

# Groton Daily Independent

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

## The Life of Rod Kluess



A Celebration of Life for Rod Kluess, 69, of Groton will be 11:00 a.m., Saturday, July 10th at Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel. Burial will follow in Lorinda Cemetery, Henry.

Rod passed away July 8, 2021 at his home in Groton.

Rodney (Rod) Allen Kluess was born in Watertown on July 12, 1951 and lived in Clark where he graduated from Clark High School in 1969. He started working in the elevators during high school. Rod eventually moved to Groton in 1973 and became General Manager of three elevators in Groton, Ferney and Stratford. He married his high school sweetheart, Arlys Sharp on August 28, 1971 and they would have celebrated 50 years next month. They had two children, Cassie and Wade.

Rod loved to be in rodeos from high school through his 20s riding bulls and bare back horses. He bowled men's and mixed league and loved to golf. He also enjoyed hunting pheasants, geese, ducks and deer until he was older and said "I'd rather watch the deer run instead of shooting them." He coached his wife's softball teams, but his big love was fishing! He met many friends in fishing with many stories about "the big one that got away." He was proud of winning several tournaments. Rod was an

avid Minnesota Twins and Detroit Lions fan.

Rod is survived by his wife and two children, Cassie Monson and Wade Kluess, his grandchildren, Colton, Clayton and Becca, two great-grandchildren, Rayce and Holden and his sister, Carmen.

Preceding him in death were his parents and brother, Meredith.

Pallbearers will be Robbie Easthouse, Ryan Easthouse Colton Monson, Becca Monson, Clayton Stippich and Rich Zimney.



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

## South Dakota Leads the Nation in Travel & Tourism Recovery!

Dear Tourism Partners,

We have some very exciting news to share with you!

According to the latest Economic Impact Report from the U.S. Travel Association, South Dakota leads the nation when it comes to travel & tourism recovery, tying with Florida. The latest recovery data from the U.S. Travel Association and Tourism Economics, from May 2021, shows that both South Dakota's and Florida's tourism economies have fully recovered and have SURPASSED pre-pandemic levels of visitor spending in our respective states. [Click here to read the press release.](#)

We want to THANK the outstanding travel and tourism industry in South Dakota for doing such an incredible job the past year as we faced the challenges of the pandemic. Your positive attitudes, grit, determination, and desire to do all you could to keep welcoming visitors to our state, while providing them with a safe and healthy experience, was nothing short of inspiring. You should all be very proud of the fact that our industry has fully recovered and, according to our most recent research data, could be on pace to have a record setting year.

As we move into July and look down the road to the fall shoulder season, please let your team in the Department of Tourism know if there is any way we can be of service to you. We are here to help! We do expect visitation to continue to be strong this fall, and we are very optimistic about what the future holds for our Great Faces and Great Places.

All our best,

Jim and Team

Jim Hagen  
Secretary of Tourism

## Claremont Resident Graduates from Mount Marty University

YANKTON, SD (July 8, 2021) - Amy Keough of Claremont, SD, was recently awarded a Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from Mount Marty University.

Mount Marty offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in a wide range of high-demand fields, including health sciences, education, criminal justice, business, accounting, recreation management and more, with campus locations in Yankton, Sioux Falls, and Watertown.

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\*Product Price – Actual retail prices are set by dealer and may vary. Taxes, freight, setup and handling charges may be additional and may vary. Models subject to limited availability. Specifications and programs are subject to change without notice. Images may not reflect dealer inventory and/or unit specifications.†† As required by Kawasaki, horsepower tested in accordance with SAE J1995 and rated in accordance with SAE J2723 and certified by SAE International. \*\*See your local Cub Cadet Independent Dealer for warranty details. © 2021 Cub Cadet3PV\_Q\_ECOMMERCE

## **USDA Announces \$500 Million for Expanded Meat & Poultry Processing Capacity as Part of Efforts to Increase Competition, Level the Playing Field for Family Farmers and Ranchers, and Build a Better Food System**

Council Bluffs, I.A., July 9, 2021 – Today, USDA is announcing it intends to make significant investments to expand processing capacity and increase competition in meat and poultry processing to make agricultural markets more accessible, fair, competitive, and resilient for American farmers and ranchers. This is one of several key steps that USDA will take to increase competition in agricultural markets, pursuant to President Biden's Executive Order on promoting competition and as part of USDA efforts to build a more resilient supply chain and better food system. Together, USDA's actions will help farmers, ranchers, farmworkers and consumers all get a fair shake.

Specifically, USDA announced its intent to invest \$500 million in American Rescue Plan funds to expand meat and poultry processing capacity so that farmers, ranchers, and consumers have more choices in the marketplace. USDA also announced more than \$150 million for existing small and very small processing facilities to help them weather COVID, compete in the marketplace and get the support they need to reach more customers. USDA is also holding meatpackers accountable by revitalizing the Packers and Stockyards Act, issuing new rules on "Product of USA" labels, and developing plans to expand farmers' access to new markets.

"The COVID-19 pandemic led to massive disruption for growers, food workers, and consumers alike. It exposed a food system that was rigid, consolidated, and fragile. Meanwhile, those growing, processing and preparing our food are earning less each year in a system that rewards size over all else," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "To shift the balance of power back to the people, USDA will invest in building more, better, and fairer markets for producers and consumers alike. The investments USDA will make in expanding meat and poultry capacity, along with restoration of the Packers and Stockyards Act, will begin to level the playing field for farmers and ranchers. This is a once in a generation opportunity to transform the food system so it is more resilient to shocks, delivers greater value to growers and workers, and offers consumers an affordable selection of healthy food produced and sourced locally and regionally by farmers and processors from diverse backgrounds. I am confident USDA's investments in expanded capacity will spur millions more in leveraged funding from the private sector and state and local partners as our efforts gain traction across the country."

The announcement USDA is making today is part of the Biden-Harris Administration's historic commitment to fight monopolization and promote competition across the economy. They are also aligned with USDA's vision of a food system that is fair, competitive, distributed, and resilient, one that supports health and ensures producers receive a fair share of the food dollar while advancing equity and combating the climate crisis. In the coming months, USDA will take additional steps to promote competition and make a series of additional investments under USDA's Build Back Better Initiative focused on building a better food system.

### Market Concentration in Agriculture

As key agricultural markets have become more concentrated and less competitive, farmers and ranchers are getting squeezed from both sides. Markets for farm inputs—like seeds and fertilizer—are now dominated by just a few companies. Meanwhile, farmers and ranchers have fewer and fewer options for selling their products. The result is that often family farmers and ranchers are getting less, consumers are

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paying more, and those in the middle are taking the difference.

Dominant companies can use their power to engage in abusive practices and make it harder for farmers, ranchers, and consumers to get a fair price. Farmers' share of every dollar spent on food has declined consistently from 35 cents in the 1970s to around just 14 cents in recent years.

Concentration in food processing has contributed to bottlenecks in America's food supply chain, too. Just a few meatpackers, with a few large processing facilities, process most of the livestock that farmers and ranchers raise into the meat that we buy. For example, just four large meat-packing companies control over 80 percent of the beef market alone. One of the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic is that this system is too rigid and too fragile. When COVID slowed or shuttered meat processing, many farmers had no place to go. Farmers were forced to depopulate their animals, while grocery store shelves went bare and demand for food assistance spiked. These vulnerabilities are not new. And, given current concerns about climate and cybersecurity, these risks are likely to grow even more sharply in the future.

USDA is announcing the following initiatives to increase competition in agricultural markets, and build more resilience supply chains:

Investing More Than \$500 million to Increase Competition and Capacity in the Meat and Poultry Processing Markets.

- USDA will commit \$500 million of USDA's Build Back Better Initiative funds through the American Rescue Plan to support new competitive entrants in meat and poultry processing. USDA will provide grants, loans, and technical assistance to address concentration within the meat and poultry sectors and relieve supply chain bottlenecks by supporting new meat and poultry processing facilities. These facilities will create competitive opportunities for producers in local and regional food systems so that farmers and ranchers have access to better choices and fairer prices. USDA has issued a Request for Information (RFI) to solicit public input into its strategy to improve meat and poultry processing infrastructure and will hold targeted stakeholder meetings and other public engagement to better understand the needs, gaps, and barriers to fair and competitive meat processing markets.

Providing more than \$150 million to Strengthen Existing Small and Very Small Processing Facilities and Help Them Weather COVID, Stay in the Marketplace, and Expand Capacity

- USDA will invest more than \$55 million in strengthening existing small and very small meat processing capacity, benefitting smaller producers and processing plants. USDA has made \$55.2 million available for Meat and Poultry Inspection Readiness Grants to support expanded meat and poultry slaughter and processing capacity and efficiency while maintaining strong inspection and food safety standards.

- USDA will dedicate \$100 million to help small and very small processing plants weather the volatility and unexpected costs that COVID imposed. With American Rescue Plan funds, USDA will provide \$100 million to reduce the financial burden of overtime inspection fees for small and very small poultry, meat and egg processing plants, which provide farmers with local alternatives and greater capacity to process livestock.

Leveling the Playing Field for Independent Family Farmers and Ranchers

- USDA will revitalize the Packers and Stockyards Act to fight unfair practices and rebuild a competitive marketplace. The Packers and Stockyards Act was designed to ensure a fair and competitive marketplace and protect farmers against abuse at the hands of large businesses in the livestock and poultry industry. But the previous administration systematically weakened the law's scope. To facilitate effective enforcement of the Act, USDA will be conducting three rulemakings. First, the rulemakings will clarify the conduct that

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USDA considers a violation of the Packers and Stockyards Act, including conduct that is unfair, deceptive, or unjustly discriminatory against farmers and growers. Second, they will address oppressive practices in chicken processing. Third, the rulemakings will reinforce the longstanding USDA position that it is not necessary to demonstrate harm or likely harm to competition in order to establish a violation of the Act.

- USDA will develop a plan to increase farmers' and ranchers' access to new markets, and promote their ability to receive a fair return. As per the President's Executive Order on promoting competition, USDA will develop a plan to increase opportunities for farmers to access markets, including by supporting value-added markets and local and regional food distribution systems. USDA will also analyze and recommend policies to address the impacts of concentration in seeds and in the retail sector on family farmers, and propose strategies to enhance transparency and accountability in key markets. Together, these initiatives will give farmers more choices on how they buy and sell so that they aren't at the mercy of a handful of dominant processors and distributors.

- USDA will issue new rules on labeling so that domestic farmers and ranchers don't have to compete with foreign companies that mislead consumers. On July 1st, USDA announced intent to conduct a top-to-bottom review of the "Product of USA" meat labeling term..

## Building a Better Food System and Strengthening the Food Supply Chain

Citing lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and recent supply chain disruptions, earlier this month USDA announced plans to invest more than \$4 billion to strengthen critical supply chains through USDA's Build Back Better initiative to strengthen and transform the food system, using funding from the American Rescue Plan and the Consolidated Appropriations Act. The \$500 million commitment to invest in meat and poultry processing today begins to detail how the \$4 billion will be deployed. The new effort will strengthen the food system, create new market opportunities, tackle the climate crisis, help communities that have been left behind, and support good-paying jobs throughout the supply chain. A transformed food system will provide producers with a greater share of the food dollar and make agriculture a more compelling career. It will also improve nutrition and the health status of Americans, reducing the costs of healthcare and diet-related diseases.

Through USDA's Build Back Better initiative, USDA will help to ensure the food system of the future is fair, competitive, distributed, and resilient; supports health with access to healthy, affordable food; ensures growers and workers receive a greater share of the food dollar; and advances equity as well as climate resilience and mitigation.

While USDA's Build Back Better initiative addresses near- and long-term issues, recent events have exposed the immediate need for action. USDA's actions to promote competition and the intention to invest in additional small- and medium-sized meat processing capacity will spur economic opportunity while strengthening resilience and certainty for producers and consumers alike.

This announcement also furthers the Biden-Harris Administration's work on strengthening the resilience of critical supply chains as directed by Executive Order 14017 on America's Supply Chains. USDA's efforts to strengthen the food system is a vital component of the Administration's whole-of-government response to address near-term supply chain challenges to the economic recovery. Through the Supply Chain Disruptions Task Force, of which Secretary Vilsack is a member, the Administration is convening stakeholders to diagnose problems and surface solutions—large and small, public or private—that could help alleviate bottlenecks and supply constraints related to the economy's reopening after the Administration's historic vaccination and economic relief efforts.

## Groton Jr. Teeners Downs Aberdeen 13s, 8-5

Groton Jr. Teeners beat Aberdeen 13s 8-5 on Friday.

Groton Jr. Teeners opened up scoring in the first inning. An error scored one run for Groton Jr. Teeners. Taylor Diegel earned the victory on the hill for Groton Jr. Teeners. The pitcher surrendered three runs on one hit over six innings, striking out seven. Braxton Imrie threw one inning in relief out of the bullpen.

Ridley took the loss for Aberdeen 13s. The hurler surrendered five runs on four hits over four innings.

Groton Jr. Teeners had seven hits in the game. Brevin Flihs and Diegel all collected multiple hits for Groton Jr. Teeners. Diegel and Flihs each managed two hits to lead Groton Jr. Teeners. Imrie led Groton Jr. Teeners with four stolen bases, as they ran wild on the base paths with eight stolen bases.

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## Groton Legion Post #39 Drops Game To Lennox After Late Score

Groton Legion Post #39 stayed in it until the end, but Lennox pulled away late in a 7-5 victory on Friday. The game was tied at four with Lennox batting in the bottom of the fifth when Brando Otte singled on a 2-1 count, scoring one run.

Groton Legion Post #39 lost despite out-hitting Lennox nine to five.

Lennox got on the board in the first inning. A sacrifice bunt by Otte scored one run for Lennox.

Brandon Fodness got the win for Lennox. The fireballer surrendered five runs on eight hits over five and a third innings, striking out five and walking one. Max Bambas threw one and two-thirds innings in relief out of the bullpen.

Peyton Johnson took the loss for Groton Legion Post #39. The southpaw went six innings, allowing seven runs on five hits and striking out eight.

Groton Legion Post #39 socked one home run on the day. Alex Morris went deep in the third inning.

Johnson led Groton Legion Post #39 with two hits in four at bats.

Peyton Eich went 2-for-3 at the plate to lead Lennox in hits. Eich led Lennox with six stolen bases, as they ran wild on the base paths with 12 stolen bases.

## Groton Legion Post #39 Takes Victory Over Renner SD

Groton Legion Post #39 scores more runs than Renner SD, takes victory on Friday to the tune of 5-1

Groton Legion Post #39 got on the board in the first inning. Groton Legion Post #39 scored one run when Tate Larson singled.

Chandler Larson got the win for Groton Legion Post #39. The righty surrendered one run on seven hits over six and a third innings, striking out three. Alex Morris threw two-thirds of an inning in relief out of the bullpen.

Joe J took the loss for Renner SD. The bulldog went six innings, allowing five runs on eight hits and striking out three.

Groton Legion Post #39 racked up eight hits in the game. Darien Shabazz and Pierce Kettering all had multiple hits for Groton Legion Post #39. Kettering and Shabazz each managed two hits to lead Groton Legion Post #39.

Kyle K led Renner SD with three hits in four at bats.

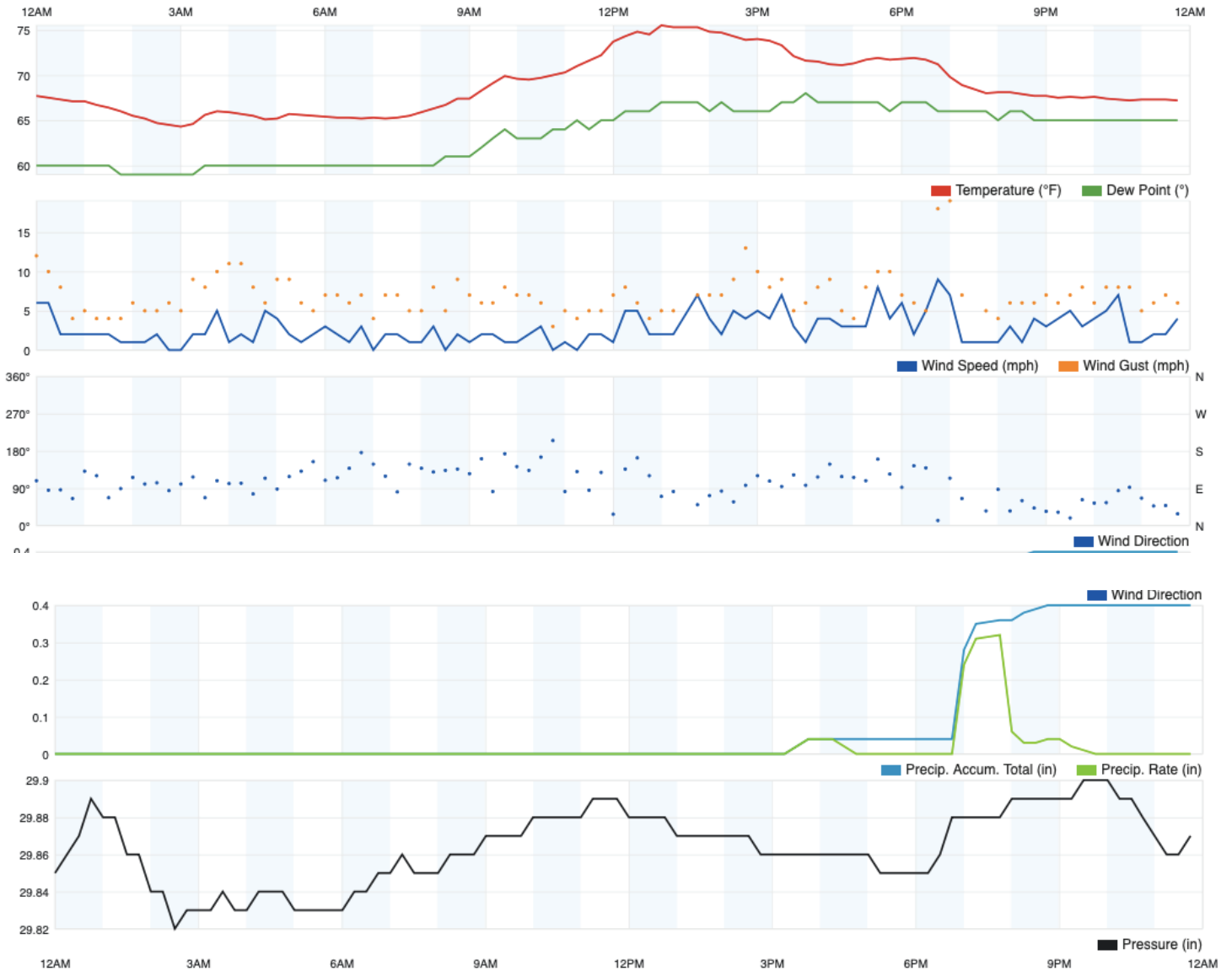
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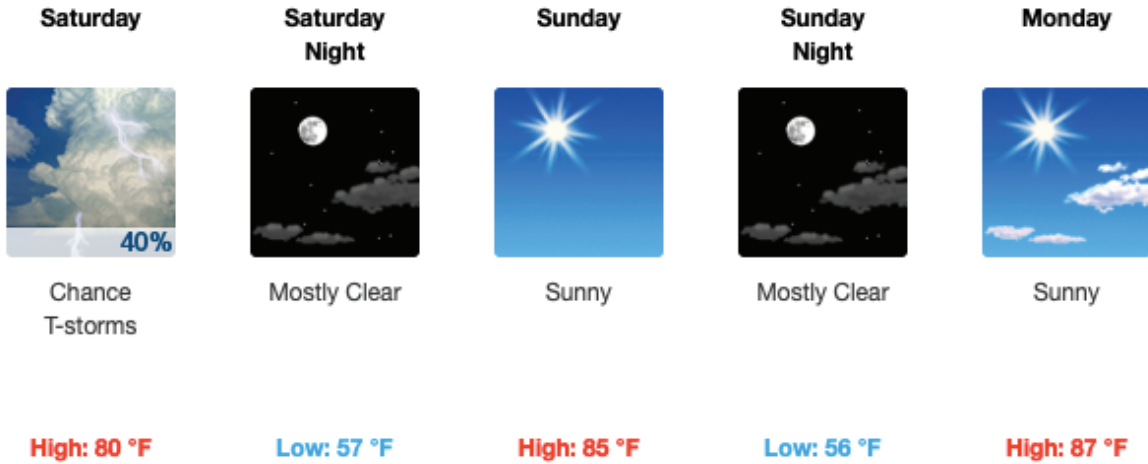
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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## Rain Chances Ending Today

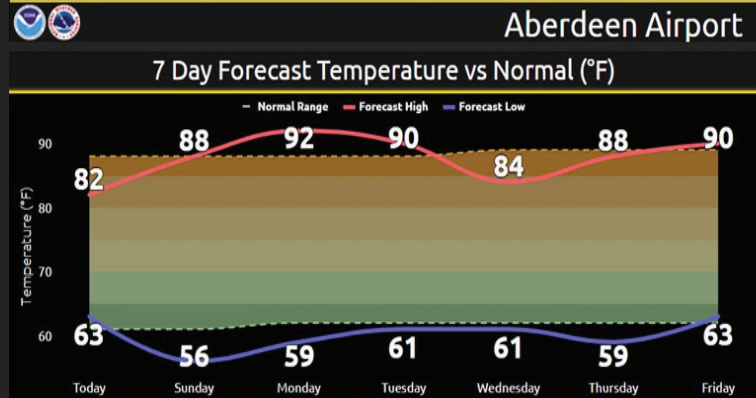
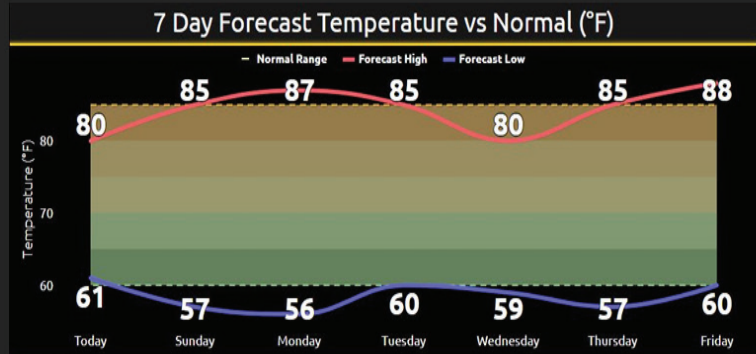
Probability of Precipitation Forecast

7/10 Sat

	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	Maximum
Aberdeen	36	32	21	12	4	0	36
Britton	33	27	16	7	4	1	33
Eagle Butte	29	19	15	9	5	1	29
Eureka	19	18	14	9	6	1	19
Gettysburg	25	25	20	10	5	1	25
Kennebec	60	54	35	21	12	3	60
McIntosh	23	15	12	6	2	0	23
Milbank	53	47	29	16	10	3	53
Miller	49	52	45	25	10	1	52
Mobridge	24	21	15	7	4	0	24
Murdo	42	32	24	13	9	2	42
Pierre	31	29	24	13	7	1	31
Redfield	57	52	35	18	6	1	57
Sisseton	40	27	16	9	4	1	40
Watertown	61	57	40	20	12	3	61
Wheaton	20	17	14	7	4	1	20

\* Table values in %  
 \*\* Created: 2 am CDT Sat 7/10/2021  
 \*\*\* Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.

## 7-Day Temperatures Near Normal



National Weather Service Aberdeen, South Dakota

Updated: 7/10/2021 3:26 AM Central

The unsettled weather pattern that has been promoting the recent rash of rain chances will be winding down after today, leaving the rest of the weekend dry and warm (image on the left times out the best rain chances through today). Temperatures fluctuate a little bit throughout the 7 day forecast, but overall, remain relatively close to climate normal for mid July.

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## Today in Weather History

July 10, 1998: Flash flooding occurred from Keldron, in Corson County, and areas south, during the late afternoon and evening as a result of up to seven inches of rain that had fallen from slow-moving thunderstorms. Willow Creek and several small tributaries went out of their banks causing the inundation of low areas and county roads. Many county roads were damaged with one farmer losing several pigs and cows as a result of the flooding.

