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Strom Death Notice

Cheri Strom, 57, of Groton passed away July 10, 2021 in Groton after following a courageous battle with cancer. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.



HOW HIRING!

Day shift and night shift assemblers!

**Competitive starting wage
with monthly tier increases!
Full benefit package!**

**To apply:
www.uslbm.com/careers or
call Diane at 605-448-2929**

Britton



TRUSS PROS
A Division of US



**Precision
Wall Systems**
A Division of US



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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United Methodist Church

Groton and Conde

Sunday, July 11, 2021

Conde Worship 9:00 AM
Groton Worship 11:00 AM

Tuesday, July 13, 2021

Bible Study 10:00 AM

Wednesday, July 14, 2021

Community Coffee Hour 9:30 AM

Sunday, July 18, 2021

Conde Worship 9:00 AM
Groton Worship 11:00 AM

Emmanuel Lutheran Church

Groton

Sunday, July 11, 2021

9 a.m.: Worship

Monday, July 12, 2021

6:30 a.m.: Bible Study

Tuesday, July 13, 2021

7:30 p.m.: Council Meeting

Saturday, July 17, 2021

10 a.m.: Rosewood Court Worship

Sunday, July 18, 2021

9 a.m.: Worship/Communion

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton &

St. Joseph Catholic

Groton and Turton

Weekend Mass Schedule

Saturday 4:30pm Groton
Sunday 8:30am Groton & 11:00am Turton

Weekday

Tues 5:00pm Turton, W-F 8:30am Groton
Sat 10am Newman Center

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

Each morning before Weekday Mass at 7:15am
Tues 3:45pm Turton

Confessions:

Sat. 3:45-4:15pm & Sun. 7:45am to 8:15am (G)
Sun. 10:30-10:45am (T)

St. John's Lutheran Church

Groton

Sunday, July 11, 2021

8 a.m.: Bible Study
9 a.m.: St. John's Worship
11 a.m.: Zion's Worship

Sunday, July 18, 2021

8 a.m.: Bible Study
Worship with Communion
9 a.m.: St. John's Worship
11 a.m.: Zion's Worship

To submit your monthly or weekly church calendar, email to
news@grotonsd.net

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**JOIN
OUR TEAM**

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

**Full or Part time help
wanted. Must be able
to lift 50lbs. Usual
hours Monday-Friday
8 to 5.**

**\$15/hr starting wage.
Contact Bob Wegner at
New Deal Tire Groton,
SD.**

605-397-7579



HELP

WANTED!

(0711.0808)

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THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE



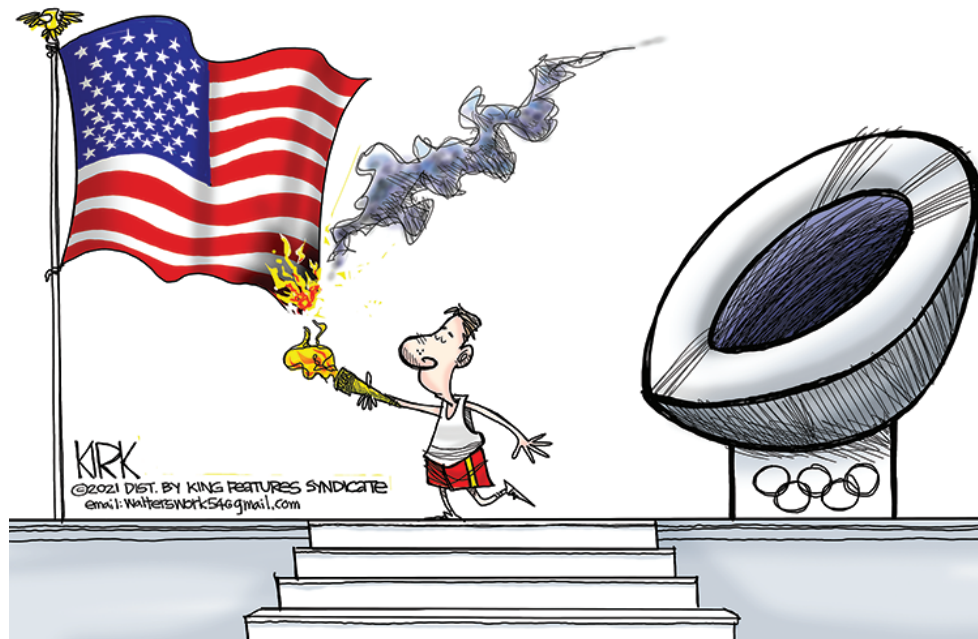
...The lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell. Lest you ponder her path of life – her ways are unstable; you do not know them.

