signal was triggered at the base in his country and posted a video on Facebook of one of the departing Spanish fighters.

Sánchez is on the final day of a three-day trip to the Baltic region and earlier met with officials in Estonia and Latvia.

EU fines German car makers \$1B over emission collusion

By DAVID McHUGH and RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union handed down \$1 billion in fines to major German car manufacturers Thursday, saying they colluded to limit the development and rollout of car emission-control systems.

Daimler, BMW and Volkswagen along with its Audi and Porsche divisions avoided competing on technology to restrict pollution from gasoline and diesel passenger cars, the EU's executive commission said. Daimler wasn't fined after it revealed the cartel to the European Commission.

It was the first time the European Commission imposed collusion fines on holding back the use of technical developments, not a more traditional practice like price fixing.

EU antitrust chief Margrethe Vestager said that even though the companies had the technology to cut harmful emissions beyond legal limits, they resisted competition and denied consumers the chance to buy less polluting cars.

"Manufacturers deliberately avoided to compete on cleaning better than what was required by EU emis-

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sion standards. And they did so despite the relevant technology being available," Vestager said. That made their practice illegal, she said.

According to Vestager, the companies agreed on the size of onboard tanks containing a urea solution known as AdBlue that is injected into the exhaust stream to limit pollution from diesel engines, and also on the driving ranges that could be expected before the tank needed refilling. A bigger tank would enable more pollution reduction.

Vestager said cooperation between companies is permissible under EU rules when it leads to efficiency gains, such as the faster introduction of new technologies. "But the dividing line is clear: Companies must not coordinate their behavior to limit the full potential of any type of technology," she said.

Volkswagen said the investigation had ended with a finding that several other forms of cooperation under review were not improper under antitrust law.

"The (EU) Commission is breaking new legal ground with this decision, because it is the first time it has prosecuted technical cooperation as an antitrust violation," the company said in a statement. "It is also imposing fines even though the contents of the talks were never implemented and customers were therefore never harmed."

Volkswagen said that the tank sizes produced by all the carmakers involved were "two to three times" bigger than discussed in the talks. It said it was considering an appeal to the European Court of Justice.

BMW said that discussions on the AdBlue tanks had "no influence whatsoever on the company's product decisions." The company said it was significant that that the fine notice found there was no collusion involving earlier allegations of using software to restrict AdBlue dosing.

BMW said it set aside 1.4 billion euros (\$1.7 billion) based on the commission's initial accusations but reduced the set-aside in May due to more serious allegations in the case not being substantiated.

The case wasn't directly linked to the "dieseldgate" scandal of the past decade, when Volkswagen admitted that about 11 million diesel vehicles worldwide were fitted with the deceptive software, which reduced nitrogen oxide emissions when the cars were placed on a test machine but allowed higher emissions and improved engine performance during normal driving.

The scandal cost Wolfsburg, Germany-based Volkswagen 30 billion euros (\$35 billion) in fines and civil settlements and led to the recall of millions of vehicles. The Volkswagen vehicles in the scandal did not use the urea tanks but relied on another pollution reduction technology.

US jobless claims tick up to 373,000 from a pandemic low

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits rose slightly last week even while the economy and the job market appear to be rebounding from the coronavirus recession with sustained energy.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department showed that jobless claims increased by 2,000 from the previous week to 373,000. Weekly applications, which generally track the pace of layoffs, have fallen steadily this year from more than 900,000 at the start of the year. The four-week average of applications, which smooths out week-to-week volatility, is now 394,500 — the lowest such level since the pandemic erupted in March of last year.

The rollout of vaccinations is driving a potent economic recovery as businesses reopen, employers struggle to fill jobs and consumers emerge from months of lockdown to travel, shop and spend at restaurants, bars, retailers and entertainment venues.