1887: A dam breaks in Zug, Switzerland, killing 70 people in their homes and destroying a large section of the town.

1911: The mercury hit 105 degrees at North Bridgton, Maine the hottest reading of record for Maine. North Bridgton also reached 105 degrees on the 4th of July in 1911.

1913 - The mercury hit 134 degrees at Greenland Ranch in Death Valley, CA, the hottest reading of record for the North American continent. Sandstorm conditions accompanied the heat. The high the previous day was 129 degrees, following a morning low of 93 degrees. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1926 - A lightning bolt struck an ammunition magazine in northern New Jersey, and a big red ball of fire leaped into the air triggering a series of explosions. All buildings within a half mile radius were destroyed, and debris fell as far as twenty-two miles away. Sixteen persons were killed, and property damage was seventy million dollars. (David Ludlum)

1936 - Afternoon highs of 112 degrees at Martinsburg, WV, 109 degrees at Cumberland, MD, and Frederick, MD, 110 degrees at Runyon, NJ, and 111 degrees at Phoenixville, PA, established all-time record highs for those four states. It was the hottest day of record for the Middle Atlantic Coast Region. (The Weather Channel)

1979 - The temperature at El Paso, TX, hit 112 degrees, an all-time record for that location. The next day was 110 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1980 - The temperature in downtown Kansas City, MO, hit 109 degrees, following a sultry overnight low of 89 degrees. The daily low of 89 degrees was the warmest of record for Kansas City, and overall it was the hottest July day of record. It was the seventh of a record seventeen consecutive days of 100 degree heat, and the mean temperature for the month of 90.2 degrees was also an all-time record for Kansas City.

1987 - An early morning thunderstorm in Minnesota produced wind gusts to 91 mph at Waseca. Later that day, thunderstorms in South Dakota produced wind gusts to 81 mph at Ipswitch, and baseball size hail near Hayes and Capa. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms brought welcome rains to parts of the central U.S., but produced severe weather along the New England coast, in the Great Lakes Region, in North Carolina, and in the Southern Plateau Region. Strong thunderstorm winds gusting to 80 mph at Bullfrog, UT, sank three boats on Lake Powell. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Severe thunderstorms spawned seventeen tornadoes in the northeastern U.S. A powerful (F-4) tornado struck Hamden CT and New Haven, CT, causing 100 million dollars damage at Hamden, and another 20 million dollars damage around New Haven. Forty persons were injured in the tornado. Seventy persons were injured in a tornado which traveled from Watertown, CT, to Waterbury, CT, and another powerful (F-4) tornado touched down near Ames NY injuring twenty persons along its 43.5 mile track. It was the strongest tornado of record for eastern New York State. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2005 - Hurricane Dennis landed near Pensacola, Florida as a category 3 storm. Maximum sustained winds at the time of landfall were near 120 mph. There were nine hurricane-related fatalities in the U.S. and preliminary estimates of insured losses ranged from \$1 to \$1.5 billion.

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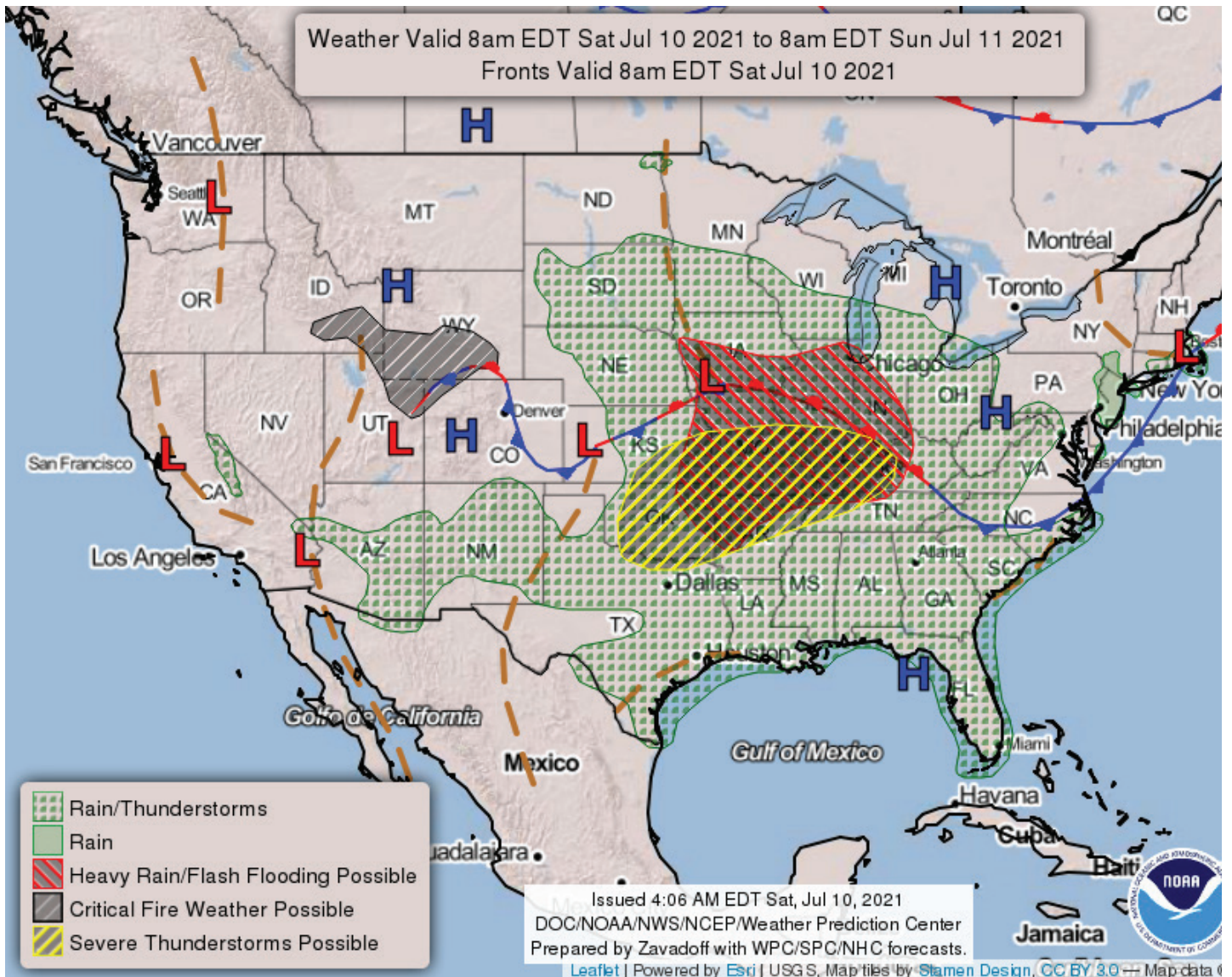
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 76 °F at 1:09 PM**  
**Low Temp: 64 °F at 2:57 AM**  
**Wind: 19 mph at 6:55 PM**  
**Precip: .40 yesterday plus .35 this morning**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 114° in 1936**  
**Record Low: 42° in 1945**  
**Average High: 85°F**  
**Average Low: 60°F**  
**Average Precip in July.: 1.05**  
**Precip to date in July.: 0.68**  
**Average Precip to date: 12.06**  
**Precip Year to Date: 5.43**  
**Sunset Tonight: 9:22 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:57 a.m.**



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## HE WILL BE KING!

A comedian was known to have a quick mind and could turn any subject into a joke. On one occasion he said to his audience, "I can make a joke on any subject. Try me!"

A gentleman stood up and shouted, "The subject is The King."

Quickly he replied, "The King can never be a subject!"

There is a Psalm that reflects this truth. The people of Israel had an unpredictable relationship with God. There were times when He was indeed their Lord, and there were times when they refused to allow Him to be their King. They wanted their own way. They wanted Him to be subject to them. They had things backwards.

But the writer of Psalm 74 was different. He said, "But God is my King from long ago; He brings salvation to the earth." He wanted God to be His Ruler – His King.

Jesus was born to be King. There were twelve whom He chose to become His disciples. And there were many who followed Him, listened to Him, believed in Him – yet never fully surrendered their hearts and lives to Him. They did not allow Him to be their King and refused to become His subjects. One day an unruly mob shouted: "We will not have this Man rule over us!" And they crucified Him.

Many years ago hundreds of college students from around the world met in London before going to their mission fields to serve their Lord. The group from Japan could not attend but sent a simple message that read, "Make Jesus King!"

We can change the world if Jesus becomes King of our lives. Will you enthrone Him?

Prayer: Come, Lord Jesus, and rule in our hearts and change our lives. May we serve You as loyal subjects and honor You as our King - forever. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: But God is my King from long ago; He brings salvation to the earth. Psalm 74:12

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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

### Summer school helps Indigenous students prepare for college

By ABBY WARGO Rapid City Journal

CUSTER, S.D. (AP) — The Indian University of North America, located at Crazy Horse Memorial near Custer, is hoping to make the transition for Indigenous students preparing to go off to college more successful.

The 7th Gen Summer Program, an eight-week program through a partnership with the University of South Dakota, gives Indigenous students the opportunity to live and work on the campus of The Indian University of North America. The program includes a paid internship experience and the opportunity to earn 12 college credits.

Whitney Rencountre, associate director of enrollment management, said the program aims to prepare students to enter the world of higher education armed with the tools to allow them to be successful.

"We bring (students) here to earn 12 college credits before their freshman year, and then develop a cohort of students that are future young Indigenous leaders and give them the tools to succeed and coach them, even after they complete college, staying in contact and supporting them. And I think that's really been the big success for our program," Rencountre said.

Indigenous students graduate from college at statistically lower rates than every other demographic. Rencountre said around 23% of Indigenous students graduate from college, compared with 47% of all students graduating, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Closing that gap by teaching students about time management, financial literacy, work habits and life coaching is one of the program's main goals.

Rencountre said the program is working. Eighty percent of former students that responded to a survey about the program are either in college or have graduated from college.

Once those students begin at their home institution, their professors say they are "amazingly" prepared and have the skills to succeed, such as good time management, study and work habits, Rencountre said.

"Whatever their dream is, we're trying to help them attain it. It lifts them out of poverty, literally. Education continues to be the great equalizer," Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation President/COO Laurie Becvar said.

Rencountre said Indigenous students are often first generation college students.

"Traditionally, (Indigenous) family circles were so close. And even still to this day, a lot of our family circles are so close that when somebody leaves, they encounter challenges of being on their own," he said. "One of the successes of the program is our leadership is all Indigenous, and most of us are first generation college students as well.

"So, we help students prepare for the culture shock that they face when they go to college and give them the tools to be able to advocate for themselves and get through the challenging times of being lonesome and away from their family."

Doris Tinsley, the program's manager of student success and a former student in the Wizipan fall program for upperclassmen, said the Indian University of North America was built for people like her.

Tinsley, who is originally from Long Island, graduated from Virginia Tech last year and came back to work at the university during her gap year before heading to law school.

"Being an Indigenous woman that was in a predominately white institution, going to a predominantly Native environment with all types of representation, students don't have to go through that culture shock. It's an Indigenous-led team, built for people like me," Tinsley said. "The connections I made as a student, I learned about more opportunities for Native students, especially for people like me who want to pursue tribal law."

The university program's location at Crazy Horse Memorial calls back to the memorial's beginnings, and to the Black Hills as a traditionally sacred site for the Lakota, Becvar said.

"I don't think there's anything like it in the world, because when you're learning against the backdrop of the memorial and the story behind not only the Indigenous people but this memorial, I mean, what an

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inspirational story about never giving up, about having a dream and making your dream happen. That's why we exist today," she said.

Becvar said one of the ways the memorial gives back to Native communities is by educating Native youth. The program is not cost-prohibitive for students — tuition and fees, books, and the majority of food and lodging costs are paid by Crazy Horse Memorial.

Students only pay \$850 for the eight-week experience, Becvar said. Students have the option to deduct the funds from their internship paychecks, as well as the opportunity to earn back 50% of their food and lodging expenses at the end of the summer.

The summer program is competitive, Becvar said. It accepts up to 32 people each year and usually receives around 75 applications.

For 2021, the program has students from 10 different states and 29 different tribal nations from around the country — from Alaska to Oklahoma to California.

Being around Indigenous students from other tribes helps students learn about other cultures, something they don't typically get in a public school setting, Rencountre said.

The program's courses are general first-semester classes, but Indigenous culture is deeply ingrained in all of the coursework. All of the professors are Indigenous, and students read Native literature, study Native art, and go on weekend field trips to sacred sites to learn the history of the land.

"We teach our students that no matter where they are, we need them to be represented, representing their families, their communities," Rencountre said. "You can see a spark in their eye when they start to realize that they can continue to make their family proud even if they leave their community."

Rencountre said the program is called 7th Gen because after the Native way of life was effectively destroyed by European colonization, Indigenous leaders prophesied that their people would begin to thrive again in seven generations.

"It was folks like Black Elk that prophesied because of this trauma... it's going to take seven generations to start to get back to normal, so to speak," he said. "So, the seventh generation is happening now, where our students are the ones that are going to carry new traditions forward in terms of healing, harmony, growth and support."

Miguel Eagle, a student at Oglala Lakota College majoring in Lakota Studies with an emphasis in cultural tourism, is in the Indian University of North America's upper-level student summer program, after participating in the first-year experience in 2019.

Eagle will be coming back to Crazy Horse in the fall for the Wizipan semester-long program in leadership and sustainability. He said the program is a really amazing experience and changed the trajectory of his college career.

"It was a huge helping hand in taking the stress off of me as a high school graduate going into college," Eagle said.

The program also helped him figure out what he wants to do with his life after college, Eagle said. He plans to pursue a Masters in Education degree after he completes his undergraduate studies.

"I'm a caring person, I love to be a mentor and teach people. It surprised me this year that I have that in me," Eagle said. "Being an upper-level student talking to first-years, I came to the realization that I love to help people like that. It amazes me — I didn't think I'd be interested in that until I came here."

One of his favorite aspects of the program is the Friday family nights, where students come together after work and class for a home-cooked meal prepared by different groups of classmates to relax and have fun. There is also a series of guest speakers who tell stories about the Indigenous history of the Black Hills and Great Plains.

A recent program was about the Battle of Greasy Grass, or Little Big Horn.

"A lot of us took a lot of information away from that. It's empowering aside from just relaxing," Eagle said. "You get to hang out, learn about people's backgrounds... it's really a mutual exchange of empowerment from the students and guest speakers."

He said he tries to emphasize to people that the students are not pawns of the Crazy Horse Memorial, just being used for their labor as part of the internship. Eagle said students are learning how to be pro-



fessional employees.

"I like to look at it at face value... and see how deeply rooted this (program) is in mutual support of Native culture and non-Native culture," he said. "We're not just here to make the memorial look good. We're genuinely taking things back to our homes and communities and applying those (skills) in order to make our communities greater."

The program is challenging, but Rencountre said most students make it through with the right support and find the experience rewarding.

Many students are not used to getting encouragement all the time from adults or having people believe in them, he said. The program becomes a positive place for those students to change the direction of their lives to the way they want it to go.

"I think it's important to be able to navigate through the challenges, and staying encouraged through the tough times. I think students develop that while they're here and even after (they leave)," Rencountre said.

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

06-37-39-41-46, Mega Ball: 17, Megaplier: 2

(six, thirty-seven, thirty-nine, forty-one, forty-six; Mega Ball: seventeen; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$94 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$127 million

## Man accused of shoving knife down dog's throat

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota man has been arrested on suspicion of shoving a knife down his ex-girlfriend's dog's throat.

KELO-TV reported Friday that the 41-year-old man called authorities saying he had killed a dog at his home in Colton. A humane society officer discovered the dead dog, Morgan, and the walls splattered with blood.

The man said the dog had bitten him, although his wound wasn't bleeding. According to court documents, he described shoving a large knife down Morgan's throat, killing her. Neighbors reported seeing the dog's body smoldering in a burn pit.

The man had just broken up with his girlfriend hours earlier.

It's unclear when Morgan died. The court documents were filed on Wednesday. A judge in court Thursday called the allegations "grotesque."

Morgan left behind five puppies. They are being bottle-fed, said Sioux Falls Area Humane Society Kori Baade said.

## Nebraska governor extending deployment of troopers to border

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts said Friday he would extend the deployment of 15 state patrol troopers along the U.S.-Mexico border for another two weeks.

Ricketts said in a news release that about 25 Nebraska State Patrol troopers traveled to Del Rio, Texas, in June to provide law enforcement assistance to the Texas Department of Public Safety. The deployment was made at the request of Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and was expected to last up to 16 days.

"Nebraska is happy to step up to provide assistance to Texas as they work to protect their communities and keep people safe," Ricketts said.

Both Ricketts and Abbott, who are Republicans, have been critical about Democratic President Joe Biden's border and immigration policies. In announcing the continued deployment, Ricketts referred to the "disastrous policies" of the Biden administration.

Ricketts has said little about what duties the Nebraska troopers are performing along the border. It also is unclear how much the mission will cost and whether Nebraska will be responsible for those expenses. Other states headed by Republican governors also have sent state troopers or National Guard troops to Texas, including those in neighboring Iowa and South Dakota.

## South Dakota sees clunky rollout of medical pot rules

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota government officials scrambled on Friday to reach a consensus on rules around medical pot, showing that the rollout of the voter-passed law has been anything but smooth.

Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg's office this week appeared to counter guidance from the Highway Patrol on medical marijuana ID cards issued by Native American tribes. But on Friday the attorney general issued a statement saying he agrees with the Highway Patrol's stance. Meanwhile, the Department of Education tried to work past state lawmakers' objections to its proposed rules for allowing students to use medical pot at school.

The attorney general's chief of staff Tim Bormann on Thursday had said tribes' pot ID cards are valid under state law because they are medically certified — a position that ran counter to guidance from the Highway Patrol that the ID cards would only be honored for tribal members. On Friday, the attorney general's office indicated that a tribe-issued ID card would not be enough for non-tribal members to prove they are staying within the bounds of state law.

Ravnsborg said in a statement that a tribe's medical cannabis card issued to non-tribal members is "not a substitute" for a written doctor's certification. His office did not immediately respond to a request to explain the statement.

The confusion over the validity of tribal ID cards has arisen because the only government body currently issuing medical cannabis cards is the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe. While state officials such as Gov. Kristi Noem have been reluctant to embrace medical marijuana, the tribe has set up a medical cannabis dispensary and started issuing medical pot cards. The Argus Leader reported that the tribe has directed people who show up without a physician's recommendation for medical pot to obtain one from an online portal that connects customers to doctors willing to write recommendations for the drug.

Under the new law, the state's Department of Health has until November to start issuing medical marijuana ID cards.

The attorney general's statement clarifies that it only considers a recommendation to use medical pot as valid if it comes from a doctor licensed in South Dakota and is part of a "bona fide practitioner-patient relationship."

Meanwhile, the South Dakota Board of Education Standards decided Friday to limit its rules on medical marijuana to public schools after state lawmakers last month rejected proposed rules that could have applied to private schools.

Lawyers for the Department of Education pointed out they were just trying to follow the requirements of the voter-passed medical marijuana law, which did not exclude private schools. The Department of Education has until the beginning of the school year to get the rules in place.

The proposed rules will go back to state lawmakers later this month for final approval. But when asked whether legislators would give their sign-off this time, Department of Education attorney Amanda LaCroix said, "Fingers crossed — that's what I hope."

## Fireworks 'mishap' sends four people to the hospital

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Four people ended up in the hospital after what authorities are calling a fireworks "mishap" in a Rapid City suburb.

The Rapid City Tribune reported Friday that firefighters were called late Thursday evening to a report of grass fire in Rapid Valley. According to a report of from the Pennington County Fire Service and the Rapid Valley Fire Department, the fire stemmed from a "mishap" during a private fireworks display.

Bystanders brought the fire under control but not before the four people suffered minor injuries. They were taken to Monument Health Rapid City Hospital.

## South Dakota man killed, wife hurt in western Nebraska crash

OGALLALA, Neb. (AP) — A South Dakota man died and his wife was hurt in a crash on Interstate 80 in western Nebraska, the Nebraska State Patrol reported.

The crash happened late Wednesday afternoon just east of Ogallala when a car driven by 72-year-old Judy Kennedy crashed into the back of a U-Haul trailer stopped on the interstate for a vehicle fire ahead of it, the Omaha World-Herald reported.

Kennedy's husband and passenger in the car, 73-year-old William Kennedy of Watertown, South Dakota, was pronounced dead at the scene, according to the patrol. Judy Kennedy was treated and released from an Ogallala hospital.

The patrol said the occupants of the Jeep pulling the trailer that was hit were not injured.

## Man wanted for fatal shooting arrested in Sioux Falls

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A man wanted for a fatal shooting in Minnesota has been arrested in South Dakota, according to sheriff's officials.

The Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office said the 18-year-old man was arrested Thursday night in Sioux Falls. He was wanted for fatally shooting 45-year-old David Harris last month in Austin, Minnesota.

Authorities say the suspect was arrested around 8 p.m. after he was found hiding in the attic of a home. Court documents say a juvenile told detectives in Minnesota that the suspect and friends were visiting from Sioux Falls, and they contacted an unnamed individual in Austin to buy marijuana.

The juvenile told police the group planned to rob the person of all their marijuana, the Argus Leader reported. The suspect pulled out a gun, demanded all the marijuana and threatened to shoot everyone if they didn't comply, court documents said.

Harris went into the room with a gun, and was shot three times in the chest and subsequently died, officials said.

Deputies attempted to take the suspect into custody on June 7, two days after the shooting, but he fled from deputies on foot.

## Charlottesville readies for removal of Confederate statues

By SARAH RANKIN Associated Press

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — Crews in Charlottesville are preparing to remove a Confederate statue that became a rallying point for white supremacists and helped inspire their violent 2017 rally that left a woman dead and dozens injured.

Saturday's removal of a statue of Gen. Robert E. Lee and another of Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson will come nearly four years after violence erupted at the infamous "Unite the Right" rally. Heather Heyer, a peaceful counterprotester, died in the violence, which sparked a national debate over racial equity, further inflamed by former President Donald Trump's insistence that there was "blame on both sides."

The city announced its plans to hoist away the statues Friday. A long, winding legal fight coupled with changes in a state law that protected war memorials had held up the removal for years.

The park where the Lee statue stands was quiet early Saturday, with protective fencing in place.

Only the statues, not their stone pedestals, will be removed Saturday. They will be taken down and stored in a secure location until the City Council makes a final decision about what should be done with them. Under state law, the city was required to solicit parties interested in taking the statues during an offer period that ended Thursday. It received 10 responses to its solicitation.

A coalition of activists commended the city for moving quickly to take the statues down after the offer period ended. As long as the statues "remain standing in our downtown public spaces, they signal that

our community tolerated white supremacy and the Lost Cause these generals fought for," the coalition called Take 'Em Down Cville said.

The most recent removal push focused on the Lee monument began in 2016, thanks in part to a petition started by a Black high school student, Zyahna Bryant. A lawsuit was quickly filed, putting the city's plans on hold, and white supremacists seized on the issue.

"This is a crucial first step in the right direction to tell a more historically accurate and complete story of this place and the people who call this place home. The work did not start here and it will not end here," Bryant, now a student at the University of Virginia, said in a statement.

## Survivors of Bosnia massacre grapple with horrors, deniers

By SABINA NIKSIC Associated Press

SREBRENICA, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Through tears and in between fraught silences, Devla Ajsic refuses to remain quiet any longer.

Ajsic was 21 years old and three months pregnant in July 1995 when she was repeatedly sexually assaulted in Srebrenica while her fiance and thousands of other mostly Muslim men and boys were taken away and executed in Europe's only acknowledged genocide since World War II.

For decades, Ajsic did not talk openly about the horrors she endured after Bosnian Serb forces stormed the eastern Bosnian town in the waning months of the Balkan country's 1992-95 war.

"I locked it all inside for 26 years and suffered in silence. I had no one to confide in, no one to share my pain with. ... I cannot take it any longer," said the now 47-year-old Ajsic, steeling herself as she finally spoke publicly of her ordeal on the eve of the 26th anniversary of the massacre Sunday.