PROVERBS 5: 3-6

"Head of a Girl" by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1915)

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OLYMPICS RELAX PROTEST RULES FOR TOKYO GAMES



BIBLE TRIVIA by Wilson Casey

1. Is the book of Haman in the Old or New Testament or neither?

2. From Genesis 21, who did Abraham banish to the desert in addition to Hagar? *Laish, Haman, Ishmael, Laban*

3. Which two disciples asked Jesus if they could sit on his right and his left? *Philip, James, Thomas, John*

4. Samson was put into prison as a political enemy of whom? *Romans, Israelites, Philistines, Assyrians*

5. From Matthew 17, who did Jesus send fishing to find tax money? *Andrew, Peter, Paul, Judas*

6. After her first husband died, who did Ruth marry? *Isaiah, Ahab, Boaz, Jehu*

ANSWERS: 1) Neither; 2) Ishmael; 3) James/John; 4) Philistines; 5) Peter; Boaz

“Test Your Bible Knowledge,” a book with 1,206 multiple-choice questions by columnist Wilson Casey, is available in stores and online.

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by Healthy Exchanges

Heavenly Hash Cream Pie

If you're like most folks, dessert is the exclamation point to the meal! Well, this delicious pie is quite a way to punctuate any menu.

2 (4-serving) packages sugar-free instant white chocolate pudding mix

1 1/3 cups nonfat dry milk powder

2 cups water

3/4 cup reduced-calorie whipped topping

1 1/2 teaspoons coconut extract

6 (2 1/2-inch) chocolate graham crackers

1 (6-ounce) purchased chocolate piecrust

2 tablespoons flaked coconut

1. In a large bowl, combine dry pudding mixes, dry milk powder and water. Mix well using a wire whisk. Blend in whipped topping and coconut extract. Coarsely crush 5 graham crackers. Fold in cracker crumbs.

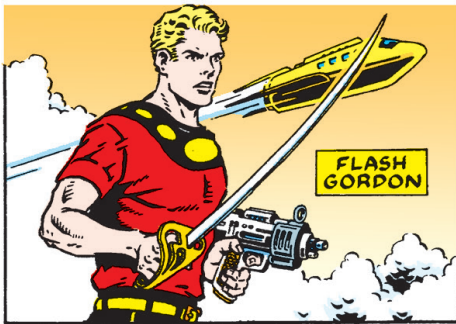
2. Spread mixture evenly into piecrust. Crush remaining 2 graham crackers into fine crumbs. Evenly sprinkle coconut and fine cracker crumbs over top. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours. Serves 8.

* Each serving equals: 206 calories, 6g fat, 6g protein, 32g carb., 516mg sodium, 1g fiber; Diabetic Exchanges: 1 1/2 Starch, 1/2 Fat-Free Milk.

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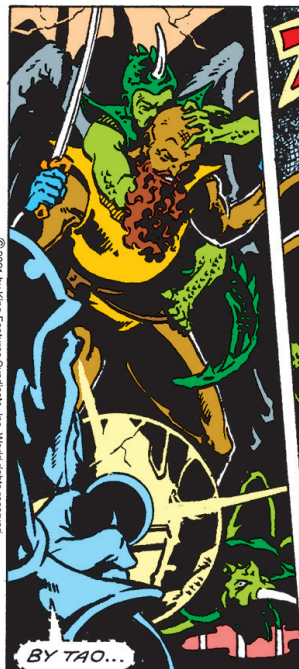