In the first three months of the year, the government has estimated that the economy expanded at a brisk 6.4% annual rate. In the April-June quarter, the annual rate is thought to have reached a sizzling 10%. And for all of 2021, the Congressional Budget Office has projected that growth will amount to 6.7%. That would be the fastest calendar-year expansion since 1984.

The economy is recovering so quickly that many companies can't find workers fast enough to meet their increased customer demand. On Wednesday, the government said that U.S. employers posted 9.21

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million jobs in May, the most since record-keeping began in 2000.

And in June, employers added a strong 850,000 jobs, and hourly pay rose a solid 3.6% compared with a year ago — faster than the pre-pandemic annual pace and a sign that companies are being compelled to pay more to attract and keep workers.

Still, the nation remains 6.8 million jobs short of the level it had in February 2020, just before the coronavirus pandemic tore through the economy and eliminated tens of millions of jobs. And weekly applications for unemployment benefits, though down sharply from earlier peaks, are still comparatively high: Before the pandemic, they were typically coming in at only around 220,000 a week.

The total number of Americans receiving jobless aid, including supplemental federal checks that were intended to provide relief during the pandemic recession, amounted to 14.2 million people during the week of June 19, down from 33.2 million a year earlier.

Many states, though, have dropped the federal aid, responding to complaints that the generous benefits were discouraging some of the unemployed from seeking work: A total of 26 states plan to end the \$300-a-week federal benefit before it ends nationally on Sept. 6. Most of those states will also cut off federal assistance to the self-employed, gig workers and people who have been out of work for more than six months.

Still, many factors other than the enhanced federal jobless benefits are thought to have contributed to the shortage of people seeking work again: Difficulty arranging or affording child care, lingering fears of COVID-19, early retirements by older workers, a slowdown in immigration and a decision by some people to seek new careers rather than return to their old jobs.

"We see weekly filings declining over coming weeks as job growth picks up, although at least some of the improvement will be due to states suspending federal support measures," Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics, said in a research note.

Osaka says Djokovic, Michelle Obama, others reached out

NEW YORK (AP) — Naomi Osaka says former first lady Michelle Obama and sports stars Novak Djokovic, Michael Phelps and Stephen Curry were among those who reached out to offer support after she withdrew from the French Open to take a mental health break.

In an essay in Time magazine's Olympic preview issue, on sale Friday, Osaka — a four-time Grand Slam champion and former No. 1-ranked player — wrote that she hopes "we can enact measures to protect athletes, especially the fragile ones," and suggests they be allowed to sometimes skip media obligations without punishment.

"There can be moments for any of us where we are dealing with issues behind the scenes," the 23-year-old Osaka said. "Each of us as humans is going through something on some level."

She said before the French Open began that she would not speak to the media during that tournament, saying those interactions were sometimes uncomfortable and would create doubts for her on the court. After her first-round victory in Paris, Osaka was fined \$15,000 for skipping her mandatory news conference and threatened by the four Grand Slam tournaments with the possibility of disqualification or suspension if she continued to avoid the media.

Osaka then pulled out of that tournament, saying she deals with anxiety before news conferences and has experienced bouts of depression in recent years.

"Believe it or not, I am naturally introverted and do not court the spotlight," she wrote for Time. "I always try to push myself to speak up for what I believe to be right, but that often comes at a cost of great anxiety."

She hasn't played since Paris, also sitting out Wimbledon, which ends Sunday.

She will return to competition at the Tokyo Olympics, which open July 23, and where she will represent her native Japan.

"It has become apparent to me that literally everyone either suffers from issues related to their mental health or knows someone who does," Osaka wrote in her essay, adding later: "I do hope that people can

relate and understand it's OK to not be OK, and it's OK to talk about it."

On the topic of news conferences, Osaka said she thinks the "format itself is out of date and in great need of a refresh."

She also proposed giving tennis players "a small number of 'sick days' per year, where you are excused from your press commitments without having to disclose your personal reasons. I believe this would bring sport in line with the rest of society."