When Bosnian Serb forces captured Srebrenica, which had been declared a U.N. "safe haven" for civilians in 1993, about 30,000 of its terrified Muslim residents rushed to the U.N. compound at the entrance to town in the hope that the Dutch U.N. peacekeepers there would protect them.

However, the outgunned and outnumbered peacekeepers watched helplessly as Serb troops took some 2,000 men and boys from the compound for execution, raped the women and girls, and then bused the women, children and elderly to Bosniak Muslim-held territory.

Ajsic said she was sexually assaulted and tortured for three days before departing Srebrenica in one of the last buses packed with refugees.

"The things they did to me, they tied me to a desk, my neck and my chest were blue from bruises, I was sprawled naked on that table," she recounted, sobbing. The Associated Press typically doesn't name sex abuse victims except in cases where they opt to speak publicly.

Ajsic said the Serb soldiers drugged her, clouding her mind, but even so she was acutely aware she was not the only woman kept bound and subject to horrific abuse in a hangar of the then-U.N. compound.

There are no words to describe their "screaming, their cries for help," she said of the women. "What could we do when (the soldiers) came through that door unzipping their pants and walked toward us? We were like lambs, like sacrificial lambs waiting for a knife to slaughter us."

And yet, she believes her personal nightmare, including the loss of the fetus she had to abort after fleeing Srebrenica, is dwarfed by the weeklong Bosnian Serb killing spree in which over 8,000 mostly Muslim men and boys from the town perished.

Most of the victims were hunted down and summarily executed as they tried to flee into nearby forest. Their bodies were plowed into hastily dug mass graves and then later excavated with bulldozers and scattered among other burial sites to hide evidence of the crime.

Many wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of those killed in Srebrenica have dedicated their lives to fighting for the truth about what happened to their men and searching for their remains. And yet, in over a quarter-century, only a handful have publicly spoken of the sexual abuse they suffered during the fall of Srebrenica.

The women stubbornly stood their ground when confronted with political opposition to their request to set up a memorial cemetery across from the former Dutch U.N. base, where on every July 11 since 2002

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they have reburied the remains of their loved ones.

So far, the remains of more than 6,600 people have been exhumed from mass graves, identified by forensic analysis and reburied at the site. The remains of 19 more victims will be laid to rest there Sunday.

Srebrenica's Bosniak women were also key to cases brought against the United Nations and the Netherlands over the failure of the Dutch U.N. troops to protect the town's civilians in 1995, and the adoption of a European Parliament resolution commemorating July 11 as the Day of Remembrance of the Srebrenica genocide.

Among them was Munira Subasic, who lost her husband, a son and 22 other male relatives in the massacre.

She, along with dozens of others testified before a special U.N. war crimes tribunal in The Hague to prosecute the crimes committed during the 1990s Balkan wars that followed the dissolution of former Yugoslavia, helping put behind bars Bosnian Serb war-time political and military leaders Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, both convicted of genocide and war crimes and jailed for life.

Although the Srebrenica massacre was branded genocide by international and national courts, Serbian and Bosnian Serb officials still downplay or deny the crime. For many Srebrenica women setting the historical record straight about what happened to their men has become their life's purpose.

"We have to keep fighting for truth and justice in order to prevent the young generations (in the Balkans) from being infected by hate, from seeking revenge," Subasic said.

"I hope that the conscience of the world will awaken and that they will protect us as they had protected the Jewish mothers, help us get a law against genocide denial, spare us from the offense and humiliation of its denial."

"Only then will we and our children start living a normal life," she said.

Bosnian Serb political leaders have consistently prevented the country from adopting a law that would ban genocide denial, with the Serb member of Bosnia's presidency, Milorad Dodik, even publicly describing the Srebrenica slaughter as a "fabricated myth."

What Bosniak Muslim women like Subasic are up against is "active, institutional and institutionalized genocide denial" by Serbian and Bosnian Serb officials, said Emir Suljagic, the director of the Srebrenica Memorial Centre.

"The people who took part in genocide are still alive and the political class which is deeply invested in (the war crimes) of the 1990s is still in power," Suljagic said, noting that Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic was a former ultranationalist government minister who, in July 1995, threatened to kill 100 Muslim Bosniaks for every Serb killed if the international community intervened to stop the Srebrenica slaughter.

Vucic has now rebranded himself as a pro-European Union reformer, but it did not stop him from condemning as "an act of betrayal" resolutions passed recently by Montenegro and Kosovo condemning the Srebrenica genocide and banning its denial.

Having returned a year ago to Srebrenica with her 24-year-old son and his family after living for decades in a region of central Bosnia, Ajsic no longer believes a normal life is possible after the horrors she endured.

Her late husband banned her from talking publicly about the abuse because of the stigma still surrounding the rapes, but with his death she felt free to unload a little of her trauma now.

She says she is afraid to walk the streets of Srebrenica, a town now shared between massacre survivors and massacre deniers, because she never knows if the people she encounters consider the genocide a fabrication or even took part in it.

"I came back to live in Srebrenica, but I am terrified to walk on the streets here because I don't know who the people driving in the cars around me are, what kind of people they are," she said.

## Black Sea drills showcase strong NATO-Ukraine defense ties

By DMYTRO VLASOV Associated Press

ABOARD USS ROSS (AP) — Ukraine and NATO have conducted Black Sea drills involving dozens of warships in a two-week show of their strong defense ties and capability following a confrontation between

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Russia's military forces and a British destroyer off Crimea last month.

The Sea Breeze 2021 maneuvers set to wrap up Saturday involved about 30 warships and 40 aircraft from NATO members and Ukraine. The captain of the USS Ross, a U.S. Navy destroyer that took part in the drills, said the exercise was designed to improve how the equipment and personnel of the participating nations operate together.

"We'd like to demonstrate to everybody, the international community, that no one nation can claim the Black Sea or any international body of water," Cmdr. John D. John said aboard the guided missile destroyer previously deployed to the area for drills. "Those bodies of water belong to the international community, and we're committed to ensure that all nations have access to international waterways."

The Russian Defense Ministry said it was closely monitoring Sea Breeze. The Russian military also conducted a series of parallel drills in the Black Sea and southwestern Russia, with warplanes practicing bombing runs and long-range air defense missiles' deploying to protect the coast.

Last month, Russia said one of its warships in the Black Sea fired warning shots and a warplane dropped bombs in the path of the HMS Defender, a British Royal Navy destroyer, to chase it away from an area near Crimea that Moscow claims as its territorial waters.

Russia denounced the Defender's presence as a provocation and warned that next time it might fire to hit intruding warships.

Britain, which like most other nations didn't recognize Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine, insisted the Defender wasn't fired upon on June 23 and said it was sailing in Ukrainian waters when Russia sent its planes into the air and shots were heard during the showdown.

The incident added to the tensions between Russia and the NATO allies. Relations between Russia and the West have sunk to post-Cold War lows over Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea, its support for a separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine, accusations of Russian hacking attacks, election interference and other irritants.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said last week that the incident with the Defender wouldn't have triggered a global conflict even if Russia had sunk the British vessel because the West knows it can't win such a war. The statement appeared to indicate Putin's resolve to raise the stakes should a similar incident happen again.

Aboard the Ross, John said the Sea Breeze participants were exercising their right to operate in international waters. He described the drills as "a tangible demonstration of our commitment to each other for a safe and stable Black Sea region."

## Chinese regulator halts Huya-Douyu game-streaming merger

By ZEN SOO AP Technology Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — China's market regulator on Saturday blocked the merger of Tencent-backed game streaming platforms Douyu and Huya following an anti-monopoly investigation, as authorities ramp up scrutiny of some of the country's biggest technology companies.

Huya and Douyu — which provide videogame live-streaming services akin to Twitch in the U.S. — are two of the largest companies of their kind in China. Both count gaming firm Tencent among their investors.

China's State Administration for Market Regulation said in a statement that a merger between Huya and Douyu would give Tencent control over the merged entity.

"From the perspective of different key indicators like revenue, number of active users, resources for streamers, the total share is very substantial and the elimination and restriction of competition can be foreseen," the statement said.

Authorities have stepped up oversight of some of China's largest technology firms over concerns of monopolistic behavior and unchecked growth, as well as how companies are collecting and using data from their millions of users.

Also Saturday, China's cyber-regulator said companies holding personal information of over a million users must apply for cybersecurity approval if they plan to list abroad. The Cyberspace Administration of

China said in a statement that the review and approval is necessary because of risks that the data could be "affected, controlled, and maliciously exploited by foreign governments."

It also said there's a risk of important data being illegally used or transferred out of the country.

Last week, the cyber-regulator ordered a cybersecurity investigation into ride-sharing platform Didi Global Inc. The food delivery platform Meituan is also under an anti-monopoly probe, and e-commerce giant Alibaba was fined a record \$2.8 billion earlier this year for antitrust violations.

China's market regulator said the decision to ban the merger between Huya and Douyu is the first instance of regulators prohibiting market concentration in the internet sector.

The two companies first announced last October that they planned to merge, but market regulators later said that they would review the \$6 billion deal.

Tencent said it was notified by the regulator that the merger has been halted.

"The company will abide by the decision, comply with all regulatory requirements, operate in accordance with applicable laws and regulations, and fulfill our social responsibilities," the company said in a statement Saturday.

Earlier this week, Chinese authorities said they would also increase supervision of companies listed overseas.

Under the new measures, regulation of data security and cross-border data flows, as well as the management of confidential data, will be improved.

Authorities also plan to crack down on illegal activities in the securities market, and will investigate and punish acts such as the fraudulent issuance of securities, market manipulation and insider trading.

## **New virus surge sends younger patients to Spain's hospitals**

By RENATA BRITO and ARITZ PARRA Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Julio Miranda had never felt the threat of the coronavirus too close. With an appointment for his first COVID-19 jab scheduled for mid-July, the 48-year-old house painter was, like many in the vaccine-abundant developed world, eagerly awaiting the end of his personal pandemic worries.

Then a colleague fell ill last month, followed by his boss' wife. Gradually, all but one of his five coworkers found themselves in bed. Miranda, who is from Chile, also started feeling stomach cramps. Soon, he was lying on the sofa, struggling to draw every breath.

"It's only when the virus hits you that you take it much more seriously," Miranda said this week from a hospital room overlooking Barcelona's beachfront where he recovered after a week in intensive care, conscious but connected to a machine aiding his oxygen intake.

After a brief respite that brought medical activity back to pre-pandemic routines, managers at the Hospital del Mar in this northeastern city are facing a sharp surge in infections by, once again, rearranging staff shifts and moving patients around in their sprawling facilities.

The increase comes amid the advance of the delta variant of the coronavirus that spreads more easily. And it's being driven mostly by younger, unvaccinated patients who require less ICU care but are turning in droves to health centers and emergency wards. If they reach the point of needing hospitalization, they typically spend longer in regular wards until they recover.

At this facility, the number of COVID-19 patients has gone from 8 to 35 in just two weeks. That is far from the hundreds that the hospital nursed at the height of previous surges. But it comes as a warning of what could await unless "drastic measures" are taken against the spread of the virus, according to Juan Pablo Horcajada, who coordinates all the COVID-19 activity there.

Although the vast majority of those infected don't show symptoms, the speed of the surge can only be compared to that of the first surge in March 2020, Horcajada said. Most hospitalized patients don't need much breathing support and get well enough with corticosteroids. But doctors are seeing people in their 20s and early 30s developing serious pneumonia.

In Spain, the young are largely socializing while unvaccinated because authorities have strictly prioritized

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the elderly and most vulnerable groups. As a result, 21 million — or half of the country's adult population — are fully vaccinated, but fewer than 600,000 of those are younger than 30, according to the latest Health Ministry data.

"It is still too early to think that vaccination will be brought under control in a short space of time," Horcajada said, adding that most of his patients became infected before they received their second vaccine dose.

As a tourism powerhouse, Spain dropped curfews and outdoors mask requirements, among other restrictions, just in time for the summer season. The first major outbreaks were reported soon after, even before many tourists could make it into the country.

Many have been tied to the first holiday trips, unofficial celebrations of traditional summer festivals that are getting labeled colloquially as "the no-parties," and nightlife that reopened just as schools closed.

For Horcajada, the timings were a recipe for disaster: "We are dealing with a variant that is capable of infecting within seconds following minimum contact with a positive person," he said.

On Friday, the closely watched 14-day rate of contagion per 100,000 residents rose in Spain to 316 cases, from a 2021 low of 92 on June 22. But, in a departure from previous surges, before vaccines were available, new deaths are receding and hospital occupation rates growing at a fraction of the pace of new infections.

Spain's Health Ministry, for example, reported Friday 6 confirmed fatalities nationwide, the lowest figure since last summer, compared to 352 on Jan. 5 this year and 217 on Oct. 19 last year, two dates when the contagion rate was at similar levels and increasing. More than one-tenth of regular hospital beds and one-fifth of intensive care wards were treating COVID-19 patients on then, but the current occupation rate stands at 2.4% in regular beds and 6.6% in ICUs.

There's a similar pattern in other countries with the fastest-spreading outbreaks in Europe. In Portugal and Cyprus, hospitals are far from previous near-collapse scenarios, although they steadily accumulate patients.

The UK averaged almost 30,000 new reported infections a day in the past week, compared to a peak of roughly 70,000 at the height of the winter surge in January driven by the alpha variant — more contagious than the original virus but significantly less so than delta. But daily deaths at the time surpassed 1,000 for days, while 29 were recorded on Friday.

Spain's central and regional governments are trying to accelerate vaccination of younger groups, but are wary of sweeping measures such as nighttime curfews or travel bans that would affect tourism. France and Germany are already discouraging travel to Spain and neighboring Portugal, a move that has thwarted the tourism industry's attempt to get back on its feet.

Experts and medical personnel complain that authorities are sending mixed signals. The northeastern Catalonia region, for example — where Barcelona is — only allows bars and nightclubs to operate their outdoor spaces starting this weekend, and yet authorities have allowed a music festival to go ahead with thousands of people. Concert-goers are required to test negative for antigens before joining the fun.

Ana Aguilar, a 20-year-old nurse at the Hospital del Mar, sympathized with those who want to party but said her generation needs to be more patient. As a medical worker, she also expressed the frustration of a never-ending cycle of virus surges.

"When everything seems to be restarting again, the virus comes back. And it's the same thing once again," Aguilar said. "It's very tiring, the uncertainty makes it very difficult to deal with."

## Indonesia short on oxygen, seeks help as virus cases soar

By NINIEK KARMINI Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Just two months ago, Indonesia was coming to a gasping India's aid with thousands tanks of oxygen.

Today, the Southeast Asia country is running out of oxygen as it endures a devastating wave of coronavirus cases and the government is seeking emergency supplies from other countries, including Singapore and China.



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A shipment of more than 1,000 oxygen cylinders, concentrators, ventilators and other health devices arrived from Singapore on Friday, followed by another 1,000 ventilators from Australia, said Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, the government minister in charge of Indonesia's pandemic response.

Beside those donations, Indonesia plans to buy 36,000 tons of oxygen and 10,000 concentrators — devices that generate oxygen — from neighboring Singapore, Pandjaitan said.

He said he is in touch with China and other potential oxygen sources. The U.S. and the United Arab Emirates also have offered help.

"We recognize the difficult situation Indonesia currently finds itself in with a surge of COVID cases," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said. In addition to sending vaccines, the U.S. is working to increase assistance for Indonesia's broader COVID-19 response efforts, she said, without elaborating.

Overall, Indonesia, the world's fourth-most populous country, has reported more than 2.4 million infections and 64,631 fatalities from COVID-19. Those figures are widely believed to be a vast undercount due to low testing and poor tracing measures. Indonesia reported the highest toll of 1,040 deaths on Wednesday and nearly 39,000 confirmed cases on Thursday and Friday.

Hospitals are swamped, with growing numbers of the ill dying in isolation at home or while waiting to receive emergency care.

On Java, Indonesia's most populous island, hospitals began setting up makeshift intensive care units in mid-June. Many patients are waiting for days to be admitted. Oxygen tanks were rolled out onto sidewalks for those lucky enough to get them, while others have been told they have to find their own.

Emergency rooms at a public hospital in Bandung city closed earlier this week after running out of oxygen amid panic buying fueled by soaring infections in the West Java provincial capital, said Yaya Mulyana, the city's deputy mayor.

"Panicked people bought oxygen tanks even though they didn't need them yet," Mulyana said. "That has led to oxygen supplies running out."

At one hospital in Yogyakarta, in central Java, 63 COVID-19 patients died in one day -- 33 of them during an outage of its central liquid oxygen supply, though the hospital had switched to using oxygen cylinders, spokesman Banu Hermawan said.

Indonesia donated 3,400 oxygen cylinders and concentrators to India when a brutal outbreak ravaged the country. As its own cases surged, Jakarta then canceled a plan to send another 2,000 oxygen concentrators to India in late June.

The daily need for oxygen has reached 1,928 tons a day. The country's total available production capacity is 2,262 tons a day, according to government data.

"I asked for 100% of oxygen go to medical purposes first, meaning that all industrial allocations must be transferred to medical," said Pandjaitan, the government minister. "We are racing against time, we have to work fast."

Given the rapid spread of the highly infectious delta variant, he warned that Indonesia could face a worst-case scenario with 50,000 cases a day. The next two weeks will be critical, he said.

The Ministry of Industry responded by issuing a decree that all oxygen supplies be sent to hospitals overflowing with coronavirus patients, and asked industry players to cooperate.

Oxygen is used in making many products, including textiles, plastics and vehicles. Oil refiners, chemical manufacturers and steel makers also use it. But industry leaders have fallen in line in supporting government efforts to maximize supplies for hospitals.

The government has redirected oxygen supplies from industrial plants in Morowali in Central Sulawesi, Balikpapan on Borneo island, and Belawan and Batam on Sumatra islands, Pandjaitan said. Smaller oxygen industries have also been directed to produce pharmaceutical oxygen.

## Surging California wildfire prompts Nevada evacuations

BECKWOURTH, Calif. (AP) — A Northern California wildfire exploding through bone-dry timber prompted Nevada authorities to evacuate a border-area community as flames leapt on ridgetops of nearby mountains.

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The Beckwourth Complex — a merging of two lightning-caused fires — headed into Saturday showing no sign of slowing its rush northeast from the Sierra Nevada forest region after doubling in size only a few days earlier.

The fire was one of several threatening homes across Western states that are expected to see triple-digit heat through the weekend as a high-pressure zone blankets the region.

On Friday, Death Valley National Park in California recorded a staggering high of 130 degrees Fahrenheit (54.4 Celsius). If verified, it would be the hottest high recorded there since July 1913, when the same Furnace Creek desert area hit 134 degrees Fahrenheit (56.6 degrees Celsius), considered the highest reliably measured temperature on Earth.

California's northern mountain areas already have seen several large fires that have destroyed more than a dozen homes. Although there are no confirmed reports of building damage, the fire prompted evacuation orders or warnings for hundreds of homes and several campgrounds in California along with the closure of nearly 200 square miles (518 square kilometers) of Plumas National Forest.

On Friday, ridgetop winds up to 20 mph (32.2 kph) combined with ferocious heat as the fire raged through bone-dry pine, fir and chaparral. As the fire's northeastern flank raged near the border, the Washoe County Sheriff's Office asked people to evacuate some areas in the rural communities of Ranch Haven and Flanagan Flats, north of Reno.

"Evacuate now," a Sheriff's Office tweet said.

Hot rising air formed a gigantic, smoky pyrocumulus cloud that reached thousands of feet high and created its own lightning, fire information officer Lisa Cox said Friday evening.

Spot fires caused by embers leapt up to a mile (1.6 kilometers) ahead of the northeastern flank — too far for firefighters to safely battle, and winds funneled the fire up draws and canyons full of dry fuel, where "it can actually pick up speed," Cox said.

Nearly 1,000 firefighters were aided by aircraft but the blaze was expected to continue forging ahead because of the heat and low humidity that dried out vegetation. The air was so dry that some of the water dropped by aircraft evaporated before reaching the ground, Cox said.

"We're expecting more of the same the day after and the day after and the day after," Cox said.

The blaze, which was only 11% contained, officially had blackened more than 38 square miles (98 square kilometers) but that figure was expected to increase dramatically when fire officials were able to make better observations.

Meanwhile, other fires were burning in Oregon, Arizona and Idaho.

In Oregon, pushed by strong winds, a wildfire in Klamath County grew from nearly 26 square miles (67 square kilometers) Thursday to nearly 61 square miles (158 square kilometers) on Friday in the Fremont-Winema National Forest and on private land. An evacuation order was issued for people in certain areas north of Beatty and near Sprague River.

That fire was threatening transmission lines that send electricity to California, which along with expected heat-related demand prompted California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Friday to issue an emergency proclamation suspending some rules to allow for more power capacity.

The state's electrical grid operator also issued a statewide Flex Alert from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday, calling for consumers to voluntarily conserve electricity by reducing the use of appliances and keeping the thermostat higher during evening hours when solar energy is diminished or no longer available.

In north-central Arizona, increased humidity slowed a big wildfire that posed a threat to the rural community of Crown King. The 24.5-square-mile (63.5-square-kilometer) lightning-caused fire in Yavapai County was 29% contained. Recent rains allowed five national forests and state land managers to lift public-access closures.

In Idaho, Gov. Brad Little declared a wildfire emergency Friday and mobilized the state's National Guard to help fight fires sparked after lightning storms swept across the drought-stricken region.

Fire crews in north-central Idaho were facing extreme conditions and gusts as they fought two wildfires covering a combined 19.5 square miles (50.5 square kilometers). The blazes threatened homes and forced

evacuations in the tiny, remote community of Dixie about 40 miles (64 kilometers) southeast of Grangeville.

## **Biden fires Trump-appointed head of Social Security agency**

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has fired the commissioner of Social Security after the official refused to resign, and Biden accepted the deputy commissioner's resignation, the White House said.

Biden asked commissioner Andrew Saul to resign, and his employment was terminated Friday after he refused the Democratic president's request, a White House official said.

Deputy Commissioner David Black agreed to resign, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel matters.

Both officials had been put in place under President Donald Trump, a Republican.

Biden named Kilolo Kijakazi as acting commissioner while the administration conducts a search for a permanent commissioner and deputy commissioner.

Kijakazi currently is the deputy commissioner for retirement and disability policy at the Social Security Administration.

Saul's removal followed a Justice Department legal opinion that found he could be removed, despite a statute that says he could only be fired for neglecting his duties or malfeasance.

The opinion — researched at the request of the White House — concluded that a reevaluation because of a recent Supreme Court ruling meant that Saul could be fired by the president at will.

Biden's move got immediate support from the Democratic senator who would be in charge of confirming a successor to Saul. Republican lawmakers accused Biden of politicizing the agency and pointed to Saul's confirmation by a bipartisan Senate vote in 2019.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said in a statement that "every president should choose the personnel that will best carry out their vision for the country.

"To fulfill President Biden's bold vision for improving and expanding Social Security, he needs his people in charge," Wyden added, pledging to work to confirm a new commissioner "as swiftly as possible."

Rep. Bill Pascrell, D-N.J., who several months ago began demanding the ouster of Saul and Black, celebrated their Friday firings.

"Social Security is in deep trouble," Pascrell said.

Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho, the top Republican on the finance committee, and Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas, the top Republican on the House Ways and Means Committee, issued a joint statement calling Biden's decision "disappointing." The pair claimed "Social Security beneficiaries stand the most to lose from President Biden's partisan decision to remove Commissioner Andrew Saul."

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., called the personnel move an "unprecedented and dangerous politicization of the Social Security Administration."

The agency, headquartered in Baltimore, pays benefits, funded by a tax on wages paid by employers and employees, to about 64 million people, including retirees, children, widows and widowers, according to its website. The agency has a staff of about 60,000 employees.

Saul was confirmed by a Senate vote of 77-16 in 2019 to a six-year term that would have expired in January 2025, tweeted Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa.

The labor union that represents Social Security employees also welcomed the firings.

Ralph de Juliis, spokesperson for the American Federation of Government Employees SSA General Committee and Council 220 President, said employee morale and agency operations had suffered under Saul and Black's leadership.

"President Biden made the right call to send these Trump appointees packing," de Juliis said.

## **White House calling out critics of door-to-door vaccine push**

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — “A disservice to the country.” “Inaccurate disinformation.” “Literally killing people.” For months, the Biden White House refrained from criticizing Republican officials who played down the importance of coronavirus vaccinations or sought to make political hay of the federal government’s all-out effort to drive shots into arms. Not any longer.

With the COVID-19 vaccination rate plateauing across the country, the White House is returning fire at those they see as spreading harmful misinformation or fear about the shots.

When South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster tried this week to block door-to-door efforts to drive up the vaccination rate in his state, White House press secretary Jen Psaki did not mince words in her reaction.

“The failure to provide accurate public health information, including the efficacy of vaccines and the accessibility of them to people across the country, including South Carolina, is literally killing people, so maybe they should consider that,” she said Friday.

While 67% of American adults have gotten at least one dose, officials are increasingly worried about vast geographic disparity in vaccination rates, and the emergence of what some experts warn could be two dramatically different realities for the country in the coming months: High vaccine uptake and lower caseloads in more Democratic-leaning parts of the country, and fresh hot spots and the development of dangerous variants in more GOP-leaning areas.

In the early months of the administration, the White House largely declined to criticize state and local officials’ handling of their vaccination programs, eager to maintain their buy-in and to prevent the politicization of the lifesaving campaign.

The recent change in tone comes after some GOP officials criticized President Joe Biden for calling for a door-to-door campaign to spread information about the safety and efficacy of vaccines in hopes it would encourage more people to get vaccinated.

“Now we need to go to community-by-community, neighborhood-by-neighborhood, and oftentimes, door-to-door — literally knocking on doors — to get help to the remaining people” who need to be vaccinated, Biden said Tuesday.

The grassroots component of the vaccination campaign has been in operation since April, when supplies of shots began outpacing demand. It was outlined and funded by Congress in the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill passed in March and overwhelmingly is carried out by local officials and private sector workers and volunteers.

But some in the GOP saw a political opening, catering to the party’s small-government roots and libertarian wing.

“The Biden Administration wants to knock on your door to see if you’re vaccinated,” tweeted Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan. “What’s next? Knocking on your door to see if you own a gun?”

McMaster asked his state’s health department to bar state and local health groups from “the use of the Biden Administration’s ‘targeted’ ‘door to door’ tactics.”

“A South Carolinian’s decision to get vaccinated is a personal one for them to make and not the government’s,” McMaster wrote in a letter to the department. “Enticing, coercing, intimidating, mandating, or pressuring anyone to take the vaccine is a bad policy which will deteriorate the public’s trust and confidence in the State’s vaccination efforts.”

In Missouri, meanwhile, GOP Gov. Mike Parson tweeted: “I have directed our health department to let the federal government know that sending government employees or agents door-to-door to compel vaccination would NOT be an effective OR a welcome strategy in Missouri!”

Earlier in the week, Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich sent a letter to Biden condemning the new strategy.

For the usually reserved Biden White House, which has long harbored private frustrations about some states’ laggard vaccination programs but refused to condemn them publicly for fear of playing up political divides in public health, it was a bridge too far.

“For those individuals, organizations that are feeding misinformation and trying to mischaracterize this type of trusted-messenger work, I believe you are doing a disservice to the country and to the doctors, the faith leaders, community leaders and others who are working to get people vaccinated, save lives and

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help end this pandemic," White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients said Thursday.

Months ago, the Biden White House refrained from responding when officials criticized its vaccine allocation strategy of sending more doses directly to pharmacies instead of through state health departments after the former strategy proved more effective. It largely kept quiet as it watched officials sow fears of vaccine "passports" and assiduously avoided engaging publicly with fringe lawmakers who promoted vaccine skepticism.

The new public expression of frustration comes amid lingering disbelief that tens of millions of Americans continue to refuse to get vaccinated, needlessly extending the pandemic and costing lives, as government health officials emphasize that nearly all serious cases and deaths are now preventable.

White House officials are quick to point out that their criticism is not related to the officials' political affiliation but to their rhetoric. They credit effective communication and leadership on the vaccines by GOP officials including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson and Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine. But they continue to be concerned that some GOP officials are seeking to boost their own fortunes by feeding into doubts about the vaccination.

Psaki on Thursday rebutted some allegations about the door-knocking program, noting that in most cases: "They are not members of the government. They are not federal government employees. They are volunteers. They are clergy. They are trusted voices in communities who are playing this role and door knocking."

Acknowledging the rhetoric has been "a bit frustrating to us," she also noted that there are indications the door-knocking has helped promote shots in areas lagging behind the rest of the country. "Alabama: The adult vaccination rate increased by 3.9%; 149,000 additional adults got their first dose in June," she said, adding that Florida saw an increase of 4.4% and Georgia of 3.5%.

"This is important work that's leading to more vaccinations," said Zients, "and it's done by people who care about the health of their family, friends and neighbors."

## Awaiting news, families of condo victims bond together

By KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — At the Seaview Hotel in Surfside, a vast and once impersonal ballroom has become a refuge — a shared space of hope and sorrow where grieving families comfort each other during the agonizing wait for news of relatives trapped inside a collapsed condo building.

Twice a day, every day, for more than two weeks, relatives of the 79 who perished and 61 still missing have huddled in the spacious room, a new daily routine thrust upon them by an unfathomable disaster.

Many members of this tiny community forged in tragedy have started arriving to the meetings early and staying late. They linger in small groups, talking. They hug each other, bring each other water and tissues. On days when information is scarce, rescuers, including those from other countries, circulate through the room, offering more detailed tidbits.

Officials announced on Wednesday that they were switching their mission from rescue to recovery, but there is no plan to stop the private briefings for the families, said Maggie Castro, a Miami-Dade firefighter and paramedic who keeps relatives updated and has forged her own connections with them.

"Obviously, this is a huge tragedy, but if I can find some kind of bright spot in this whole thing, it's to be with these families, watching their emotions come and go and ... watching them evolve through their stages and then also watching them bond," Castro said.

Soriya Cohen's husband, Brad Cohen, is still missing. Her brother-in-law Gary Cohen was found Thursday, and her two children are begging rescuers to search a similar grid line to find their father.

"The community outpours so much love," she said, recalling how volunteers wrapped her in a blanket, brought her food and coffee in the initial days after the collapse and "surrounded me with so much emotional support."

She still has the blanket, she said in a text Friday.

Rachel Spiegel, whose mother, Judy, is still missing, said she, her father and brother also have made

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connections with other families inside the room, but she stopped short of calling it comforting.

"I don't know if I would define it as comfort yet because we still don't know where my mom is. She's still missing."

While sobs could be heard in the background Wednesday night as officials announced they would shift from rescue to recovery, largely dashing any hope of survivors, some families said they won't feel different until they have final word on their loved ones.

"It's hard to digest," Spiegel said in a phone call. "Many people did say they feel the shift. For us, we just want to find my mom and be reunited with her. We're still hoping for the best. We're going to have this shift once we find her and are reunited with her."

The Cohen family said not having any updates about Brad Cohen was agonizing.

"I don't think the terminology of rescue versus recovery matters. It's semantics," said Soriya Cohen. "They will find people in whatever state they are in, however it's termed."

Other families told rescuers they did feel a sense of finality once workers started searching for victims instead of survivors.

"There has been a sort of shift I think toward acceptance but also obviously with that comes some sadness," said Castro, adding that the families are physically and emotionally exhausted. "It's a lot, a lot of emotional roller coasters that they've been on, just trying to stay positive and hold out the wait," she said.

The family briefings are surrounded by heavy security, with various checkpoints to protect their privacy.

Organizations set up at a line of tables in the room offer everything from free international phone calls and counseling to clothing and housing. Several snowbirds are offering their Surfside homes to displaced survivors, said Rabbi Yakov Saacks, a family friend who flew from New York to comfort the Cohens. The owner of a 16-unit building opened it up rent-free to Surfside survivors for the month of July.

Huge platters of catered food sit day and night, including glatt kosher meals, all donated by community members longing to ease the pain.

Meanwhile, Support Surfside has raised \$2 million for victims with another \$2 million pledged, and GoFundMe has separately raised \$1.7 million for various families.

The nearby Shul has been transformed into a huge clothing and dry goods facility for families to pick up items while they wait.

Saacks described the ballroom as painfully quiet at times.

"While families were either sitting or standing together, they were, for the most part, just silently and painfully waiting for news," he said. "While some families would welcome any news at that stage, others would welcome only good news."

## 'We need help': Haiti's interim leader requests US troops

By DANICA COTO and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press Writers

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Haiti's interim government said it asked the U.S. to deploy troops to protect key infrastructure as it tries to stabilize the country and prepare the way for elections in the aftermath of President Jovenel Moïse's assassination.

"We definitely need assistance and we've asked our international partners for help," Interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph told The Associated Press in a phone interview late Friday. "We believe our partners can assist the national police in resolving the situation."

The stunning request for U.S. military support recalled the tumult following Haiti's last presidential assassination, in 1915, when an angry mob dragged President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam out of the French Embassy and beat him to death. In response, President Woodrow Wilson sent the Marines into Haiti, justifying the American military occupation — which lasted nearly two decades — as a way to avert anarchy.

But the Biden administration has so far given no indication it will provide military assistance. For now, it only plans to send FBI officials to assist with the ongoing investigation into a crime that has plunged Haiti, a country already wracked by gaping poverty and gang violence, into a destabilizing battle for power and constitutional standoff.

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On Friday, a group of lawmakers declared loyalty and recognized Joseph Lambert, the head of Haiti's dismantled senate, as provisional president in a direct challenge to the interim government's authority. They also recognized as prime minister Ariel Henry, whom Moïse had selected to replace Joseph a day before he was killed but who had not yet taken office or formed a government.

Joseph expressed dismay that others would try to take advantage of Moïse's murder for political gain.

"I'm not interested in a power struggle," said Joseph, who assumed leadership with the backing of police and the military. "There's only one way people can become president in Haiti. And that's through elections."

Joseph spoke as more details emerged of a killing that increasingly has taken the air of murky, international conspiracy involving a Hollywood actor, a shootout with gunmen holed up in a foreign embassy and a private security firm operating out of a cavernous warehouse in Miami.

Among those arrested are two Haitian Americans, including one who worked alongside Sean Penn following the nation's devastating 2010 earthquake. Police have also detained or killed what they described as more than a dozen "mercenaries" who were former members of Colombia's military.

Some of the suspects were seized in a raid on Taiwan's Embassy where they are believed to have sought refuge. National Police Chief Léon Charles said another eight suspects were still at large and being sought.

The attack, which took place at Moïse's home before dawn Wednesday, also seriously wounded his wife, who was flown to Miami for surgery. Joseph said he has spoken to the first lady but out of respect for her mourning has not inquired about the attack.

Colombian officials said the men were recruited by four companies and traveled to the Caribbean nation in two groups via the Dominican Republic. U.S.-trained Colombian soldiers are heavily sought after by private security firms and mercenary armies in global conflict zones because of their experience in a decades-long war against leftist rebels and powerful drug cartels.

In an unexplainable twist would've surely outed any highly sensitive mission, some of the men posted on Facebook photos of themselves visiting the presidential palace and other tourist spots in the Dominican Republic, which shares Hispaniola Island with Haiti.

The sister of one of the dead suspects, Duberney Capador, told the AP that she last spoke to her brother late Wednesday — hours after Moïse's murder — when the men, holed up in a home and surrounded, were desperately trying to negotiate their way out of a shootout.

"He told me not to tell our mother, so she wouldn't worry," said Yenny Capador, fighting back tears.

It's not known who masterminded the attack. And numerous questions remain about how the perpetrators were able to penetrate the president's residence posing as U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents, meeting little resistance from those charged with protecting the president.

Capador said her brother, who retired from the Colombian army in 2019 with the rank of sergeant, was hired by a private security firm with the understanding he would be providing protection for powerful individuals in Haiti.

Capador said she knew almost nothing about the employer but shared a picture of her brother in a uniform emblazoned with the logo of CTU Security — a previously unknown company based in Doral, a Miami suburb popular with Colombian migrants.

The wife of Francisco Uribe, who was among those arrested, told Colombia's W Radio that CTU offered to pay the men about \$2,700 a month — a paltry sum for a dangerous international mission but far more than what most of the men, non-commissioned officers and professional soldiers, earned from their retirement pensions.

Uribe is under investigation for his alleged role in the murder of an unarmed civilian in 2008 that he tried to present as someone killed in combat, part of a spate of thousands of extrajudicial killings that rocked Colombia's U.S.-trained army more than a decade ago.

CTU Security was registered in 2008 and lists as its president Antonio Intriago, who is also affiliated with several other Florida-registered entities, some of them since dissolved, including the Counter Terrorist Unit Federal Academy, the Venezuelan American National Council and Doral Food Corp.

CTU's website lists two addresses, one of which was a gray-colored warehouse that was shuttered Friday with no sign indicating who it belonged to. The other was a small suite under a different company's

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name in a modern office building a few blocks away. A receptionist at the office said Intriago stops by every few days to collect mail and hold meetings. Intriago, who is Venezuelan, did not return phone calls and an email seeking comment.

"We are the ones who are most interested in clarifying what happened, so that my brother's reputation does not remain like it is," said Capador. "He was a humble, hard-working man. He had honors and decorations."

Besides the Colombians, among those detained by police were two Haitian Americans.

Investigative Judge Clément Noël told Le Nouvelliste that the arrested Americans, James Solages and Joseph Vincent, said the attackers originally planned only to arrest Moïse, not kill him. Noël said Solages and Vincent were acting as translators for the attackers, the newspaper reported Friday.

Solages, 35, described himself as a "certified diplomatic agent," an advocate for children and budding politician on a now-removed website for a charity he started in 2019 in south Florida to assist resident of his home town of Jacmel, on Haiti's southern coast.

He worked briefly as a driver and bodyguard for a relief organization set up by Penn following a magnitude 7.0 earthquake that killed 300,000 Haitians and left tens of thousands homeless. He also lists as past employers the Canadian Embassy in Haiti. His Facebook page, which was also taken down following news of his arrest, features photos of armored military vehicles and a shot of himself standing in front of an American flag.

Calls to the charity and Solages' associates went unanswered. However, a relative in south Florida said Solages doesn't have any military training and doesn't believe he was involved in the killing.

"I feel like my son killed my brother because I love my president and I love James Solages," Schubert Dorisme, whose wife is Solages' aunt, told WPLG in Miami.

Joseph refused to finger any attackers but said that Moïse had earned numerous enemies while attacking powerful oligarchs who for years profited from overly generous state contracts.

Some of those elite insiders are now the focus of investigators, with authorities asking that presidential candidate and well-known businessman Reginald Boulos and former Senate president Youri Latortue meet with prosecutors early next week for questioning. No further details were provided and none of the men have been charged.

Analysts say whoever plotted the brazen attack likely had ties to a criminal underworld that has flourished in recent years as corruption and drug trafficking have become entrenched. Even before Moïse's murder, Port-au-Prince already had been on edge due to 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.

Prosecutors also want to interrogate members of Moïse's security detail, including the president's security coordinator, Jean Laguel Civil, and Dimitri Hérard, the head of the General Security Unit of the National Palace.

"If you are responsible for the president's security, where have you been?" Port-au-Prince prosecutor Bed-Ford Claude was quoted as telling French-language newspaper Le Nouvelliste. "What did you do to avoid this fate for the president?"

## For Biden, politics are often framed by the personal

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — When grieving with those who lost loved ones in a building collapse, President Joe Biden invoked the car crash that claimed members of his own family decades ago. When explaining his decision to pull troops from Afghanistan, he remembered his veteran son. When discussing the importance of education, he recalled the teachers who helped him overcome his childhood stutter.

And when he met with Queen Elizabeth and then Vladimir Putin on a recent trip abroad, he couldn't resist bringing up his mother with both of them.

The personal has always been the political for Biden. Far more than his recent predecessors, the president publicly draws on his own experiences when he makes connections with voters and considers his deci-



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sions. Many politicians make their background a central component of their political identity, but Biden is particularly prone to draw links between his own life story and the day-to-day workings of his presidency.

And the strongest connection is often the saddest one.

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

And it was on vivid display recently when he spent more than three hours in private with people mourning the loss of loved ones in the building collapse in Surfside, Florida, going from family to family to hear the stories of those still missing in the debris. Biden spoke of wanting to switch places with a lost or missing loved one and lamented that "the waiting, the waiting, is unbearable."

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

Biden carries with him an index card that lists the total number of Americans who have died from COVID-19 and in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has been known to quietly send notes to people, including lawmakers and journalists, affected by cancer, referring to his own family's struggles with the affliction.

"Cynical people say, 'OK, this is a calculator, these are crocodile tears, this is something he turns on and off for the cameras.' ... That is total balderdash," said Dick Harpootlian, a Democratic South Carolina state lawmaker who's known and advised Biden for 40 years.

Harpootlian said that when his own mother died, Biden called with condolences. The lawmaker added: "Empathy is sort of the wrong word. I mean, it's not strong enough. It was just, he felt my loss.

"I could tell it's sincere, genuine caring for people that are hurt or have lost loved ones," he continued.

Beau Biden, who died of brain cancer in 2015, looms large in the president's life.

He said that his dying son made him promise to keep going and, the day before he was sworn in as president, he tearfully told a crowd in Delaware that his "only regret" was that Beau couldn't be there. Biden marked his first Memorial Day weekend as commander in chief by honoring the nation's sacrifices in a deeply personal manner as he paid tribute to those lost while remembering his son.

"I know how much the loss hurts," said Biden.

Though a tent was overhead, the cold wind whipped the rain onto guests as they watched a lone military trumpeter play taps at a memorial to Delaware's fallen troops. Biden appeared to pay the chill no mind, remaining for the entirety of the 75-minute ceremony and mouthing the words to the closing rendition of "God Bless America."

"For Joe Biden, this isn't something that he does — this is who he is," said Anita Dunn, senior White House adviser. "He makes sure that everyone who wants to talk to him got to talk to him, and not just a greeting but a conversation. He knows how important those conversations are because of the tragedy in his own life."

Biden draws on more than just grief.

This past week, at an event in Illinois to promote the family portion of his massive infrastructure bill, he extolled its benefits for child care and in particular for single parents. He evoked his own challenges as a single father in the aftermath of the car accident that killed his first wife and daughter and injured his two young sons.

"If I hadn't had the family I have, my younger sister, my best friend, and my brother, and my mom help out, I couldn't have done it," the president said. "But not everybody has that kind of support."

West Wing staffers and journalists alike know that nearly every event has a chance to be enhanced — or sidetracked — by a stroll down memory lane. In Brussels, during his first overseas trip, Biden took a detour about his father changing jobs and neglected to deliver news of an Airbus-Boeing trade deal as planned.

At a recent education event in Washington, Biden evoked both his second wife, first lady Jill Biden, a teacher, and the educators who helped him manage a childhood stutter.

"They took a stuttering kid who couldn't speak very well in school, was scared to death to be called on

to read out loud," Biden recalled.

"And they nurtured me: 'Joey — you're a very smart boy, Joey. Just take your time. Don't let that get in your way, Joey,'" he told the gathering of teachers. "I'm serious. I think what you all underestimate, beyond the teaching of reading and writing, adding and subtracting: You give so many kids confidence."

Many presidents draw from their own lives to guide their politics: George W. Bush fashioned a persona as a down-home Texas ranch owner; Bill Clinton frequently invoked his family's poverty; even Donald Trump told stories of a friend named Jim who no longer felt safe going to Paris as a means to explain his own hard-line immigration policies.

But folksy remembrances often give Biden a more relatable identity than those of many of his predecessors, including Trump, who lived in a Manhattan skyscraper that bore his name in gold-plated letters, and Barack Obama, whose cool intellect and constitutional law background at times appeared to leave him detached.

There are potential downsides to Biden's approach, as he risks suggesting to people that he can't identify with people whose life experiences are different than his own. But many observers believe that those connections to his own life — which mirror how many voters relate to issues, through the prisms of their own family and experiences — can be both genuine and politically effective.

"Starting with the 'Joe from Scranton' moniker, to the horrific car crash, to the glory and tragedy of Beau to the foibles of Hunter, the President dons a soft tone and frames most of his worldview from his reminiscence," said Tobe Berkovitz, political ad consultant and professor at Boston University's College of Communication. "No president has ever worn his heart on his sleeve like Joe Biden."

## Heat, wind spur California fire; evacuation hits Nevada area

BECKWOURTH, Calif. (AP) — A California wildfire that closed nearly 200 square miles of forest forced evacuations across state lines into Nevada on Friday as winds and scorching, dry weather drove flames forward through trees and brush.

The Beckwourth Complex — which began as two lightning-caused fires in Plumas National Forest — showed "extreme behavior," fire information officer Lisa Cox said Friday evening.

Hot rising air formed a gigantic, smoky pyrocumulus cloud that reached thousands of feet high and created its own lightning, Cox said.

Spot fires caused by embers leapt up to a mile (1.6 kilometers) ahead of the northeastern flank — too far for firefighters to safely battle, Cox said.

Winds up to about 20 mph (32 kph) on ridgetops were funneling flames up draws and canyons full of dry fuel, where "it can actually pick up speed," Cox said.

By evening, the fire was approaching U.S. 395, a main interstate in the northern Sierra Nevada not far from the border. Although the flames hadn't crossed that divide, the Washoe County Sheriff's Office told people to evacuate some areas in the rural communities of Ranch Haven and Flanagan Flats, north of Reno.

"Evacuate now," a Sheriff's office tweet said.

Although there are no confirmed reports of building damage, the fire already prompted evacuation orders or warnings for hundreds of homes and several campgrounds in California along with the closure of nearly 200 square miles of Plumas National Forest.

The blaze, which was only 11% contained, officially had blackened more than 38 square miles (98 square kilometers) but that figure was expected to increase dramatically when fire officials were able to make better observations.

Nearly 1,000 firefighters were aided by aircraft but the blaze was expected to continue leaping through trees and chaparral that already are bone-dry because of low humidity and a heat wave forecasted to continue through the weekend.

"We're expecting more of the same the day after and the day after and the day after," Cox said.

The air was so dry that some of the water dropped by aircraft evaporated before it reached the ground, she said.

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The fire was one of several burning in the West, including several that destroyed dozens of California homes in recent days.

In the region between the Oregon border and the northern end of the Central Valley, the big Lava and Tennant fires were significantly contained, and progress was reported at the Salt Fire as containment improved to 45%. The Salt Fire has burned 27 homes and 14 outbuildings north of Redding, which hit 100 degrees (37.7 Celsius) before 11 a.m. The Lava Fire destroyed 20 structures, including 13 homes, and damaged two structures. The Tennant Fire destroyed five buildings, including two homes.

In north-central Arizona, increased humidity slowed a big wildfire that posed a threat to the rural community of Crown King. The 24.5-square-mile (63.5-square-kilometer) lightning-caused fire in Yavapai County was 29% contained. Recent rains allowed five national forests and state land managers to lift public-access closures.

Climate change is considered a "key driver" of a trend that is creating "longer and more intense dry seasons that increase moisture stress on vegetation and make forests more susceptible to severe wildfire," the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said recently.

Fire crew officials will be briefing the community on progress Friday evening at the Chiloquin Community Center. The meeting will be streamed on the Facebook page for the Fremont-Winema National Forest beginning at 7 p.m.

In Oregon, pushed by strong winds, a wildfire in Klamath County grew from nearly 26 square miles (67 square kilometers) Thursday to nearly 61 square miles (158 square kilometers) on Friday in the Fremont-Winema National Forest and on private land. It was 0% contained, according to a Facebook post by the incident management team. Klamath County Emergency Management on Friday issued an immediate evacuation order for people in certain areas north of Beatty and near Sprague River. California dispatched two strike teams with wildland engines to help.

In Idaho, Gov. Brad Little declared a wildfire emergency Friday and mobilized the state's National Guard to help fight fires sparked after lightning storms swept across the drought-stricken region.

Fire crews in north-central Idaho were facing extreme conditions and gusts as they fought two wildfires covering a combined 19.5 square miles (50.5 square kilometers). The blazes threatened homes and forced evacuations in the tiny, remote community of Dixie about 40 miles (64 kilometers) southeast of Grangeville. Efforts were complicated in part because resources were stretched thin, fire managers said, and the area has very challenging terrain covered with parched trees and plants.