Do I need to take precautions at hotels if I'm vaccinated?

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Do I need to take precautions at hotels if I'm vaccinated?

Most people won't need to, but it depends on your situation.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says the risk of COVID-19 is low if you're fully vaccinated, and that you can resume indoor and outdoor activities without wearing a mask or social distancing.

But if you have health issues, the CDC says to talk to your doctor about the need to continue taking precautions. Parents of young children may also want to be more careful until their kids are vaccinated. Guidance might vary by country as well, depending on local vaccination and infection rates.

"Hotels are safe, but I think there are individual personal factors that may sway you one way or another," says Dr. Soniya Gandhi, associate chief medical officer at Cedars-Sinai Marina del Rey Hospital.

To help you decide your comfort level, Gandhi suggests looking at infection and vaccination rates in the place you're visiting. If cases are low, you should feel more confident about activities that could put you in close contact with others, like dining at a hotel restaurant or using the gym.

Most U.S. hotel chains took measures during the pandemic to reduce the risk of infections, and those changes remain in effect. Many hotels offer contactless check-in, prepackaged breakfast items instead of open buffets and more frequent cleaning of common areas.

Some hotels and inns, including the MGM Resort chain, have also upgraded their air filtration systems and even added individual air purifiers to some guest rooms.

If you're concerned, call ahead to see what protocols the hotel has in place.

Marriott, Hyatt, IHG Hotels & Resorts and other hotel operators have removed mask mandates for fully vaccinated guests at their U.S. hotels. Hilton's mask rules vary by location, but employees are still required to wear masks.

Tropical storm kills 1 in Florida, hurts 10 at Georgia base

By RUSS BYNUM and CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — Tropical Storm Elsa carved a destructive and soaking path up the East Coast after killing at least one person in Florida and spinning up a tornado at a Georgia Navy base that flipped recreational vehicles upside-down and blew one of them into a lake.

Elsa's winds weakened to 40 mph (65 kph), but it was dropping torrential rains over the Carolinas as it made its way through South Carolina early Thursday, the National Hurricane Center said in its latest update. Elsa was expected to move over North Carolina later in the day, pass near the eastern mid-Atlantic states by Thursday night and move near or over the northeastern United States on Friday.

Some re-strengthening was possible Thursday night and Friday while the system moves close to the northeastern United States.

A tropical storm warning was in effect north of Great Egg Inlet, New Jersey to Sandy Hook, New Jersey, and for the coast of Long Island from East Rockaway Inlet to the eastern tip along the south shore and from Port Jefferson Harbor eastward on the north shore. A warning was also in effect from New Haven, Connecticut to Merrimack River, Massachusetts including Cape Cod, Block Island, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket.

There was a chance Long Island in New York would see sustained tropical storm-force winds late Thurs-

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day night and into Friday morning, the National Weather Service in New York warned.

Elsa seemed to spare Florida from significant damage, though it still threatened flooding downpours and caused several tornado warnings. The coasts of Georgia and South Carolina were under a tropical storm warning. Forecasters predicted Elsa would remain a tropical storm into Friday, and issued a tropical storm watch from North Carolina to Massachusetts.

Authorities in Jacksonville, Florida, said one person was killed Wednesday when a tree fell and struck two cars. The National Weather Service reported 50 mph (80 kph) wind gusts in the city. The tree fell during heavy rains and no one else was injured, according to Capt. Eric Prosswimmer of the Jacksonville Fire Rescue Department.

In nearby Camden County, Georgia, a possible tornado struck a park for recreational vehicles at Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base. About 10 people were injured and taken to hospitals by ambulance, said base spokesman Scott Bassett. The extent of their injuries was not immediately clear. He said some buildings on the base appeared to have been damaged as well.

An EF-2 tornado flipped over multiple RVs, blowing one of the overturned vehicles about 200 feet (61 meters) into a lake, the National Weather Service said in a preliminary report early Thursday after its employees surveyed the damage. Debris from the RVs was strewn throughout the park, the agency said.