Meanwhile, forecasters warned that much of California will see dangerously hot weekend weather, with highs in triple digits in the Central Valley, mountains, deserts and other inland areas because of strengthening high pressure over the state. Heat warnings did not include major coastal populations.

On Friday, Death Valley National Park recorded a staggering 130 degrees Fahrenheit (54.4 Celsius).

If verified, it would be the hottest high recorded there since July 1913, when the same Furnace Creek area hit 134 degrees Fahrenheit (56.6 degrees Celsius), considered the highest reliably measured temperature on Earth.

California's power grid operator issued a statewide Flex Alert from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. Friday to avoid disruptions and rolling blackouts. Flex Alerts call for consumers to voluntarily conserve electricity by reducing the use of appliances and keeping the thermostat higher during evening hours when solar energy is diminished or no longer available.

Gov. Gavin Newsom on Friday signed an emergency proclamation suspending certain requirements so the state could obtain additional power capacity.

## Haiti's interim PM confirms request for US troops to country

JOSHUA GOODMAN, ASTRID SUÁREZ, EVENS SANON and DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Haiti's interim government said Friday that it asked the U.S. to deploy troops to protect key infrastructure as it tries to stabilize the country and prepare the way for elections in the aftermath of the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.

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"We definitely need assistance and we've asked our international partners for help," Interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph told The Associated Press in an interview, declining to provide further details. "We believe our partners can assist the national police in resolving the situation."

Joseph said that he was dismayed by opponents who've tried to take advantage of Moïse's murder to seize political power — an indirect reference to a group of lawmakers that have declared their loyalty and recognized Joseph Lambert, the head of Haiti's dismantled senate, as provisional president and Ariel Henry, whom Moïse designated as prime minister a day before he was killed, as prime minister.

"I'm not interested in a power struggle," Joseph said in the brief phone interview, without mentioning Lambert by name. "There's only one way people can become president in Haiti. And that's through elections."

Joseph spoke just hours after the head of Colombia's police said that the Colombians implicated in Moïse's assassination were recruited by four companies and traveled to the Caribbean nation in two groups via the Dominican Republic. Meanwhile, the U.S. said it would send senior FBI and Homeland Security officials to help in the investigation.

Haitian National Police Chief Léon Charles said 17 suspects have been detained in the brazen killing of Moïse that stunned a nation already reeling from poverty, widespread violence and political instability.

As the investigation moved forward, the killing took on the air of a complicated international conspiracy. Besides the Colombians, among those detained by police were two Haitian Americans, who have been described as translators for the attackers. Some of the suspects were seized in a raid on Taiwan's Embassy where they are believed to have sought refuge.

At a news conference in Colombia's capital of Bogota, Gen. Jorge Luis Vargas Valencia said four companies had been involved in the "recruitment, the gathering of these people" implicated in the assassination, although he did not identify the companies because their names were still being verified.

Two of the suspects traveled to Haiti via Panama and the Dominican Republic, Vargas said, while a second group of 11 arrived in Haiti on July 4 from the Dominican Republic.

In Washington, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said senior FBI and Department of Homeland Security officials will be sent to Haiti "as soon as possible to assess the situation and how we may be able to assist."

"The United States remains engaged and in close consultations with our Haitian and international partners to support the Haitian people in the aftermath of the assassination of the president," Psaki said.

Following Haiti's request for U.S. troops, a senior administration official reiterated Psaki's earlier comments that the administration is sending officials to assess how it can be most helpful, but added there are no plans to provide military assistance at this time.

The U.S. sent troops to Haiti following the last presidential assassination in the country, the murder of President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam in 1915 at the hands of an angry mob that had raided the French Embassy where he had sought refuge.

In Haiti, National Police Chief Léon Charles said another eight suspects were still at large and being sought for

Investigative Judge Clément Noël told the French-language newspaper Le Nouvelliste that the Haitian Americans arrested, James Solages and Joseph Vincent, said the attackers originally planned only to arrest Moïse, not kill him. Noël said Solages and Vincent were acting as translators for the attackers.

The same newspaper quoted Port-au-Prince prosecutor Bed-Ford Claude as saying he ordered an investigative unit of the National Police Force to interrogate all the security agents close to Moïse. These include Moïse's security coordinator Jean Laguel Civil and Dimitri Hérard, head of the General Security Unit of the National Palace.

"If you are responsible for the president's security, where have you been? What did you do to avoid this fate for the president?" Claude said.

The attack, which took place at Moïse's home before dawn Wednesday, also seriously wounded his wife, who was flown to Miami for treatment.

Joseph assumed leadership with the backing of police and the military and declared a two-week "state

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of siege." Port-au-Prince already has been on edge amid 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.

The killing brought the usually bustling capital to a standstill, but Joseph urged the public to return to work.

Vargas has pledged Colombia's full cooperation, and authorities there identified 13 of the 15 Colombians implicated in the attack as retired members of the military, 11 captured and two killed. They range in rank from lieutenant colonel to soldier.

The commander of Colombia's Armed Forces, Gen. Luis Fernando Navarro, said they had left the institution between 2018 and 2020.

"In the criminal world, there is the concept of murder for hire and this is what happened: they hired some members of the (army) reserve for this purpose and they have to respond criminally for the acts they committed," said retired Colombian army general Jaime Ruiz Barrera.

Senior officials from Colombia's security forces will travel to Haiti to help with the investigation.

U.S.-trained Colombian soldiers are heavily recruited by private security firms in global conflict zones because of their experience in a decades-long war against leftist rebels and powerful drug cartels.

The wife of one former Colombian soldier in custody said he was recruited by a security firm to travel to the Dominican Republic last month.

The woman, who identified herself only as "Yuli," told Colombia's W Radio that her husband, Francisco Uribe, was hired for \$2,700 a month by a company named CTU to travel to the Dominican Republic, where he was told he would provide protection to some powerful families. She says she last spoke to him at 10 p.m. Wednesday — almost a day after Moïse's killing— and said he was on guard duty at a house where he and others were staying.

"The next day he wrote me a message that sounded like a farewell," the woman said. "They were running, they had been attacked. ... That was the last contact I had."

The woman said she knew little about her husband's activities and was unaware he had even traveled to Haiti.

Uribe is under investigation for his alleged role in extrajudicial killings by Colombia's U.S.-trained army more than a decade ago. Colombian court records show he and another soldier were accused of killing a civilian in 2008 who they later tried to present as a criminal killed in combat.

The CTU in question may be CTU Security in Miami-Dade. The business has two listed addresses on its website. One was a shuttered warehouse with no sign indicating who it belonged to. The other is a simple office under a different company's name where the receptionist says the CTU owner comes once a week to collect meal and hold the occasional meeting.

Solages, 35, described himself as a "certified diplomatic agent," an advocate for children and budding politician on a now-removed website for a charity he started in 2019 in south Florida to assist resident of his home town of Jacmel, on Haiti's southern coast.

Solages also said he had worked as a bodyguard at the Canadian Embassy in Haiti, and on his Facebook page, which was also taken down after news of his arrest, he showcased photos of armored military vehicles and a shot of himself standing in front of an American flag.

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.

Calls to the charity and Solages' associates went unanswered. However, a relative in south Florida said Solages doesn't have any military training and doesn't believe he was involved in the killing.

"I feel like my son killed my brother because I love my president and I love James Solages," Schubert Dorisme, whose wife is Solages' aunt, told WPLG in Miami.

Taiwan's Embassy in Port-au-Prince said police had arrested 11 individuals who tried to break into the compound early Thursday. It gave no details of their identities or a reason for the break-in but in a statement referred to the men as "mercenaries" and strongly condemned the "cruel and barbaric assassination"

of Moïse.

"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 while Taiwanese diplomats were working from home. Haiti is one of a handful of countries with diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

## **Pacific Northwest strengthens heat protections for workers**

By NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — Washington state on Friday became the second state in the Pacific Northwest in as many days to announce emergency rules that provide farmworkers and others who work outdoors more protection from hot weather in the wake of an extreme heat wave that is believed to have killed hundreds of people.

The announcement comes a day after Oregon approved what advocates call the nation's most protective emergency heat rules for workers and as temperatures are spiking again this week in parts of the U.S. West, though not as severely as the end of June. The heat is making it difficult to fight wildfires in parts of a region struggling with a historic drought tied to climate change.

"The heat experienced in our state this year has reached catastrophic levels," Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said. "The physical risk to individuals is significant, in particular those whose occupations have them outdoors all day."

Washington's new rules take effect Tuesday and update existing mandates that are in place from May through September, when the state's multibillion-dollar agricultural industry relies on tens of thousands of farmworkers to tend and harvest crops such as apples, cherries, hops and asparagus.

Under the emergency rules, when the temperature is at or above 100 F (38 C), employers must provide shade or another way for employees to cool down and ensure a paid cool-down rest period of at least 10 minutes every two hours.

The state already required employers to provide every outdoor worker with at least a quart of drinking water per hour, offer safety training on outdoor heat exposure and respond to any employee with symptoms of heat-related illness. A new requirement is that the water must be cool.

The onus is on businesses under heat rules in Washington, Oregon and California, where Del Bosque Farms owner Joe Del Bosque was monitoring his workers Friday and into the weekend, when he was expecting temperatures above 110 F (43 C) in the Central Valley.

"If we see it gets too hot and it's a danger to them, we will shut down the operation and send them home," he said.

Del Bosque also said he educates workers who pick and pack melons on his farm about preventing heat illness and provides plenty of cool water and shade to rest.

The scramble to protect workers follows a heat wave that hit the Northwest and British Columbia at the end of June and broke all-time heat records in places like Seattle and Portland, Oregon.

An immigrant from Guatemala who was part of an outdoor crew moving irrigation lines at a Oregon plant nursery was among those who died in the heat wave. Nearly 200 deaths have been blamed on the heat in Washington and Oregon, while authorities in British Columbia say hundreds of people there may have died.

The record-high temperatures were caused by what meteorologists described as a dome of high pressure worsened by human-caused climate change, which is making such extreme weather events more likely and more intense.

Last month was the hottest June on record for the contiguous United States, smashing the record set in 2016 by nearly a degree, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Friday. The unheard-of extreme heat in the Pacific Northwest at the end of the month was a main driver as the country averaged 72.64 degrees Fahrenheit (22.58 Celsius) for June, beating the old record of 71.76 F (22 C). The 20th century average for June is 68.4 F (20 C).

Usually records get beaten by one- or two-tenths of a degree, but "that's a wide margin," NOAA climate

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scientist Ahira Sanchez-Lugo said. "That is pretty remarkable."

While there is natural variability always involved, "our climate is changing," she said.

Eight states — Arizona, California, Idaho, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Utah — had their hottest June, while six more had their second hottest. NOAA records go back 127 years.

"The recent heat wave is a reminder that extreme temperatures can be a real danger in the workplace. With more hot weather on the way, we're taking action now," said Joel Sacks, director of the Washington state Department of Labor & Industries.

Its rules are similar to increased protections that Oregon adopted Thursday, but that state went further. Once the heat index rises above 90 F (32 C), employers in Oregon must ensure effective communication between workers and supervisors so employees can report concerns and must ensure employees are observed for alertness and signs of heat illness.

At 80 F (27 C) or above, employers must provide sufficient shade and an adequate supply of drinking water.

Agricultural-rich California adopted the nation's first rules requiring shade and water for farmworkers in 2005 following 10 heat-related deaths — four of them farmworkers — in a two-month period.

The regulations have since been beefed up, requiring employers to provide shade when temperatures rise above 80 F (27 C) and 15-minute breaks in the shade each hour when temperatures rise higher. Employers also must provide cool drinking water in easily accessible locations, toilets and hand-washing facilities. When it's hot, many work in the middle of the night.

## **Biden fires Trump-appointed head of Social Security agency**

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Friday fired the commissioner of Social Security after the official refused to resign, and Biden accepted the deputy commissioner's resignation, the White House said.

Biden asked commissioner Andrew Saul to resign, and his employment was terminated after he refused the Democratic president's request, a White House official said.

Deputy Commissioner David Black agreed to resign, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel matters.

Both officials had been put in place under President Donald Trump, a Republican.

Biden named Kilolo Kijakazi as acting commissioner while the administration conducts a search for a permanent commissioner and deputy commissioner.

Kijakazi currently is the deputy commissioner for retirement and disability policy at the Social Security Administration.

Saul's removal followed a Justice Department legal opinion that found he could be removed, despite a statute that says he could only be fired for neglecting his duties or malfeasance.

The opinion — researched at the request of the White House — concluded that a reevaluation because of a recent Supreme Court ruling meant that Saul could be fired by the president at will.

Biden's move got immediate support from the Democratic senator who would be in charge of confirming a successor to Saul. Republican lawmakers accused Biden of politicizing the agency and pointed to Saul's confirmation by a bipartisan Senate vote in 2019.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said in a statement that "every president should choose the personnel that will best carry out their vision for the country.

"To fulfill President Biden's bold vision for improving and expanding Social Security, he needs his people in charge," Wyden added, pledging to work to confirm a new commissioner "as swiftly as possible."

Rep. Bill Pascrell, D-N.J., who several months ago began demanding the ouster of Saul and Black, celebrated their Friday firings.

"Social Security is in deep trouble," Pascrell said.

Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho, the top Republican on the finance committee, and Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas, the top Republican on the House Ways and Means Committee, issued a joint statement calling Biden's decision "disappointing." The pair claimed "Social Security beneficiaries stand the most to lose from Presi-

dent Biden's partisan decision to remove Commissioner Andrew Saul."

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., called the personnel move an "unprecedented and dangerous politicization of the Social Security Administration."

The agency, headquartered in Baltimore, pays benefits, funded by a tax on wages paid by employers and employees, to about 64 million people, including retirees, children, widows and widowers, according to its website. The agency has a staff of about 60,000 employees.

Saul was confirmed by a Senate vote of 77-16 in 2019 to a six-year term that would have expired in January 2025, tweeted Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa.

The labor union that represents Social Security employees also welcomed the firings.

Ralph de Juliis, spokesperson for the American Federation of Government Employees SSA General Committee and Council 220 President, said employee morale and agency operations had suffered under Saul and Black's leadership.

"President Biden made the right call to send these Trump appointees packing," de Juliis said.

## 'Heartbreaking': Death toll in Florida condo collapse now 79

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — The death toll in the collapse of a Miami-area condo building rose to 79 on Friday, a number the mayor called "heartbreaking" as recovery workers toiled for a 16th day to find victims in the rubble. Another 61 people remain unaccounted for.

Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said the work to recover victims was "moving forward with great urgency" in order to bring closure to the families of victims who have spent an agonizing two weeks waiting for news.

"This is a staggering and heartbreaking number that affects all of us very deeply," Levine Cava said of the latest death toll.

"All those who have passed ... are leaving behind loved ones. They're leaving behind devastated families. The magnitude of this tragedy is growing each and every day," she said.

Rescue workers and emergency support teams from Florida and several other states have labored in 12-hour shifts, 24 hours a day at the site of the devastated beachfront condominium in Surfside — physically and emotionally taxing work performed amid oppressive heat and in dangerous conditions.

"We know that there will be long-term impacts for the teams on the front line," Levine Cava said. "They have given so much of themselves in these first two weeks."

Miami-Dade Fire Chief Alan Cominsky said taking care of the mental health and well-being of the first responders is a priority. He said it is critical that the first responders communicate with each other. "It's important for us to talk," he said.

To that end, Levine Cava said officials have added peer support personnel at the fire stations.

No one has been found alive since the first hours after a large section of the 12-story Champlain Towers South came crashing down on June 24.

Hope of finding survivors was briefly rekindled after workers demolished the remainder of the building Sunday night, 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.

On Wednesday, workers shifted their mission from search and rescue to recovery after concluding that there was "no chance of life" in the rubble.

Levine Cava said the high death toll is "an aching hole in the center of this close-knit family here in Surfside."

She said that with 61 people still listed as missing, detectives are continuing to audit the list to verify that all of those people were actually inside the building when it collapsed. "We want to get this right," she said.

Miami-Dade Fire Chief Alan Cominsky said it is unclear how long the recovery effort will take, but said crews are making progress.



On Thursday, Paraguay's foreign minister said in a radio report that the body of the sister of that country's first lady was among those found. Several Latin American citizens were reported in the building when it collapsed. Rescue workers now focused on finding remains instead of survivors have pledged to keep up their search for victims until they clear all the debris at the site.

State and local officials have pledged financial assistance to families of the victims, as well as to residents of the building who survived but lost all their possessions. On Friday, Gov. Ron DeSantis issued an executive order indefinitely suspending laws that would require the payment of property taxes for residents whose homes were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable in the collapse. The order also requests that the state legislature explore additional acts that may be needed to alleviate their property tax obligations.

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

## White House calling out critics of door-to-door vaccine push

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — "A disservice to the country." "Inaccurate disinformation." "Literally killing people."

For months, the Biden White House refrained from criticizing Republican officials who played down the importance of coronavirus vaccinations or sought to make political hay of the federal government's all-out effort to drive shots into arms. Not any longer.

With the COVID-19 vaccination rate plateauing across the country, the White House is returning fire at those they see as spreading harmful misinformation or fear about the shots.

When South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster tried this week to block door-to-door efforts to drive up the vaccination rate in his state, White House press secretary Jen Psaki did not mince words in her reaction.

"The failure to provide accurate public health information, including the efficacy of vaccines and the accessibility of them to people across the country, including South Carolina, is literally killing people, so maybe they should consider that," she said Friday.

While 67% of American adults have gotten at least one dose, officials are increasingly worried about vast geographic disparity in vaccination rates, and the emergence of what some experts warn could be two dramatically different realities for the country in the coming months: High vaccine uptake and lower caseloads in more Democratic-leaning parts of the country, and fresh hot spots and the development of dangerous variants in more GOP-leaning areas.

In the early months of the administration, the White House largely declined to criticize state and local officials' handling of their vaccination programs, eager to maintain their buy-in and to prevent the politicization of the lifesaving campaign.

The recent change in tone comes after some GOP officials criticized President Joe Biden for calling for a door-to-door campaign to spread information about the safety and efficacy of vaccines in hopes it would encourage more people to get vaccinated.

"Now we need to go to community-by-community, neighborhood-by-neighborhood, and oftentimes, door-to-door — literally knocking on doors — to get help to the remaining people" who need to be vaccinated, Biden said Tuesday.

The grassroots component of the vaccination campaign has been in operation since April, when supplies of shots began outpacing demand. It was outlined and funded by Congress in the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill passed in March and overwhelmingly is carried out by local officials and private sector workers and volunteers.

But some in the GOP saw a political opening, catering to the party's small-government roots and libertarian wing.

"The Biden Administration wants to knock on your door to see if you're vaccinated," tweeted Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan. "What's next? Knocking on your door to see if you own a gun?"

McMaster asked his state's health department to bar state and local health groups from "the use of the Biden Administration's 'targeted' 'door to door' tactics."

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"A South Carolinian's decision to get vaccinated is a personal one for them to make and not the government's," McMaster wrote in a letter to the department. "Enticing, coercing, intimidating, mandating, or pressuring anyone to take the vaccine is a bad policy which will deteriorate the public's trust and confidence in the State's vaccination efforts."

In Missouri, meanwhile, GOP Gov. Mike Parson tweeted: "I have directed our health department to let the federal government know that sending government employees or agents door-to-door to compel vaccination would NOT be an effective OR a welcome strategy in Missouri!"

Earlier in the week, Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich sent a letter to Biden condemning the new strategy.

For the usually reserved Biden White House, which has long harbored private frustrations about some states' laggard vaccination programs but refused to condemn them publicly for fear of playing up political divides in public health, it was a bridge too far.

"For those individuals, organizations that are feeding misinformation and trying to mischaracterize this type of trusted-messenger work, I believe you are doing a disservice to the country and to the doctors, the faith leaders, community leaders and others who are working to get people vaccinated, save lives and help end this pandemic," White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients said Thursday.

Months ago, the Biden White House refrained from responding when officials criticized its vaccine allocation strategy of sending more doses directly to pharmacies instead of through state health departments after the former strategy proved more effective. It largely kept quiet as it watched officials sow fears of vaccine "passports" and assiduously avoided engaging publicly with fringe lawmakers who promoted vaccine skepticism.

The new public expression of frustration comes amid lingering disbelief that tens of millions of Americans continue to refuse to get vaccinated, needlessly extending the pandemic and costing lives, as government health officials emphasize that nearly all serious cases and deaths are now preventable.

White House officials are quick to point out that their criticism is not related to the officials' political affiliation but to their rhetoric. They credit effective communication and leadership on the vaccines by GOP officials including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson and Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine. But they continue to be concerned that some GOP officials are seeking to boost their own fortunes by feeding into doubts about the vaccination.

Psaki on Thursday rebutted some allegations about the door-knocking program, noting that in most cases: "They are not members of the government. They are not federal government employees. They are volunteers. They are clergy. They are trusted voices in communities who are playing this role and door knocking."

Acknowledging the rhetoric has been "a bit frustrating to us," she also noted that there are indications the door-knocking has helped promote shots in areas lagging behind the rest of the country. "Alabama: The adult vaccination rate increased by 3.9%; 149,000 additional adults got their first dose in June," she said, adding that Florida saw an increase of 4.4% and Georgia of 3.5%.

"This is important work that's leading to more vaccinations," said Zients, "and it's done by people who care about the health of their family, friends and neighbors."

## More competition: Biden signs order targeting big business

By AAMER MADHANI and MARCY GORDON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden signed an executive order on Friday targeting what he labeled anticompetitive practices in tech, health care and other parts of the economy, declaring it would fortify an American ideal "that true capitalism depends on fair and open competition."

The sweeping order includes 72 actions and recommendations that Biden said would lower prices for families, increase wages for workers and promote innovation and faster economic growth. However, new regulations that agencies may write to translate his policy into rules could trigger major legal battles.

The order includes calls for banning or limiting noncompete agreements to help boost wages, allowing rule

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changes that would pave the way for hearing aids to be sold over the counter at drugstores and banning excessive early termination fees by internet companies. It also calls on the Transportation Department to consider issuing rules requiring airlines to refund fees when baggage is delayed or in-flight services are not provided as advertised.

At a White House signing ceremony, Biden said of some in big business: "Rather than competing for consumers they are consuming their competitors; rather than competing for workers they are finding ways to gain the upper hand on labor."

"Let me be clear: Capitalism without competition isn't capitalism. It's exploitation," he said.

The White House said Biden's order follows in the tradition of past presidents who took action to slow corporate power. Theodore Roosevelt's administration broke up powerful trusts that had a grip on huge swaths of the economy, including Standard Oil and J.P. Morgan's railroads. Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration stepped up antitrust enforcement in the 1930s.

But experts noted that Biden's sprawling presidential initiative is hardly a mandate on competition.

"This is really more of a blueprint or agenda than a traditional executive order," said Daniel Crane, a law professor at the University of Michigan who focuses on antitrust. "This is a very broad and ambitious policy agenda for the Biden administration that offers lots of insights on the administration's direction and priorities, but there could be many a slip between the cup and the lip."

Biden's order includes a flurry of consumer-pointed initiatives that could potentially lead to new federal regulations, but it also includes plenty of aspirational language that simply encourages agencies to take action meant to bolster worker and consumer protections.

Business and trade groups quickly expressed opposition, arguing that the order would stifle economic growth just as the U.S. economy is recovering from the coronavirus pandemic.

"Some of the actions announced today are solutions in search of a problem," said Jay Timmons, president and CEO of the National Association of Manufacturers. "They threaten to undo our progress by undermining free markets and are premised on the false notion that our workers are not positioned for success."

The order seeks to address noncompete clauses — an issue affecting some 36 million to 60 million Americans, according to the White House — by encouraging the Federal Trade Commission to ban or limit such agreements, ban unnecessary occupational licensing restrictions and strengthen antitrust guidance to prevent employers from collaborating to suppress wages or reduce benefits by sharing wage and benefit information with one another.

Noncompete agreements often stop workers in a variety of industries from going to other employers for higher pay. Biden noted that in some states even fast food franchises include such clauses for low-wage workers.

"Come on, are there trade secrets about what's inside the patty?" Biden said.

The order also takes aim at tech giants Facebook, Google, Apple and Amazon by calling for greater scrutiny of mergers, "especially by dominant internet platforms, with particular attention to the acquisition of nascent competitors, serial mergers, the accumulation of data, competition by 'free' products, and the effect on user privacy."

In his executive order, Biden also calls on the Federal Maritime Commission to take action against shippers that it says are "charging American exporters exorbitant charges" and the Surface Transportation Board to require railroad track owners to "strengthen their obligations to treat other freight companies fairly."

The White House argues that rapid consolidation and sharp hikes in pricing in the shipping industry have made it increasingly expensive for U.S. companies to get goods to market. In 2000, the largest 10 shipping companies controlled 12% of the market. They now control about 82%, according to the Journal of Commerce.

The World Shipping Council, an industry trade group, pushed back in a statement that "normalized demand, not regulation," is the way to answer rising costs.

"There is no market concentration 'problem' to 'fix,' and punitive measures levied against carriers based on incorrect economic assumptions will not fix the congestion problems," said John Butler, president and

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CEO of the council.

The order also notes that over the past two decades the U.S. has lost 70% of the banks it once had, with around 10,000 bank closures. Communities of color and rural areas have been disproportionately affected.

To begin addressing the trend, the order encourages the Justice Department as well as the Federal Reserve, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency to update guidelines to provide greater scrutiny of mergers. It also encourages the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to issue rules allowing customers to download their banking data and take it with them when they switch.

The order includes several provisions that could affect the agricultural industry. It calls on the U.S. Department of Agriculture to consider issuing new rules defining when meat can use "Product of USA" labels. It also encourages the FTC to limit farm equipment manufacturers' ability to restrict the use of independent repair shops or do-it-yourself repairs — such as when tractor companies block farmers from repairing their own tractors.

Democratic lawmakers and union leaders cheered the order.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a Minnesota Democrat who chairs the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Competition Policy, said that Biden's executive order needs to be buttressed by congressional action.

"Competition policy needs new energy and approaches so that we can address America's monopoly problem," Klobuchar said. "That means legislation to update our antitrust laws, but it also means reimagining what the federal government can do to promote competition under our current laws."

## **EXPLAINER: How Richard Branson will ride own rocket to space**

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

Virgin Galactic will become the first rocket company to launch the boss when Richard Branson straps into one of his sleek, shiny space planes this weekend.

The self-described tie-loathing adventurer and troublemaker will join five company employees for Sunday's test flight from New Mexico's southern desert — the company's fourth trip to the edge of space.

Branson assigned himself to Virgin Galactic's first full-scale crew, jumping ahead of Blue Origin's Jeff Bezos, an even richer rocketeer looking to launch himself into space. Bezos' liftoff is set for July 20 from West Texas.

A brief look at Branson's ride and company:

### **BOSS ON BOARD**

Just a week shy of turning 71, the London-born founder of the Virgin Group says he's "not apprehensive at all and it is the dream of a lifetime" to ride into space. The longtime fitness fanatic put in extra effort to prepare for the brief up-and-down flight. "I'm in my 70s now so you either let yourself go or you get fit and enjoy life." His wife, children and grandchildren will be there as he climbs aboard the rocket plane that's attached to a dual-fuselage aircraft for takeoff. During the three to four minutes of weightlessness, "I'll be looking back at our beautiful Earth and taking it all in and realize that only 500 other people have done this." Closer to 600, actually, but still a relatively small number. Upon landing, he'll celebrate with "a great, great grin on my face."

### **WHO ELSE IS FLYING**

Two pilots are needed to fly the rocket plane from the time it's released from the mothership to shoot into space until it glides down to a runway. It will be the third trip to space for chief pilot David Mackay, a Scottish-born test pilot for the Royal Air Force who went on to fly for Branson's Virgin Atlantic, and the second for chief flight instructor Michael Masucci. Chief astronaut instructor Beth Moses, a former NASA engineer, is also launching for the second time. Joining Branson as space rookies are lead operations engineer Colin Bennett and Sirisha Bandla, a vice president. The six will grab a lift from mothership pilots C.J. Sturckow, a former NASA astronaut, and Kelly Latimer.

### **ROCKET PLANE**

Virgin Galactic's space plane, Unity, will take off attached to a specially designed double aircraft nick-

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named Eve after Branson's late mother. After reaching nearly 50,000 feet (15,000 meters), the plane will be released and drop for a moment or two before its rocket motor ignites to send the craft on a steep climb toward space, exceeding 3 G's, or three times the force of Earth's gravity. The motor will shut off once the craft reaches space — a maximum altitude of about 55 miles (88 kilometers) is anticipated — enveloping the ship in silence as everyone but the pilots unbuckle, float and gaze out the 17 windows at Earth and the black void of space. After a few minutes of weightlessness, the occupants will strap back in as the plane reorients itself for entry — folding up its wings, then folding them back down in unique technique known as feathering. The rocket plane will glide back, NASA space shuttle style, to conclude about 15 minutes of free flight.

## TRACK RECORD

Founded in 2004, Virgin Galactic got its start when Branson teamed up with aircraft designer Burt Rutan to provide the necessary spaceship technology. A 2007 rocket motor test in California's Mojave Desert left three workers dead and three more injured. Then in 2014 the rocket plane Enterprise — named after the "Star Trek" ship — broke apart during a test flight, killing one pilot and seriously injuring the other. Unity, the replacement ship named by the late physicist Stephen Hawking, began flight tests in 2016. It made its first trip to the edge of space with two pilots in 2018 and the second in 2019, both times from Mojave. The operations moved to New Mexico's Spaceport America, with the plane soaring from there on May 22 to achieve the company's third spaceflight.

## WHAT'S NEXT

After Branson's launch, Virgin Galactic plans two more test flights this summer and fall before inviting paying customers on board. The next one will include more company employees, and the last will have Italian Air Force members conducting research. If all goes well, the first of the more than 600 confirmed ticket holders will climb aboard next year. The company plans to reopen reservations once Branson soars. Initial tickets went for \$250,000; no word on whether that will change. Branson promises a surprise after his ride to "give more people the chance to become an astronaut — because space belongs to us all." In the meantime, scientists are lining up for research rides, including Southwest Research Institute's Alan Stern, who was behind NASA's New Horizons mission to Pluto and beyond.

## Taking Trump's cue, Bolsonaro clouds vote with fraud claims

By DÉBORA ALVARES and DIANE JEANTET Associated Press

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP) — Brazil's presidential election is 15 months away, yet barely a day passes without President Jair Bolsonaro raising the specter of fraud and warning that he will be entitled to reject the results unless Congress overhauls the voting system.

He has mentioned potential vote fraud more than 20 times in the past two months and even floated the idea of canceling the election altogether.

"I don't mind handing over the government next year, to whomever it is, but with an honest vote, not with fraud," Bolsonaro told supporters July 1 outside the presidential residence. Later that day, he was harping on the issue again. "They say I don't have proof of fraud. You don't have proof that there's no fraud either!"

The relentless attack on Brazil's electronic voting system has prompted an outcry and closed-door meetings between lawmakers and Supreme Court justices to defend the system. And the nation's electoral tribunal last month ordered the president to provide proof of the fraud he has repeatedly claimed to possess, but so far hasn't presented.

The assault also raises concern that Bolsonaro, who is far behind in early polls, is cribbing from former U.S. President Donald Trump and laying the groundwork for his own version of the Jan. 6 Capitol riot in Washington.

"His strategy seems to be that if he can cloud the results of the election by claiming it is fraudulent or rigged, then he has a better chance of overturning the results," said Robert Kaufman, a professor of political science at Rutgers University, whose research has focused on democracies and dictatorships in

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Latin America.

Brazil's electoral tribunal organizes and oversees elections, not the executive branch. The president's press office did not immediately comment on whether he will present evidence of past electoral fraud, with the deadline looming in August.

At Bolsonaro's order, his administration has tasked the federal police with scouring Brazil's states for reports of fraud from the past 25 years he can use to support his claims, according to one of his ministers, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly. It is also part of his strategic response to opponents of a constitutional reform proposal that would add printouts of each vote to the electronic system, the minister said.

Were the proposal implemented, a receipt for each electronic vote would be visible to the voter before being deposited into a sealed ballot box. In the event of alleged irregularities with the electronic vote, the president argues, results could be checked by manually counting the printouts.

Opponents of the proposal, including the current and future presidents of the electoral tribunal, all three of whom are also Supreme Court justices, say the electronic system that began taking shape in 1996 already allows for an audit and that the change would merely open the way for baseless fraud claims.

The tribunal's president, Justice Luís Roberto Barroso, has been on a mission to quash the proposal in the congressional committee that is expected to vote on it next week. Last month, he and two other Supreme Court justices met with more than 40 politicians from across the political spectrum to prevent the bill from advancing.

The printed vote is a "risky solution to a problem that does not exist," Barroso told The Associated Press. He said it increases the risk of coercion and breaches of vote secrecy by drug traffickers and militias. Criminal organizations have been known to corral support for candidates and buy votes.

Supreme Court Justice Gilmar Mendes, a former president of the electoral tribunal, said by phone that the current moment calls for caution.

"People close to the government have used as an argument that, if it isn't their way, there can't be an election," Mendes said. "It became a topic to cultivate crisis. We saw what happened in the United States."

Bolsonaro's push for voting reform precedes his 2018 election, after which he claimed many votes cast for him were diverted to the Workers' Party candidate. Former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, of the Workers' Party, is widely expected to run against Bolsonaro in 2022.

In recent weeks, the far-right president has ratcheted up the frequency and intensity of his comments. "Either we do clean elections in Brazil or we don't do elections at all," he told cheering supporters on July 8. The next morning, he told them: "We run the risk of not having elections next year. It's your future that's at risk."

On Friday, the president of the Senate, Rodrigo Pacheco, said elections were "nonnegotiable" and that anyone who attempts to take a step backward "will be singled out by the people and history as the enemy of the nation."

The cause has become a family affair. His sons Eduardo, Flavio and Carlos, all politicians, have joined the campaign using their widely followed social media accounts and sometimes posting more than once a day.

The escalation coincides with record-low approval ratings for Bolsonaro, street protests against him, mounting pressure from a parliamentary inquiry into his administration's handling of the pandemic and allegations of corruption in the acquisition of vaccines. Early polling shows da Silva as a heavy favorite next year.

Stirring doubts about election results under these circumstances "could aim to make people believe an election isn't necessary," said Diogo Rais, professor of electoral law at Mackenzie University in Sao Paulo.

If the special committee of Lower House lawmakers approves the reform proposal next week, it would proceed to the floor, marking the start of a drawn-out process involving several votes. If concluded by October, the system would be in place for the October 2022 election. Doing so in time would be an uphill battle, especially since 11 political party leaders last month banded together to oppose the reform.

More likely is a scenario akin to what happened in the U.S., where a significant percentage of the popula-

tion believes the election was neither free nor fair, said Anya Prusa, senior associate at the Wilson Center's Brazil Institute in Washington.

"In some ways, that is more dangerous to a democratic system than an outright power grab, which is easier to defend against," Prusa said. "It will further erode Brazilians' confidence in their democratic system, at a moment where there is a lot of polarization and distrust."

## **Biden tells Putin Russia must crack down on cybercriminals**

By ZEKE MILLER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden told Russian President Vladimir Putin in a Friday phone call that he must "take action" against cybercriminals acting in his country and that the U.S. reserves the right to "defend its people and its critical infrastructure" from future attacks, the White House said.

The warning to Putin was largely a repetition of the tough rhetoric Biden had used during their meeting in Geneva last month, when he warned that there would be consequences for continuing cyberattacks emanating from Russia. Since then, a new ransomware attack linked to the Russia-based REvil hacking group has caused widespread disruption, placing Biden under growing pressure to this time marry the warning with actions — though none were immediately announced.

"I made it very clear to him that the United States expects when a ransomware operation is coming from his soil even though it's not sponsored by the state, we expect them to act if we give them enough information to act on who that is," Biden said, speaking to reporters at an event on economic competitiveness. Asked whether there will be consequences, he said, "Yes."

The call with Putin underscored the extent to which the ransomware threat from criminal hacker gangs has mushroomed into an urgent national security challenge for the White House, and it suggested a possible concession by the administration that earlier warnings to the Russian leader had failed to curb a criminal activity that has taken aim at businesses across the globe.

A White House statement announcing the hourlong call also highlighted a U.S.-Russian agreement that will allow humanitarian aid to flow into Syria. The dual prongs of the agenda show how even as Biden pledges to get tough on Russia over hacking, there's an inherent desire to avoid aggravating tensions as the administration looks for Russia to cooperate, or at least not interfere, with U.S. actions in other areas, including Syria, the Afghanistan withdrawal and climate change.

In his call with Putin, besides reiterating the need for Russia to take action and that the U.S. stands ready to act in response, Biden also "emphasized that he is committed to continued engagement on the broader threat posed by ransomware," the White House said.

Biden told reporters that the U.S. and Russia have "set up a means of communication now on a regular basis to be able to communicate with one another when each of us thinks something is happening in another country that affects the home country. And so it went well. I'm optimistic."

In its own summary of the call, the Kremlin said "Putin noted that despite the Russian side's readiness to jointly stop criminal activities in the information sphere, U.S. agencies haven't made any requests during the past month."

The Kremlin said the two leaders emphasized the need for cooperation on cybersecurity, which it said "must be permanent, professional and non-politicized and should be conducted via special communication channels ... and with respect to international law."

The Kremlin statement also noted that Biden and Putin touched on the situation in Syria "with a special emphasis on humanitarian aspects" and "gave a positive assessment of coordination of Russian and U.S. efforts on the issue, including in the U.N. Security Council."

The White House declined to discuss the tone of Biden's call, though press secretary Jen Psaki said it did focus significantly on the latest breach, which cybersecurity researchers have said infected victims in at least 17 countries, largely through firms that remotely manage IT infrastructure for multiple customers.

Though Biden had previously said the attack had caused "minimal damage," and it did not appear to target vital infrastructure, the sheer global scale and the fact that it occurred so soon after the Geneva

meeting put immediate pressure on the administration to have some sort of response.

Officials did not immediately announce any specific actions they were taking or would consider taking. There are few easy options to resolve the threat without risking a conflict that could spiral out of control beyond the cybersecurity realm.

The Biden administration took office on the heels of a massive cyberespionage campaign known as SolarWinds that U.S. officials have linked to Russian intelligence operatives. But ransomware attacks, perpetrated generally by criminal hacker gangs rather than state-sponsored hackers, appear to have eclipsed old-fashioned spying as a potent threat.

A May attack on a pipeline that supplies roughly half the fuel consumed on the East Coast caused the company to temporarily halt operations. Colonial Pipeline paid roughly \$4.4 million in ransom, although U.S. authorities were able to claw back a large portion of that sum in a law enforcement operation last month.

Hackers also recently extorted an \$11 million ransom payment from JBS SA, the world's largest meat processor.

## Police testimony will lead off panel's first Jan. 6 hearing

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and PADMANANDA RAMA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol is expected to hold its first public hearing this month with police officers who responded to the attack and custodial staff who cleaned up afterward, chairman Rep. Bennie Thompson said Friday.

Thompson, D-Miss., says the committee hopes to "set the tone" of the investigation by hearing from those first responders, many of whom were brutally beaten and verbally abused by former President Donald Trump's supporters as they pushed past law enforcement and broke into the Capitol to interrupt the certification of President Joe Biden's victory.

Referring to the police officers, Thompson told The Associated Press in an interview, "We need to hear how they felt, we need to hear what people who broke into the Capitol said to them."

He said the members of the panel, who held an initial strategy session this week, want to frame that first hearing so that it is clear that they are serious, and also that they care about "those individuals who either secure the Capitol or clean the Capitol."

Thompson said the select committee is eyeing the week of July 19 for the hearing, which is likely to be a dramatic curtain-raiser for the new investigation. An increasing number of police officers who responded to the attack, including members of the U.S. Capitol Police and Washington's Metropolitan Police Department, have lobbied for Congress to launch an independent, bipartisan investigation of the insurrection, but that proposal was blocked by Senate Republicans. The officers have pressured Republicans who have downplayed the violence to listen to their stories, and several watched from the gallery last week as the House voted along party lines to form the select committee.

Two Senate committees have already investigated the attack and made security recommendations, but they did not examine the origins of the siege, leaving many unanswered questions.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has appointed eight members to the select committee, including seven Democrats and Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming. Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy has discretion over five additional appointments, though Pelosi must approve them.

McCarthy has not yet said who he will appoint or if Republicans will even participate in the probe, as many are still loyal to Trump. Some have sought to downplay the insurrection and deny the political motives behind it.

Thompson said the panel welcomes Republican members, but will be moving ahead even if McCarthy chooses not to participate. Under the committee's rules, the eight members appointed by Pelosi will be enough for the committee to have a working quorum. He said a lack of GOP participation won't diminish what the committee is trying to do.

"As chair, my role is to keep the committee moving forward, making sure that whatever deflections that come up basically would not impede the work of the committee," he said. "And I plan to do that."



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Thompson said the central focus of the investigations will be why the systems that were in place that day failed — why there wasn't a greater presence of law enforcement, why the military was delayed for hours as the police were quickly overwhelmed and why crucial intelligence predicting the attack was missed.

The panel is also expected to probe the links that some rioters had to white supremacist groups. Thompson said an assessment by FBI Director Christopher Wray that racially motivated violent extremism, and especially white supremacy, is one of the biggest threats to U.S. security "tells me that the significance of this committee's work is as important as it can ever get."

Thompson hasn't said whether the panel will call Trump to testify, but said, "I don't think anyone is off limits."

And if any witnesses resist, Thompson reiterated that he is willing to use the panel's subpoena authority "to the fullest extent of the law."

He said the panel is hiring professional staff who will have the skills and experience to obtain and sort through vast amounts of data, and their work will continue through the summer break. At the strategy session on Wednesday, he told his colleagues on the committee that "whatever recess you might have planned for August, you might have to reassess it."

The committee is still deciding how much of its work will be done behind closed doors, Thompson said, as some witnesses may not want to testify in public and some information could be sensitive or classified.

He said there will also be no foregone conclusions — on timing or otherwise — as the committee begins its work.

"We don't have a timetable," Thompson said. "The goal of the committee is to be as thorough as we can in the investigation, but also flexible to the point that we know that things change along the way."

## Eyeing another run, Grassley shows Iowans he's keeping up

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

SIOUX CENTER, Iowa (AP) — In dress shirts and pants, Chuck Grassley and Tom Cotton dropped to their knees on stage at a recent Iowa Republican Party fundraiser and began pumping out pushups. The 87-year-old Iowa senator's were slow and deliberate while his Arkansas colleague's were crisp and level, befitting the 44-year-old former Army captain.

The 22 reps were part of a campaign to curb veteran suicides. But for Grassley, a senator considering a bid for an eighth term, it was also a moment to send another message to voters: I can still keep up.

After 40 years in the Senate, serving under seven presidents, Grassley's resilience isn't just physical. Once proudly bipartisan, Grassley adapted deftly to the new hyperpartisanship of the Trump era. While some of his fellow longtimers in Washington are calling it quits, fed up with the rightward lurch of the GOP or the inertia in Congress, Grassley has set out to show he's thriving.

"He goes out and talks to Republicans, and sees the party still includes a number of people who are big-time Trump supporters," said longtime adviser Mike Schreurs. "One way or another, you've got to accommodate them. And that's Grassley's astute politics."

Grassley has said he will announce his plans this fall, later than usual for the senator, who typically has decided to run again immediately after each of his previous reelections.

But the senator's campaign team is functioning as if he's running. Grassley and his pollster Brian Tringali met last month with leaders of the National Republican Senatorial Committee at their headquarters in Washington. Other advisers, including Grassley's longtime advertising consultant Fred Davis, participated in the meeting via Zoom. They reviewed Grassley's polling and fundraising head start, pleased with what they saw.

The senator is raising money at a healthy clip. He reported having \$2 million in his campaign account at the end of the first quarter. It's been enough to scare off any big-name challengers. Two little-known western Iowa prospects have announced their candidacy: Republican state Sen. Jim Carlin and Democratic farmer Dave Muhlbauer.

Still, Grassley's age — he would be 95 at the end of his term if he won — inevitably raises questions

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about his future, and the senator isn't shying from them. Advisers say Grassley has said he wants to avoid a situation like the final months in office of Sens. Robert Byrd, a West Virginia Democrat, and Strom Thurmond, a South Carolina Republican.

Byrd was in and out of the hospital before he died in office at age 92 in 2010. Thurmond, frail and guided through the Capitol in a wheelchair before retiring in 2003, died six months later at age 100.

Grassley would be the second-oldest member of the Senate and among the 10 oldest senators in history. With his signature gruffness, Grassley acknowledges his age is "one of the reasons that I've put off making the decision until later on."

"Who knows? I could die tomorrow," he told The Associated Press as he visited tiny Ida Grove in northwest Iowa last week. "If I announce I'm running, I'm planning on living to be 95. But I might not live that long."

His health habits suggest otherwise. The pushups aren't just for show, but part of his daily routine, he says. He also runs 12 miles (19 kilometers) per week, though he chuckles calling it "a shuffle." He wakes up at 4 a.m. and is in his Washington office by 6 a.m.

Despite the pace, and his activity on Twitter, there's no hiding Grassley has decades on most of his voters.

At events, Grassley references his hearing aid, sometimes as a joke, but he also relies on a staffer to repeat what he misses. He often illustrates his points with creaky references and examples that predate his listeners.

Meeting with a group of young professionals in Sioux City last week, Grassley fielded a question about same-sex marriage by noting that it reminded him of some constitutional research he did in college in 1953.

When answering a question about the fuel tax and electric cars, he illustrated the improvement in fuel efficiency over time by recalling a billboard from the 1950s advertising a Chevrolet that got up to 15 miles (24 kilometers) per gallon.

"He referenced things long in the past," said Josiah Paulsrud, 35, of Sioux City, who is a Republican and undecided about Grassley. "Whether it was him trying to educate people or rambling on, I can't say."

Five Senate Republicans, including Richard Shelby of Alabama, who is also 87, are retiring after 2022. In announcing his retirement, two-term Republican Sen. Rob Portman of Ohio expressed frustration with the dysfunction in Washington.

Grassley, however, has adapted smoothly to changes in the party. He's consistently supported Donald Trump's agenda and often his political tactics. At times, he's even taken a lead role in satisfying the party's vocal right wing.

Grassley helped spur Trump Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett's confirmation days before the 2020 election — even after effectively killing Democratic President Barack Obama's nomination of Merrick Garland, saying it came too close to the 2016 election.

He partnered with the pro-Trump Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson on a high priority for the far right, investigating Hunter Biden's financial dealings last year as his father ran for president.

And, having criticized him as president, he has been nearly silent on Trump's false claims that he won the 2020 presidential election.

When pressed at a recent public meeting to call out Trump's falsehood, Grassley declined.

Grassley replied curtly to retired anesthesiologist Phil Dokter: "On December the 12th, after the electoral votes were cast, Biden is the president of the United States."

"That's not enough. You've used your soapbox over the decades," said Dokter, an independent who has voted for Grassley in the past. "And we're talking about a big deal here."

Grassley moved on to the next question.

But the senator hasn't always been a Trump acolyte. He voted to count Arizona's and Pennsylvania's Electoral College votes the day of the deadly Capitol riot in January. He also objected loudly to waivers the Trump administration gave petroleum companies from the federal Renewable Fuel Standard, a goal that helps Iowa farmers.

The senator says he's doesn't consider Trump the de facto leader of the national Republican Party, despite the former president's continued effort to influence Republican primary contests.

"Right now, the Republican Party doesn't have a leader. We've got people who have great influence

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within the party like Sen. Cotton, Sen. (Ted) Cruz, Sen. Lindsey Graham. People like that," he said in the AP interview. "And Trump is one of them."

Still, Grassley's appeals to the right appear to have hurt his approval in Iowa, once called "stratospheric" by J. Ann Selzer, director of The Des Moines Register's Iowa Poll.

In June, the poll showed Grassley's approval at 45%, down 30 percentage points from 2009, when he was a key figure in bipartisan negotiations over health care legislation.