Sergio Rodriguez, who lives near the RV park, said he raced to the scene fearing friends staying at the park might be hurt. The area was under a tornado warning Wednesday evening.

"There were just RVs flipped over on their sides, pickup trucks flipped over, a couple of trailers had been shifted and a couple of trailers were in the water" of a pond on the site, Rodriguez said in a phone interview.

Cellphone video he filmed at the scene showed trees bent low among scattered debris. He said ambulances arrived and began treating dazed people trying to understand what had happened.

"A bunch of folks had lacerations and were just banged around," Rodriguez said. "A majority of folks were in their trailers when it happened."

The hurricane center said there was a risk of flooding in South Carolina, which was predicted to get 3 to 5 inches (8 to 13 centimeters) of rainfall.

More than 7 inches (18 centimeters) of rain was recorded at a weather station near Gainesville, Florida, the weather service reported. More than 5 inches (13 centimeters) of rain had fallen by early Thursday at Sapelo Island off the Georgia coast; and at a weather station along the Savannah River in Jasper County, South Carolina.

Scattered power outages were being reported along Elsa's path Wednesday evening, with about 35,000 homes and businesses on either side of the Georgia-Florida state line without electricity, according to the website poweroutages.us.

The storm complicated the search for potential survivors and victims in the collapse of a Miami-area condominium on June 24. Regardless, crews continued the search in the rubble of Champlain Towers South in Surfside, Florida, on the state's southeast coast.

The storm also temporarily halted demolition Wednesday on the remainder of an overturned cargo ship off the coast of Georgia. The South Korean freighter Golden Ray capsized in September 2019 off St. Simons Island, about 70 miles (110 kilometers) south of Savannah. Crews have removed more than half the ship since November.

Most salvage workers were sheltering indoors Wednesday, said Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Himes, a spokesperson for the multiagency command overseeing the demolition.

Himes said crews would be watching to see if Elsa's winds scatter any debris from the ship into the surrounding water. The vessel's remains are open at both ends, like a giant tube on its side, and its cargo decks still contain hundreds of bashed and mangled cars.

In Edisto Beach, South Carolina, Wednesday started muggy and overcast.

"The kind of day you can just feel the weather wanting to move in," Mayor Jane Darby said.

The forecast for the barrier island 30 miles (48 kilometers) down the coast from Charleston was similar

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to a heavy summer thunderstorm – an inch or two (2.5 to 5 centimeters) of rain, winds gusting up to about 40 mph (64 kph) and maybe a little beach erosion. Other South Carolina beaches expected similar conditions, coming mostly overnight to be less of a bother to visitors during an extremely busy summer.

“Businesses are struggling with workers in short supply a lot more than they are going to be bothered by this storm,” Darby said. “That’s where the stress is now.”

Meanwhile, the U.S. Coast Guard said 13 people were rescued from a boat that had left Cuba with 22 people aboard late Monday. Nine people remained missing. Elsa was also blamed for three deaths in the Caribbean before it reached Florida.

Elsa is the earliest fifth-named storm on record, said Brian McNoldy, a hurricane researcher at the University of Miami.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, July 9, the 190th day of 2021. There are 175 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On July 9, 2004, a Senate Intelligence Committee report concluded the CIA had provided unfounded assessments of the threat posed by Iraq that the Bush administration had relied on to justify going to war.

On this date:

In 1540, England’s King Henry VIII had his 6-month-old marriage to his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, annulled.

In 1776, the Declaration of Independence was read aloud to Gen. George Washington’s troops in New York.

In 1918, 101 people were killed in a train collision in Nashville, Tennessee. The Distinguished Service Cross was established by an Act of Congress.

In 1937, a fire at 20th Century Fox’s film storage facility in Little Ferry, New Jersey, destroyed most of the studio’s silent films.

In 1943, during World War II, the Allies launched Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily.