His approval remains healthy among Republicans, and more Iowans approve than disapprove of his performance. Grassley's numbers have dropped sharply among Democrats and fallen among independents, both of whom used to pad his high ratings.

"Democrats are no longer willing to give him the benefit," Selzer said. "But it could also be that he's doing things, more things, that are ticking off Democrats. The two are conjoined."

Grassley won't need the Democratic support to win. Iowa has drifted decidedly Republican in the past decade, electing and reelecting GOP governors, filling longtime liberal Democratic Sen. Tom Harkin's seat with conservative Republican Joni Ernst.

The state voted twice for Trump, a fact that appeared top of mind as Grassley visited a friendly crowd in Ida Grove. The senator railed against the Biden administration's U.S.-Mexico border policy, and when asked his opinion about Trump's recent visit to the border, Grassley gave the audience of 50 in the town's recreation center what they wanted.

"Nobody can tell him what to do," he said. "And if you did tell him what to do, he wouldn't do it anyway."

The gym burst into applause and laughter.

## Marilyn Manson surrenders on New Hampshire assault warrant

By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Rocker Marilyn Manson surrendered to police in Los Angeles last week in connection with a 2019 arrest warrant out of New Hampshire where he allegedly assaulted a videographer at a concert, authorities said.

Manson, whose legal name is Brian Hugh Warner, is charged with two misdemeanor counts of simple assault stemming from an alleged incident on Aug. 19, 2019 at the Bank of New Hampshire Pavilion in Gilford.

Gilford police Chief Anthony J. Bean Burpee said Thursday that Manson had turned himself into law enforcement in Los Angeles the week before. Manson was booked and released without bail pending a court appearance in New Hampshire.

Manson's attorney did not immediately respond to requests for comment Friday.

The victim, a videographer, was in the venue's stage pit area at the time of the alleged assault, Gilford police previously said. The misdemeanor charges can each result in a jail sentence of less than a year and a \$2,000 fine if convicted.

Los Angeles Police Capt. Brent McGuyre confirmed Manson's surrender to The Associated Press. Manson turned himself in at the department's Hollywood station on July 2 and was processed on the warrant before being released.

"This is consistent with anybody who has a misdemeanor warrant that is not local," McGuyre said.

Manson also has faced abuse accusations — unrelated to the New Hampshire incident — in recent years. He has denied wrongdoing.

In February, actor Evan Rachel Wood publicly accused Manson, her ex-fiancé, of sexual and other physical abuse, alleging she was "manipulated into submission" during their relationship. Months later, "Game of Thrones" actor Esmé Bianco sued Manson in federal court in Los Angeles, alleging sexual, physical and emotional abuse.

The AP generally does not identify people who say they have been sexually assaulted, but Bianco and Wood have spoken publicly.

In 2018, Los Angeles County prosecutors declined to file charges against Manson over allegations of assault, battery and sexual assault dating to 2011, saying they were limited by statutes of limitations and a lack of corroboration. The accuser in that case was identified only as a social acquaintance of Manson.

## As frustration mounts, a White House push on voting rights

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, ZEKE MILLER and ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Facing a call to “save American democracy,” the Biden administration has unveiled new efforts to protect access to the ballot amid rising complaints from civil rights activists and other Democrats that the White House hasn’t done enough to counter Republican-led state legislatures attempting to narrow voting procedures.

President Joe Biden met with civil rights leaders Thursday in the West Wing, while Vice President Kamala Harris announced \$25 million in new spending by the Democratic National Committee on actions to protect voting access ahead of the 2022 midterm elections.

Biden and his team stress ongoing legal efforts to safeguard voting rights. They’ve also promised a major legislative push after Senate Republicans blocked a sweeping election overhaul last month. The president has told reporters he plans on “speaking extensively” on voting rights and that he would be “going on the road on this issue.”

Friday, the White House announced that Biden would travel to Philadelphia on Tuesday to discuss “actions to protect the sacred, constitutional right to vote.”

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the president will “go to the birthplace of democracy to make the case for the moral imperative of making voting more accessible to people across the country.”

There has been growing frustration among those in Biden’s own party who view GOP actions on voting as an existential threat to both Democrats and democracy.

Pressure only mounted after a Supreme Court decision limited the ability of minorities to challenge state laws that Democrats say are discriminatory under the Voting Rights Act. Biden has brought in outside advocates for meetings at the White House and has consulted advisers on the best strategy for combating new laws.

“We will not leave any stone unturned to save American democracy,” said Marc Morial, head of the National Urban League, as he stood with the Rev. Al Sharpton and other civil rights leaders after Thursday’s meeting. “This is an attack on a very fundamental value that undergirds this country. When we look at what’s happening in this nation, we see an effort to impose a system, American apartheid.”

During the meeting, Biden and Harris assured the civil rights leaders that they would push Congress to pass voting legislation, while doing everything within the administration’s power to secure full voter participation in elections, according to a White House summary.

This Thursday’s speech from Harris, tasked with leading the administration’s response to voting issues, was expected to be the first from her in a series.

“This campaign is grounded in the firm belief that everyone’s vote matters -- that your vote matters,” Harris said. “We want to help to make sure your vote is counted, and that is because our democracy is strongest when everyone participates.”

Several states enacted new voting laws, and others are debating them, after Republicans seized on former President Donald Trump’s false claim of massive voter fraud in the 2020 election as a pretext for passing new legislation curtailing ballot access.

Democrats have grown nervous that the new laws could suppress turnout for next year’s midterm elections when the party is trying to hold on to very narrow margins in both chambers of Congress.

“Folks, it is never too early to defend your rights,” Harris said. “With these new laws that have been passed, or they’re trying to, we have to start now to finish strong.”

But some Democrats and voting rights activists believe that the White House did not start nearly soon enough.

“Our backs are against the wall. This is the moment. We have no more time,” said Sherrilyn Ifill, president of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. “I told the president: We will not be able to litigate our way out of this threat to Black citizenship.”

“We must have the president use his voice,” Ifill said.

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

The stalemate has increased focus on the Senate filibuster, which, if left in place, would seem an insurmountable obstacle to sweeping voting bills in Congress. With Republicans unanimous in their opposition, it would take the elimination or modification of the filibuster for two bills still on the table to have a chance at passage. Moderate Democrats like Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona so far have expressed reluctance to change Senate rules that protect the filibuster.

Although not abandoning hope for a legislative breakthrough, the West Wing has been shifting focus to other measures to protect the vote, including legal action by the Department of Justice and in individual states, according to the officials. There also will be an emphasis on boosting voter turnout, with aides pointing to the successes Democrats had in getting out votes last year during the height of the pandemic.

Biden believes "that voting is a fundamental right for the American people," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki this week. "He is going to use every lever at his disposal to advocate for that."

Officials concede, though, that turning out voters is always harder in a nonpresidential election year. Some frustrated aides, seeing the impasse in the Senate, believe too much focus has been placed on federal legislative measures. They think that civic and business groups can also play a role in fighting the voting restrictions, noting that an outcry in Georgia helped water down some of the GOP's proposed plans.

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

Many Republicans continue to question the outcome of the 2020 presidential election, despite the absence of evidence of fraud. Republican elected officials in a number of states have responded by enacting restrictions on early voting and mailed-in ballots, as well as tougher voter identification laws, prompting some liberals to demand more from Biden.

"We're past the point where we've lost faith that he's going to do it on his own," said Cliff Albright, co-founder of the Black Voters Matter Fund. "Where's your voting rights tour? People have already started to call this out. That's just going to escalate."

## FDA head calls for inquiry into Alzheimer's drug review

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The acting head of the Food and Drug Administration on Friday called for a government investigation into highly unusual contacts between her agency's drug reviewers and the maker of a controversial new Alzheimer's drug.

Dr. Janet Woodcock announced the extraordinary step via Twitter. It's the latest fallout over last month's approval of Aduhelm, an expensive and unproven therapy that the agency OK'd against the advice of its own outside experts.

Woodcock made the request to the Department of Health and Human Services' inspector general, the watchdog agency that oversees the FDA and other federal health agencies. The move comes after numerous calls for a probe into the approval from medical experts, consumer advocates and members of Congress. Two congressional committees have already launched their own review.

"We believe an independent assessment is the best manner in which to determine whether any interactions that occurred between the manufacturer and the agency's review staff were inconsistent with FDA's policies and procedures," Woodcock wrote on Twitter. Biogen pledged to cooperate with the inquiry.

Last month, the health news site Stat reported on the unusually close collaboration between Aduhelm drugmaker Biogen and FDA staff. In particular, the site reported an "off-the-books" meeting in May 2019 between a top Biogen executive and the FDA's lead reviewer for Alzheimer's drugs.

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The meeting came after Biogen stopped two studies because the drug didn't seem to slow the disease as intended. Biogen and the FDA began reanalyzing the data together, concluding the drug may actually work. The collaboration ultimately led to the drug's conditional approval two years later, on the basis that it reduced a buildup of sticky plaque in the brain that is thought to play a role in Alzheimer's disease.

FDA interactions with drug industry staff are tightly controlled and almost always carefully documented. It's unclear if the May 2019 meeting violated agency rules.

When Biogen and FDA brought the drug before the FDA's panel of outside advisers in November, the group was nearly unanimous in urging its rejection.

The FDA isn't required to follow the group's advice. And the FDA lead staff reviewer — who had been working with Biogen for months on the drug's data — called it "exceptionally persuasive," "strongly positive" and "robust."

The consumer advocacy group Public Citizen called for an investigation into the collaboration after the November advisory meeting. The group's health director Dr. Michael Carome welcomed Woodcock's request for an inquiry.

"We're pleased to see that belatedly she has made this request that should have been made months ago," Carome said. "The signs of an inappropriate collaboration have been clear to us since November."

The FDA has faced intense backlash since approving the drug, which costs \$56,000 a year and requires monthly IVs.

Three of the FDA advisers who opposed the drug resigned over the decision. Among other issues, they protested that the agency did not disclose that it was considering approving the drug on a conditional basis, based on its effect on brain plaque, rather than any actual benefit to patients. Aduhelm is the first Alzheimer's drug approved in that manner.

"I think all the different parts of the decision are worthwhile for an independent investigation," said Harvard University researcher Dr. Aaron Kesselheim, one of the three advisers who resigned. "The trust that we have in FDA's ability to make independent decisions is very important."

On Thursday, the FDA took the unusual step of vastly scaling back prescribing information on the drug. The agency and Biogen announced the new label would recommend that it only be given to patients with mild or early-stage Alzheimer's. That came after many doctors criticized the original label as too broad, because it said the drug could be given to anyone with Alzheimer's.

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. More than two dozen other drugs have previously tried that approach without yielding positive results. Biogen is required to conduct a follow-up study to definitively answer whether it really works. Other Alzheimer's drugs only temporarily ease symptoms.

Woodcock has been serving as the agency's acting commissioner since January. Previously she spent more than 25 years directing the agency's drug center. While widely respected among government and drug industry circles, she has also been criticized for often pushing aggressively to approve new therapies, even when their benefits aren't certain.

## Vaccinated teachers and students don't need masks, CDC says

By MIKE STOBBE and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Vaccinated teachers and students don't need to wear masks inside school buildings, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Friday in relaxing its COVID-19 guidelines.

The changes come amid a national vaccination campaign in which children as young as 12 are eligible to get shots, as well as a general decline in COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths.

"We're at a new point in the pandemic that we're all really excited about," and so it's time to update the guidance, said Erin Sauber-Schatz, who leads the CDC task force that prepares recommendations designed to keep Americans safe from COVID-19.

The nation's top public health agency is not advising schools to require shots for teachers and vaccine-

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eligible kids. And it's not offering guidance on how teachers can know which students are vaccinated or how parents will know which teachers are immunized.

That's probably going to make for some challenging school environments, said Elizabeth Stuart, a John Hopkins University public health professor who has children in elementary and middle schools.

"It would be a very weird dynamic, socially, to have some kids wearing masks and some not. And tracking that? Teachers shouldn't need to be keeping track of which kids should have masks on," she said.

Another potential headache: Schools should continue to space kids — and their desks — 3 feet apart in classrooms, the CDC says. But the agency emphasized that spacing should not be an obstacle to getting kids back in schools. And it said distancing is not required among fully vaccinated students or staff.

All of this may prove hard to implement, and that's why CDC is advising schools to make decisions that make the most sense, Sauber-Schatz said.

The biggest questions will be at middle schools where some students are eligible for shots and others aren't. If sorting vaccinated and unvaccinated students proves too burdensome, administrators might choose to just keep a masking policy in place for everyone.

"The guidance is really written to allow flexibility at the local level," Sauber-Schatz said.

State mandates are further complicating the issue. Several states, including California and Virginia, have policies requiring all students to wear masks at school regardless of vaccination. But governors and lawmakers in some other states, including in Arizona, Iowa and Texas, have barred local school officials from requiring masks.

Widespread mask-wearing is expected to continue this fall in some of the nation's largest school districts, but not in others. In Detroit's public schools, everyone will be required to wear a mask unless everyone in the classroom has been vaccinated. Philadelphia was planning to require masks, but the school district was reviewing the policy based on the new CDC guidance. Houston will not require masks at all because of the Texas law.

What about requiring COVID-19 vaccination as a condition of school attendance? That's commonly done across the country to prevent spread of measles and other diseases.

The CDC has repeatedly praised such requirements, but the agency on Friday didn't recommend that measure because it is considered a state and local policy decision, CDC officials said.

Early in the pandemic, health officials worried schools might become coronavirus cauldrons that spark community outbreaks. But studies have shown that schools often see less transmission than the surrounding community when certain prevention measures are followed.

The new guidance is the latest revision to advice the CDC began making to schools last year. In March, the CDC stopped recommending that children and their desks be spaced 6 feet apart, shrinking the distance to 3 feet, and dropped its call for use of plastic shields.

The new schools guidance says:

—No one at schools needs to wear masks at recess or in most other outdoor situations. However, unvaccinated people are advised to wear masks if they are in a crowd for an extended period of time, like in the stands at a football game.

—Ventilation and handwashing continue to be important. Students and staff also should stay home when they are sick.

—Testing remains an important way to prevent outbreaks. But the CDC also says people who are fully vaccinated do not need to participate in such screening.

—Separating students into smaller groups, or cohorts, continues to be a good way to help reduce spread of the virus. But the CDC discouraged putting vaccinated and unvaccinated kids in separate groups, saying schools shouldn't stigmatize any group or perpetuate academic, racial or other tracking.

Becky Pringle, president of the National Education Association, called the new CDC guidance "an important roadmap for reducing the risk of COVID-19 in schools."

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten praised the guidance as being "grounded in both science and common sense."

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"Our ultimate goal remains: to get students, teachers and staff back in school buildings full time, and to make sure they're safe while doing it," she said in a statement, adding that dozens of the union's affiliates are holding vaccine clinics.

U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona pledged to work with schools to help them get kids back into classrooms.

"We know that in-person learning offers vital opportunities for all students to develop healthy, nurturing relationships with educators and peers, and that students receive essential supports in school for their social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, and academic success," he said in a statement.

## AP Interview: Afghan warlord slams govt, quick US goodbye

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

MAZAR-E-SHARIF, Afghanistan (AP) — A powerful warlord in northern Afghanistan and a key U.S. ally in the 2001 defeat of the Taliban blames a fractious Afghan government and an "irresponsible" American departure for the insurgents' recent rapid territorial gains across the north.

Ata Mohammad Noor, who is among those behind the latest attempt to halt the Taliban advances by creating more militias, told The Associated Press that the Afghan military is badly demoralized. He said Washington's quick exit left the Afghan military logistically unprepared for the Taliban onslaught.

In an interview at his opulent home in Mazar-e-Sharif, the main city of the north, he said that even he had not expected the Taliban's rapid wins, particularly in nearby Badakhshan province in the country's northeast corner.

"It was surprising for me that in 24 hours, 19 districts of Badakhshan were surrendered without a fight," said Noor.

He said in some areas the Taliban were small in number, perhaps even too few to capture a district, yet the military handed over their weapons and left. Reports and photos widely shared on social media show some government officials in the provincial capital of Faizabad boarding one of the last commercial flights to Kabul. The Afghan capital remains in government hands.

The 57-year-old Noor is one of the powerhouse players as Afghanistan enters what many fear will be a chaotic new chapter, with the final withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops. He commands a personal militia with thousands of fighters. Once the governor of Balkh province, where Mazar-e-Sharif is the capital, he effectively still runs the province. As head of Jamiat-e-Islami, one of Afghanistan's strongest parties, he wields influence across the north.

Though nominally united in opposition to the Taliban, he and other warlords are often bitter rivals. With the government weak and the insurgents gaining, the potential for violent fragmentation is high.

The Taliban's capture of most of the remote Badakhshan province is particularly significant because the north has traditionally been the domain of the U.S.-allied warlords. It was the only province that didn't come under Taliban control during the group's 1996-2001 rule. It was once a Jamiat-e-Islami stronghold, the home province of one of Noor's predecessors as its leader, Burhanuddin Rabbani, killed by a suicide bomber in 2011.

The insurgents now claim control over more than a third of the 421 districts and district centers across Afghanistan. They have also captured several border crossings with Iran, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, opening up potential revenues for the Taliban and cutting key transportation routes. The Islam Qala border crossing with Iran was the latest to fall to the Taliban, on Thursday.

Noor was harsh in his criticism of the fractious Afghan leadership, saying it often left the army without reinforcements in battle or even food and erratically paid soldiers' salaries. He said Afghan President Ashraf Ghani rules with a coterie of four people, a reference to the president's increasingly reduced inner circle.

U.S. President Joe Biden defended the withdrawal in a speech Thursday and said it would be finished by Aug. 31. He urged greater unity among Afghanistan's leadership, saying America has given the Afghan government the weapons, training and tools to sustain itself.

"The Afghan government, leadership has to come together," Biden said. "They have the capacity. They



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have the forces. They have the equipment. The question is will they do it?"

Still, Noor said the signs of a dispirited military predated Biden's mid-April announcement that the U.S. was ending its "forever war," noting that Afghan army recruitment was already down by 60% and corruption was widespread.

"We advised the government then that they had to work on the morale of the military, they had to be unified, but they did not listen," he said.

Noor also criticized the Afghan government's fighting strategy, saying the Afghan National Security and Defense forces' leadership has overused its elite commando units. He said this included sending them into battle without proper preparations for reinforcements and re-supplies, as well as ordering them to hold checkpoints, a job they are not meant to do. Commandos were also not given proper rest, he said.

Though the Afghan air force has well-trained pilots, Noor said the fleet was overused and under-maintained. As a result "most of the planes are back on the ground. They cannot fly and most of them are out of ammunition," he said.

Noor also slammed the quick U.S. departure as irresponsible. While Afghanistan appreciated the money and manpower America invested in the country, it did nothing to make Afghanistan self-sufficient, he said.

"We needed factories to produce our own ammunition and workshops to repair the aircraft and other vehicles that were given to the Afghan forces," said Noor. "But the international forces did not work to build a foundation, a self-sufficiency in Afghanistan."

Earlier this year as the Taliban gained momentum, Noor was one of the first to press for the creation of new militias, calling it a "people's uprising." Last month, the government launched a mobilization program, helping arm and finance volunteers under local commanders.

Noor said the new militias are needed as much to help bolster army morale as fight the Taliban.

Still, he acknowledged the dangers. In the 1990s, militias and warlords — including Noor — fought a civil war that wreaked devastation on Kabul, killed some 50,000 people and helped fuel the Taliban's rise.

"There is a real possibility of a civil war. This is a very dangerous possibility," he said. He warned it would be stoked by Afghanistan's neighbors — Pakistan, Iran, Russia and India — all of whom use Afghan factions to advance their interests.

The new mobilization program only adds more militias of uncertain loyalties to the mix of militias maintained by Afghanistan's multiple warlords since the 1990s.

Besides Noor, they include Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum, accused of war crimes, and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former U.S.-declared terrorist, who is currently in Kabul and has been a bitter enemy of Noor's Jamiat-e-Islami for decades. Abdur Rasool Sayyaf's past militias have been linked to brutal crimes against the Hazara ethnic minority during the 1990s civil war. The religiously regressive Sayyaf also had close ties to al-Qaida, and even operated training camps with the terrorist group in the 1990s.

A couple of kilometers (miles) from Noor's home, he maintains a political office in a lavish compound, protected by armed guards and barricades. A group of his militiamen, some with assault rifles, others with machine guns, lounged on the lush grounds. Their leader, Habibullah Rahman Orfan, said they would follow Noor anywhere and accept his commands without reservations, referring to him as "the great" commander.

He said they would defend Mazar-e-Sharif, would begin an offensive to retake the districts in Balkh province currently under the Taliban and were ready to serve as Noor commanded.

## 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

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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 them are 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 page referencing "mainstream media" that boasts more than 4,000 followers. It features links to clips of Fox News' Tucker Carlson and 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, and the lack of new messages from "Q." 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 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.

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

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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.

## Bug experts seeking new name for destructive gypsy moths

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Bug experts are dropping the common name of a destructive insect because it's considered an ethnic slur: the gypsy moth.

The Entomological Society of America, which oversees the common names of bugs, is getting rid of the common name of that critter and the lesser-known gypsy ant. The group this week announced that for the first time it changed a common name of an insect because it was offensive. In the past they've only reassigned names that weren't scientifically accurate.

"It's an ethnic slur to begin with that's been rejected by the Romani people a long time ago," said society president Michelle S. Smith. "Second, nobody wants to be associated with a harmful invasive pest."

The society is taking a hard look at some of the more than 2,000 common insect names to remove derogatory and geographically inaccurate ones. About 20 years ago, a committee of fish experts renamed the jewfish into the goliath grouper.

The moths are invasive and destructive critters in the caterpillar stage. They have a voracious appetite that can denude entire forests of leaves, said University of Illinois entomologist May Berenbaum, a past society president.

The moths likely got their name because as larvae they have hair with small air pockets that act like balloons allowing them to float for miles, wandering like the group of people they were named after, Berenbaum said. Another theory is that male adult moths have a tan color that could be similar to Romani people.

The Entomological Society is now on the hunt for a new common name, a process that will take months, Smith said. Until then, even though it's a mouthful, Smith said the moths should be called by their scientific name, *Lymantria dispar* or *L. dispar*.

Berenbaum — who has written about weirdly named plants, animals and gene mutations — said given the moths' destructiveness, she and other would have some ideas for a descriptive new name.

"You're not allowed to use obscenities," she said, "so that's out."

## Pandemic garbage boom ignites debate over waste as energy

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — America remains awash in refuse as new cases of the coronavirus decline — and that has reignited a debate about the sustainability of burning more trash to create energy.

Waste-to-energy plants, which produce most of their power by incinerating trash, make up only about half a percent of the electricity generation in the U.S. But the plants have long aroused considerable op-

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position from environmentalists and local residents who decry the facilities as polluters, eyesores and generators of foul odor.

The industry has been in retreat mode in the U.S., with dozens of plants closing since 2000 amid local opposition and emissions concerns. But members of the industry said they see the increase in garbage production in the U.S. in recent months as a chance to play a bigger role in creating energy and fighting climate change by keeping waste out of methane-creating landfills.

One estimate from the Solid Waste Association of North America placed the amount of residential waste up as much as 8% this spring compared to the previous spring. And more trash is on the way. A 2020 study in the journal *Science* stated that the global plastic packaging market size was projected to grow from more than \$900 billion in 2019 to more than \$1 trillion by 2021, growth largely due to the pandemic response.

That trash has to go somewhere, and using it as a resource makes more sense than sending it to landfills, said James Regan, senior director of corporate communications for Covanta, the largest player in the industry. The company currently processes about 20 million tons (18,144 metric tons) of waste a year to power about a million homes, and it could do more, he said.

"If we're going to reach climate goals by 2050, the waste sector really can and should be part of that story," Regan said. "This is low-hanging fruit. So what are we waiting for?"

Waste-to-energy plants are expanding in other parts of the world, as more than 120 plants have been built in the last five years. They're concentrated most heavily in Europe and Asia. But the most recent new plant in the U.S. opened in 2015 in Palm Beach County, Florida.