In 1944, during World War II, American forces secured Saipan as the last Japanese defenses fell.

In 1947, the engagement of Britain’s Princess Elizabeth to Lt. Philip Mountbatten was announced.

In 1982, Pan Am Flight 759, a Boeing 727, crashed in Kenner, Louisiana, shortly after takeoff from New Orleans International Airport, killing all 145 people aboard and eight people on the ground.

In 1992, Democrat Bill Clinton tapped Tennessee Sen. Al Gore to be his running mate. Former CBS News commentator Eric Sevareid died in Washington at age 79.

In 1999, A jury in Los Angeles ordered General Motors Corp. to pay \$4.9 billion to six people severely burned when their Chevrolet Malibu exploded in flames in a rear-end collision. (A judge later reduced the punitive damages to \$1.09 billion, while letting stand \$107 million in compensatory damages; GM settled the lawsuit in July 2003 for an undisclosed amount.)

In 2010, the largest U.S.-Russia spy swap since the Cold War was completed on a remote stretch of Vienna airport tarmac as planes from New York and Moscow arrived within minutes of each other with 10 Russian sleeper agents and four prisoners accused by Russia of spying for the West.

In 2015, South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley relegated the Confederate flag to the state’s “relic room” after the legislature passed a measure removing the flag from the grounds of the Statehouse in the wake of the slaughter of nine African-Americans at a church Bible study.

Ten years ago: South Sudan became the world’s newest nation, officially breaking away from Sudan after two civil wars over five decades that had cost millions of lives. Derek Jeter homered for his 3,000th hit, making him the first player to reach the mark with the New York Yankees, who defeated the Tampa Bay Rays, 5-4.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama wrapped up his visit to the NATO summit in Warsaw before

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heading to Madrid for a visit cut short because of violence back home, where five Dallas police officers had been killed by a sniper and two Black men were dead after being shot by police. Serena Williams won her record-tying 22nd Grand Slam title by beating Angelique Kerber 7-5, 6-3 in the Wimbledon final and pulling even with Steffi Graf for the most major championships in the Open era, which began in 1968.

One year ago: The World Health Organization acknowledged the possibility that COVID-19 might be spread in the air under certain conditions; more than 200 scientists, in an open letter, had urged the agency to do so. The head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Robert Redfield, said federal health officials would not revise their coronavirus guidelines for reopening schools, despite criticism from President Donald Trump. New York Mayor Bill de Blasio used a roller to help paint "Black Lives Matter" in front of Trump's namesake Manhattan tower. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of a New York prosecutor's demands for Trump's tax records.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-singer Ed Ames is 94. Actor Richard Roundtree is 79. Singer Dee Dee Kennebrew (The Crystals) is 76. Author Dean Koontz is 76. Football Hall of Famer O.J. Simpson is 74. Actor Chris Cooper is 70. TV personality John Tesh is 69. Country singer David Ball is 68. Business executive/TV personality Kevin O'Leary (TV: "Shark Tank") is 67. R&B singer Debbie Sledge (Sister Sledge) is 67. Actor Jimmy Smits is 66. Actor Tom Hanks is 65. Singer Marc Almond is 64. Actor Kelly McGillis is 64. Rock singer Jim Kerr (Simple Minds) is 62. Actor-rock singer Courtney Love is 57. Rock musician Frank Bello (Anthrax) is 56. Actor David O'Hara is 56. Actor Pamela Adlon is 55. Actor Scott Grimes is 50. Actor Enrique Murciano is 48. Rock singer-musician Isaac Brock (Modest Mouse) is 46. Musician/producer Jack White is 46. Rock musician Dan Estrin (Hoobastank) is 45. Actor-director Fred Savage is 45. Actor Linda Park is 43. Actor Megan Parlen is 41. R&B singer Kiely Williams (3lw) is 35. Actor Mitchel Musso is 30. Actor Georgie Henley is 26.