President Joe Biden, meanwhile, has put a premium on the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions and creation of more renewable energy, and while that push has focused heavily on wind and solar power, the administration has also acknowledged a place for waste-to-energy conversion. The White House said in an April statement that the U.S. "can address carbon pollution from industrial processes" by including waste-to-power in the mix.

Any attempt to build more plants in the U.S. will be met with resistance, said Mike Ewall, director of the Philadelphia-based Energy Justice Network. The plants represent a threat to human and environmental health because they emit chemicals such as mercury and dioxin, he said. Communities have also opposed waste-to-energy plants because of concerns about airborne particulate matter that can have negative health consequences.

"The notion that this industry is going to be building new plants is just ludicrous," Ewall said.

But the fact remains that creation of garbage has increased, and municipalities have to deal with it somehow. One study, published in the scientific journal *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, attributed the increase to factors such as panic buying and more reliance on single-use items. Medical waste has also increased due to the heavy use of personal protective equipment, the study found.

As the pandemic has abated in many part of the country and the economy has reopened, commercial waste has increased, but residential waste creation has not slowed. In Portland, Maine, residential waste was up 12% and commercial was up 2% in June, said Matt Grondin, spokesman for ecomaine, which operates a waste-to-energy power plant.

Converting all that new garbage to energy is the best available option, Grondin said.

"It's a lot of garbage. You can probably imagine with a lot of people at home, cleaning out, doing projects, that accounts for a lot of the increase," he said. "It has to go somewhere."

Other communities have looked at garbage-to-gas production as a way to get energy from swelling amounts of trash. These plants use strategies such as compacting garbage and sealing it to capture methane that can be used as fuel.

The garbage-to-gas program at the landfill in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, started as a way to get carbon credits by burning off methane, said Richard LeBouef, executive director of the parish Solid Waste Disposal District.

Now natural gas from the landfill powers contractor Waste Connection's 12 garbage trucks, the landfill's five pickup trucks and six trucks for litter abatement teams. The district has put \$2.7 million, plus main-

tenance, into the system.

"What we're saving monetarily is not super-substantial but in accordance with the green issue I think it's a great thing," LeBouef said.

Waste-to-energy plants typically create power by burning the trash at about 2,000 degrees (1,093 degrees Celsius) and using it to boil water that is turned into steam, superheated and sent to a turbine to make electricity.

Attempts to convert more pandemic garbage into energy are likely to be controversial, said Frank Roethel, director of the Waste Reduction and Management Institute at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. But using the trash to make power beats letting it pile up, he said.

"Here you have the Biden administration talking about climate change, and talking about strategies that could help reduce emissions," Roethel said. "And waste to energy doesn't necessarily get the recognition, but it could certainly reduce emissions."

## 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 Championship. 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. More than 128,000 people have died in the U.K. during the coronavirus pandemic, 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 without the players who had a parent or grandparent born abroad: 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 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.

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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."

"When I was a teenager we associated football with all of the negative aspects of English identity: With violence, with racism, with hooliganism," Katwala said.

He said the modern, multicultural England team is part of a "culture shift" that has "changed the public conversation about what is English."

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."

**France to pull more than 2,000 troops from Africa's Sahel**

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By ANGELA CHARLTON and CARLEY PETESCH undefined

PARIS (AP) — France will withdraw more than 2,000 troops from an anti-extremism force in Africa's Sahel region by early next year and pivot its military presence to specialized regional forces instead, President Emmanuel Macron said Friday.

Macron announced last month a future reduction of France's military presence, arguing that it's no longer adapted to the needs in the area. The French Barkhane force, operating in Mali, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania, had also met opposition from some Africans.

After discussions Friday with leaders of the African countries involved, Macron announced that France would reduce its force to 2,500 to 3,000 troops over the long term. The country currently has 5,000 troops in the region.

The French leader insisted that his country is not abandoning African partners, and would keep helping them fight groups linked to Al-Qaida and the Islamic State group.

"France doesn't have the vocation or the will to stay eternally in the Sahel," Macron said. "We are there because we were asked to be."

French troops have been present in Mali since 2013, when they intervened to force Islamic extremist rebels from power in towns across the country's north. Operation Serval was later replaced by Barkhane and was expanded to include other countries in an effort to help stabilize the broader Sahel region.

Islamic militants, though, have continued to launch devastating attacks against the militaries fighting them as well as increasingly against civilians.

Hundreds have died since January in a series of massacres targeting villages on the border of Niger and Mali.

While governments in the Sahel have embraced France's military help, some critics have likened their presence to a vestige of French colonial rule.

France will focus over the next six months on dismantling the Barkhane operation and reorganizing the troops, Macron said.

The French military will shut down Barkhane bases in Timbuktu, Tessalit and Kidal in northern Mali over the next six months, and start to reconfigure its presence in the coming weeks to focus particularly on the restive border area where Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger meet.

Niger's President Mohamed Bazoum, speaking at Macron's side, welcomed the French military support and training, but on African terms.

"The main thing is that France maintains the principle of its support, its cooperation and support for the armed forces of our different countries. We need France to give us what we don't have. We don't need France to give us what we already have," he said, without elaborating. He acknowledged failings of local armed forces but also praised their courage in fighting extremists.

France's military presence in the future will focus on neutralizing extremist operations and strengthening and training local armies, Macron said. "There will also a dimension of reassurance ... to remain permanently ready to intervene rapidly in support of partner forces," notably via military aviation from Niger and Chad.

This new structure "seems to us to respond better to the evolution of the threat," he said. Once the reorganization is complete, he said, "the Barkhane operation will close down."

Some experts say that France's decision may be linked to growing political instability in Mali.

Macron's June announcement came days after Mali coup leader Col. Assimi Goita was sworn as president of a transitional government, solidifying his grip on power in the West African nation after carrying out his second coup in nine months.

Late in June, the U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution extending the U.N. peacekeeping mission in crisis-wracked Mali and said it's "imperative" that the military government holds presidential and legislative elections on schedule next February.

The council maintained the ceilings in the U.N. force at 13,289 military troops and 1,920 international police, but it asked Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to make a recommendation on the force level given growing levels of insecurity and physical violence against the civilian populations in central Mali.

## 52 dead in Bangladesh factory fire as workers locked inside

By JULHAS ALAM Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — A fire engulfed a food and beverage factory outside Bangladesh's capital, killing at least 52 people, many of whom were trapped inside by an illegally locked door, fire officials said Friday.

The blaze began Thursday night at the five-story Hashem Foods Ltd. factory in Rupganj, just outside Dhaka, sending huge clouds of black smoke billowing into the sky. Police initially gave a toll of three dead, but then discovered piles of bodies on Friday afternoon after the fire was extinguished.

So far 52 bodies have been recovered, but the top two floors of the factory have yet to be searched, said Debasish Bardhan, deputy director of the Fire Service and Civil Defense.

He said the main exit of the factory was locked from the inside and many of those who died were trapped.

Many workers jumped from the upper floors of the factory, and at least 26 suffered injuries, the United News of Bangladesh agency reported.

Information about how many people were in the factory and how many were missing was not immediately available.

"For now, we only have these details. After searching the top floors we will be able to get a complete picture," Bardhan said.

Bangladesh has a tragic history of industrial disasters, including factories catching fire with the workers locked inside. Continuing corruption and lax enforcement have resulted in many deaths over the years, and big international brands, which employ tens of thousands of low-paid workers in Bangladesh, have come under heavy pressure to improve factory conditions after fires and other disasters killed thousands of people.

The factory that caught fire Thursday was subsidiary of Sajeeb Group, a Bangladeshi company that produces juice under Pakistan's Lahore-based Shezan International Ltd., said Kazi Abdur Rahman, the group's senior general manager for export.

According to the group's website, the company exports its products to a number of countries including Australia, the United States, Malaysia, Singapore, India, Bhutan, Nepal and nations in the Middle East and Africa.

Rahman told The Associated Press by phone that the company is fully compliant with international standards, but he was not certain whether the exit of the factory was locked. According to Bangladesh's factory laws, a factory cannot lock its exit when workers are inside during production hours.

"We are a reputed company; we maintain rules," he said. "What happened today is very sad. We regret it."

As the recovery effort was carried out Friday, victims in white body bags were piled in a fleet of ambulances as relatives wailed. As the heavy smoke continued to rise from the still smoldering factory, weeping family members of missing workers waited anxiously for news of loved ones outside the charred site.

Earlier, family members clashed with police as they waited overnight without any word of the fate of their loved ones.

The government ordered an investigation into the cause of the fire.

Past industrial tragedies have often been attributed to safety lapses that still plague the South Asian country despite its rapid economic growth.

In 2012, about 117 workers died when they were trapped behind locked exits in a garment factory in Dhaka.

The country's worst Industrial disaster came the following year, when the Rana Plaza garment factory outside Dhaka collapsed, killing more than 1,100 people.

Authorities imposed tougher safety rules after that disaster and the country's garment industry has since become largely compliant under domestic and global watchdogs. But many other local industries fail to maintain safety compliance and the disasters have continued.

In February 2019, a blaze ripped through a 400-year-old area cramped with apartments, shops and warehouses in the oldest part of Dhaka and killed at least 67 people. Another fire in Old Dhaka in a house illegally storing chemicals killed at least 123 people in 2010.



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The International Labor Organization said in a 2017 report that Bangladesh's regulatory framework and inspections "had not been able to keep pace with the development of the industry."

## At Cannes under COVID-19, glamour gets unmasked

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

CANNES, France (AP) — For nearly everybody who has come to the Cannes Film Festival after months in various stages of lockdown and caution, the transition is head-spinning.

Even in normal years, Cannes is an onslaught. But this time, plunging into full-capacity theaters and teeming red carpets is like stepping into another world. The morning after the Val Kilmer documentary "Val" premiered at Cannes, its co-director Ting Poo was still reeling.

"Yesterday was so surreal. Just seeing the film with a full theater, and here at the most prestigious film festival," said Poo. "To go from not being around people to that experience in a day was incredible."

The pandemic is far from invisible at Cannes. A negative COVID-19 test is required every 48 hours for even those vaccinated — unless they got their shots in the European Union. Moviegoers wear masks indoors. Everything is a little muted. Usually well-booked hotels have vacancies. Screenings that would typically leave hundreds queueing outside don't fill up. The usual tuxedoed ticket-seekers praying for a handout have been pushed away from the Palais, the festival hub, to clear space.

But in places like the Cannes red carpet, life is almost normal — if "normal" can ever apply to a stretch of carpet where coteries of stars drift in every few hours like parade floats. Glamour has been unmasked, maybe more than any other time in the last year and a half of pandemic.

Over the first few days of the 74th Cannes Film Festival — held two months later than usual, and after last year's edition was scrubbed entirely — the red carpet has looked much as it has always before. Marion Cotillard, Bella Hadid, Matt Damon, Helen Mirren and Adam Driver have all strolled along, though they may have all been outclassed, fashion-wise, by Spike Lee and his flamingo-pink Louis Vuitton suit. Most walk unmasked, as the carpet is outdoors and most attending are vaccinated — though proof isn't required. And there are no fewer photographers than usual jockeying for stars' attention.

The spectacle has picked up right where it left off. Nature, even the Cannes sequined variety, is healing.

"It's a little bit like a strange dream, like waking up from this nap of two years doing nothing and suddenly: Boom," said Avshalom Pollak, star of Nadav Lapid's "Ahed's Knee," an impassioned Israeli drama competing for the Palme d'Or. "There is a very particular kind of feeling to it because it's like: Where is the world going? Is it restarting? Is it changing? What's going on here?"

Cannes is taking place on the heels of France easing COVID-19 restrictions and reopening international travel. About half the French have received at least one vaccination shot, while 38% are fully vaccinated. But the delta variant has pushed infections back up slightly recently, stoking fears of a resurgence. On Friday, French Health Minister Olivier Véran said the delta variant would likely become France's dominant strain this weekend.

That, along with images of unmasked attendees at premieres, has pushed the festival to increase pre-screening mask reminders. Swarming beachside after parties have been curtailed, in the hotels along the Croisette film publicists and executives have pushed their chairs out onto open-air balconies. Cannes mayor David Lisnard has even employed a pair of COVID-19-sniffing dogs to help with screening.

Ahead of the festival, its director Thierry Frémaux said dinners would be more favored this year than cocktails. On the sun-dabbled French Riviera, most restaurants are spread out on the sidewalks. One major concession: Frémaux isn't greeting guests at the top of the Palais stairs with a kiss — though there have been a few rogue smooches.

"The pandemic is not conquered" Frémaux said on Tuesday. "So we all have to be careful, even though most festival-goers are vaccinated."

But since there's such variation country to country in vaccination proof — the U.S., for example, has no official vaccine passport — the festival is requiring most to test every other day. The joke is that this year a negative test is the hottest ticket in Cannes. And while at first some complained about the less-than-elegant

process of retreating to a cubicle to fill a tube with saliva, the tented lab just down the street from the Palais had become a regular stop for festivalgoers — just like the Palais Nespresso bar, only less refreshing.

The specially erected testing site is staffed by 60 medical school students. The lab's director, Guillaume Armana, said Friday that they were conducting up to 4,000 tests daily.

"We are working with the festival and the regional agency," said Armana, who said any positive tests would be confidential. "For now we have maybe 10,000 people to test and everything is under control. It's the best way to make a festival again here in Cannes and to let the people have a new life."

## Lockdowns in Asia as some nations see 1st major virus surges

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Several countries around Asia and the Pacific that are experiencing their first major surges of the coronavirus rushed to impose tough restrictions, a year and a half into a pandemic that many initially weathered well.

Faced with rapidly rising numbers of infections in recent months, authorities in such countries as Thailand, South Korea and Vietnam announced or imposed measures Friday that they hope can slow the spread before health care systems are overwhelmed.

It's a rhythm familiar in much of the world, where repeated surges deluged hospitals and led to high numbers of deaths. But many Asian countries avoided that cycle by imposing stiff travel restrictions combined with tough measures at home.

Now some are seeing record numbers of new cases and even deaths, blamed in part on the highly contagious delta variant combined with low rates of vaccination and decisions to ease restrictions that have hit economies hard. Though overall numbers are nowhere yet near those seen during outbreaks in hotspots in Europe and the United States, the rapid rise set off alarm bells just as many Western countries with high vaccine rates began to breathe a sigh of relief.

Thailand reported a record number of new deaths on Thursday with 75 — and they came in at 72 on Friday. South Korea set a record for number of new cases on Thursday, only to break it on Friday with 1,316 infections, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency. For the first time, Indonesia is seeing a surge that has hospitals turning patients away and oxygen supplies running out.

Of Thailand's 317,506 confirmed cases and 2,534 deaths since the pandemic started, more than 90% have come since the start of April.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's handling of the surge has been widely criticized, including the decision to allow people to travel for April's Songkran festival celebrating Thailand's New Year.

Thailand already has strict regulations on wearing masks and other rules to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but the government announced even more stringent measures Friday for Bangkok and the surrounding area, including closing spas, limiting the hours of public transit, and restricting the opening times of markets and convenience stores.

"There is something wrong with the government policies, our vaccinations are too slow, and we should get better vaccines," said resident Cherkarn Rachasevet, a 60-year-old IT analyst, who hustled to the grocery store to stock up on supplies after hearing new restrictions were coming, wearing four masks and a face shield.

She lamented that she isn't due for her first shot until the end of the month.

Across the Asia-Pacific region, immunization rates have lagged for a variety of reasons, including production and distribution issues as well as an initial wait-and-see attitude from many early on when numbers were low and there was less of a sense of urgency.

In South Korea — widely praised for its initial response to the pandemic that included extensive testing and contact-tracing — critics are now blaming a current spike in cases on the government's push to ease social-distancing because of economic concerns. Meanwhile, a shortage in vaccine supplies has left 70% of the population still waiting for their first shot.

The recent death toll has been low, however, and authorities attribute that to the fact that many who

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have been vaccinated were at-risk older Koreans.

Amid a spike in infections in the Seoul area, authorities announced Friday that starting next week they would impose the strongest restrictions yet. Those include prohibiting private social gatherings of three or more people after 6 p.m., shutting down nightclubs and churches, banning visitors at hospitals and nursing homes and limiting weddings and funerals to family-only gatherings.

No country has been worse hit in the region recently than Indonesia. The seven-day rolling averages of daily cases and deaths both more than doubled over the past two weeks.

Health experts say a partial lockdown imposed July 3 was too little too late and warned the current wave, which is mostly on the islands of Java, Bali, and a few cities on the island of Sumatra, will soon start to spread across the vast archipelago — and the health system is already buckling under the pressure.

Despite a strict national lockdown in nearby Malaysia under which residents are confined to their homes, with only one person per household allowed out to purchase groceries, new cases since it began June 1 continued to shoot up, and a record 9,180 daily cases were reported Friday. The total death toll more than doubled to 5,903 since June 1.

It's the second national lockdown over the past year and the government said it will stay in place until daily infections fall below 4,000 and at least 10% of the population is vaccinated — but it comes at a tremendous cost, deepening economic hardships, with scores of businesses forced to shutter and thousands losing their jobs.

Vietnam also imposed tighter restrictions on Friday, locking down Ho Chi Minh City, the country's largest metropolis and its economic and financial hub, for two weeks. The southern city's 9 million residents are only permitted to leave home to buy food, medicine and for other urgent matters during that time.

Vietnam was able to limit its total coronavirus cases to 2,800 during the first year of the pandemic, and reported almost no new cases in the three months up to the end of April when they began to climb rapidly. In the last two months, the country has recorded some 22,000 new cases, and the less stringent restrictions imposed so far have been unable to stem the rise.

"It is a difficult decision to lock down the city, but it is necessary to curb the pandemic and get back to normalcy," Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh said during a government meeting Thursday evening.

Currently, about 4% of the population has received at least one dose of the vaccine, though the Health Ministry said it hopes to inoculate 70% of the country's 96 million people by the end of the year.

One exception to the regional rule appears to be India, where the delta variant was first detected — perhaps because its surge came first. The country has slowly emerged from a traumatic April and May, when a devastating spike in infections tore through the nation, hospitals ran out of beds and oxygen supplies, and overwhelmed crematoria were forced to burn bodies in pyres outdoors.

New cases and deaths are now decreasing, but with less than 5% of the country's eligible population fully vaccinated, authorities are scrambling to distribute more shots and are investing heavily in field hospitals and ICU beds, and stockpiling oxygen supplies.

Japan and Australia also announced new restrictions this week. Japan is particularly being watched since its state of emergency means spectators will be banned at most venues at the upcoming Olympics.

With the detection of the delta variant last month in Australia's New South Wales, state Premier Gladys Berejiklian said Friday that this is now the "scariest period" of the pandemic yet as she announced new restrictions in Sydney after the city reported 44 new cases, in line with the country's approach to move quickly with targeted measures to stamp out new outbreaks.

"New South Wales is facing the biggest challenge we have faced since the pandemic started," she said. "And I don't say that lightly."

## Vatican: Pope to deliver Sunday blessing from Rome hospital

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis will follow in the footsteps of St. John Paul II and deliver his weekly Sunday blessing and greeting from the Rome hospital where he is recovering from intestinal surgery, the Vatican

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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 normally, with the pontiff walking, eating, working and celebrating Mass with hospital staff.

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 John Paul, 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. Four days later, he delivered his Sunday prayer from the hospital and said: "Pray for the brother who shot me, whom I have sincerely forgiven."

John Paul was released in June of that year but returned a few weeks later after developing a serious infection that kept him hospitalized for nearly two months.

He returned in subsequent years for broken bones suffered in falls, an appendectomy, respiratory and throat problems as well as to have a benign intestinal tumor removed. The Polish pope, who suffered from Parkinson's disease, died at the Vatican on April 2, 2005.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, July 10, the 191st day of 2021. There are 174 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On July 10, 1991, Boris N. Yeltsin took the oath of office as the first elected president of the Russian republic. President George H.W. Bush lifted economic sanctions against South Africa.

On this date:

In A.D. 138, Roman Emperor Hadrian, responsible for the construction of opulent temples as well as the barrier in northern Britain known as Hadrian's Wall, died at age 62.

In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson personally delivered the Treaty of Versailles (vehr-SY') to the Senate and urged its ratification. (However, the Senate rejected it.)

In 1925, jury selection took place in Dayton, Tennessee, in the trial of John T. Scopes, charged with violating the law by teaching Darwin's Theory of Evolution. (Scopes was convicted and fined, but the verdict was overturned on a technicality.)

In 1940, during World War II, the Battle of Britain began as the Luftwaffe started attacking southern England. (The Royal Air Force was ultimately victorious.)

In 1943, during World War II, U.S. and British forces invaded Sicily.

In 1951, armistice talks aimed at ending the Korean War began at Kaesong.

In 1985, the Greenpeace protest ship Rainbow Warrior was sunk with explosives in Auckland, New Zealand, by French intelligence agents; one activist was killed.

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In 1989, Mel Blanc, the "man of a thousand voices," including such cartoon characters as Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and Porky Pig, died in Los Angeles at age 81.

In 2002, The House approved, 310-113, a measure to allow airline pilots to carry guns in the cockpit to defend their planes against terrorists (President George W. Bush later signed the measure into law).

In 2005, a search-and-rescue team found the body of a missing U.S. commando in eastern Afghanistan, bringing an end to the desperate search for the last member of an ill-fated, four-man special forces unit that had disappeared the previous month.

In 2015, to the cheers of thousands, South Carolina pulled the Confederate flag from its place of honor at the Statehouse after more than 50 years.

In 2018, a daring rescue mission in Thailand was completed successfully, as the last four of the 12 boys who were trapped in a flooded cave for more than two weeks were brought to safety along with their soccer coach; the other eight had been brought out in the two preceding days.

Ten years ago: The space shuttle Atlantis docked with the International Space Station, the final such hookup in orbit. An overloaded cruise vessel sank in Russia's Volga River, killing 122 people. Some 70 people were killed when a train derailed in northern India. Britain's best-selling Sunday tabloid the News of the World, brought down by a phone-hacking scandal, signed off with a simple front page message: "THANK YOU & GOODBYE."

Five years ago: President Barack Obama, during an abbreviated visit to Spain, urged respect and restraint from Americans angered by the killing of Black men by police, saying anything less did a "disservice to the cause" of ridding the criminal justice system of racial bias. Andy Murray won his second Wimbledon title by beating Milos Raonic 6-4, 7-6 (3), 7-6 (2) on Centre Court.

One year ago: President Donald Trump commuted the sentence of his longtime political confidant Roger Stone, intervening in extraordinary fashion in a criminal case that was central to the Russia investigation and concerned Trump's own conduct; the move came days before Stone was to begin serving a 40-month sentence for lying to Congress, witness tampering and obstructing the House investigation into whether Trump's 2016 campaign had colluded with Russia.

Today's Birthdays: Actor William Smithers is 94. Actor Lawrence Pressman is 82. Singer Mavis Staples is 82. Actor Mills Watson is 81. Actor Robert Pine is 80. Rock musician Jerry Miller (Moby Grape) is 78. International Tennis Hall of Famer Virginia Wade is 76. Folk singer Arlo Guthrie is 74. Rock musician Dave Smalley is 72. Country-folk singer-songwriter Cheryl Wheeler is 70. Rock singer Neil Tennant (Pet Shop Boys) is 67. Banjo player Bela Fleck is 63. Actor Fiona Shaw is 63. Bluegrass singer-musician Tim Surratt (Balsam Range) is 58. Actor Alec Mapa is 56. Country singer-songwriter Ken Mellons is 56. Rock musician Peter DiStefano (Porno for Pyros) is 56. Actor Gale Harold is 52. Country singer Gary LeVox (Ih-VOH') (Rascal Flatts) is 51. Actor Aaron D. Spears is 50. Actor Sofia Vergara is 49. Rockabilly singer Imelda May is 47. Actor Adrian Grenier (grehn-YAY') is 45. Actor Chiwetel Ejiofor (CHOO'-ih-tehl EHJ'-ee-oh-for) is 44. Actor Gwendoline Yeo is 44. Actor Thomas Ian Nicholas is 41. Singer-actor Jessica Simpson is 41. Actor Heather Hemmens is 37. Actor Emily Skeggs (TV: "When We Rise") is 31. Rapper/singer Angel Haze is 30. Pop singer Perrie Edwards (Little Mix) is 28.