FLASH GORDON

7-4

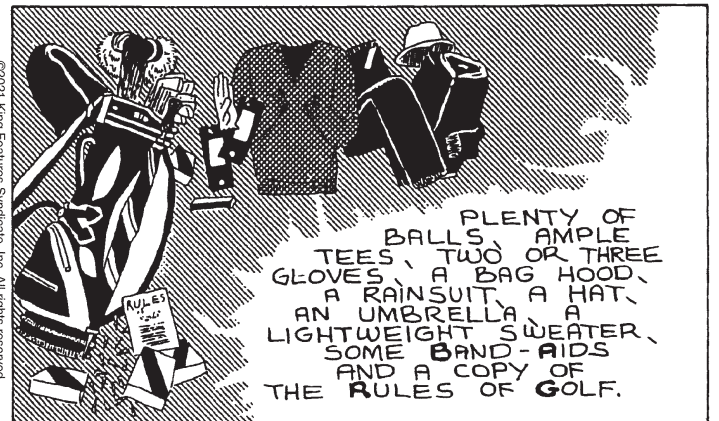
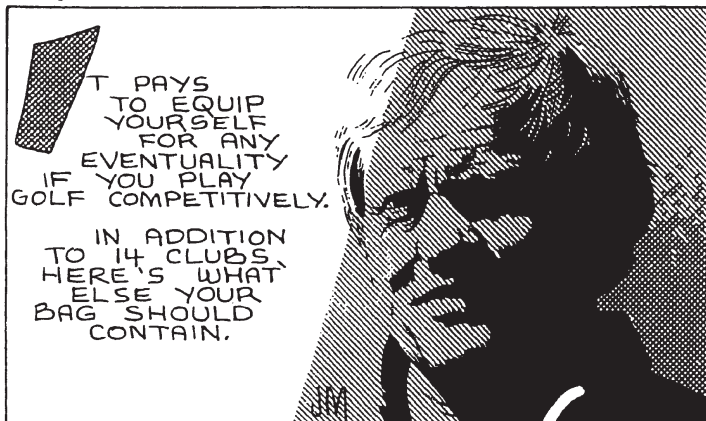
By JIM KEEFE

FEARING FOR HIS KING'S LIFE, CAPTAIN RANOK RACES INTO THE DOWNED CRAFT.



TO BE CONT'D

Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS





Chronic vs. Acute Pain

DEAR DR. ROACH: What is the difference between chronic pain and acute pain? How can I best describe my chronic pain when it is variable in intensity but negatively impacts so much of my life and my activities? Are there things my doctor should consider or suggest in my treatment or in communicating with me? -- P.P.C.

ANSWER: Acute pain is usually due to an injury or infection, and we expect healing to occur relatively quickly. Chronic pain is expected to go on for at least six months. In some people, acute pain is not treated adequately at the time of injury, and the brain and body learn to be in pain chronically.

The reason for pain is perfectly obvious in some cases, but in others, it is not possible to identify the exact cause of pain. Most times, pain is due to damaged nerves (neuropathic pain); injury or degeneration in the musculoskeletal system (osteoarthritis and many kinds of back pain); inflammatory pain (due to infection or inflammatory diseases like rheumatoid arthritis); and compressive pain (such as kidney stones or cancer).

Chronic pain affects many parts of your life, as you correctly note, and an experienced doctor will ask about the effect of pain on your social life, mood (depression is very common), relationships, sleep, exercise and occupation. People with more severe problems will have limitations in their activities of daily living.

Many people with chronic pain have almost given up communicating the scope of the problems they have, as they don't like "complaining" all the time, or they feel their loved ones are tired of hearing about it. However, getting a thorough history of the effect of all these dimensions of pain is important for your doctor. Questionnaires like the Brief Pain Inventory address more areas of function than a typical 1-10 pain scale, and may be useful to monitor response to treatment. Experts in pain management are more likely to have the knowledge and experience to communicate about pain effectively, and truly effective treatment for chronic pain requires understanding it.

There can be pain without suffering. Suffering is the emotional component brought on by fear: "How bad am I going to hurt today? Will I ever be able to work again? All of my relationships are suffering." Learning to live a function-centered life is key in the treatment of chronic pain. It isn't easy and requires a multidisciplinary approach.

The time of prescribing pain medications, especially opiates, without a comprehensive plan for long-term pain management, should be over.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I'm a 79-year-old female and take one 200-mg tablet of magnesium oxide before bedtime to keep leg cramps at bay. I sleep really deeply and wonder if it has side effects or long-term consequences? I'm generally not a sound sleeper, so taking the MagOx daily seems to help me get a good night's rest. -- J.L.

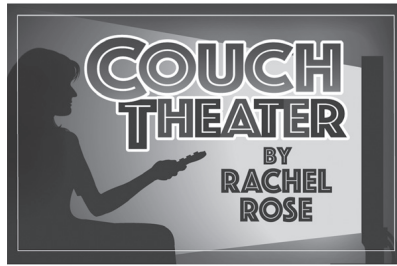
ANSWER: Magnesium oxide in the low dose of 200 mg is quite safe for most people. It is often used as an antacid at up to four times that dose. Diarrhea is the major side effect. In people with kidney disease, magnesium should be used with caution, and only at the advice of a physician.

It doesn't help everyone with leg cramps, but it is effective for some people, anecdotally. I have not heard of it making people sleep more deeply.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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McCartney 3,2,1— Six decades' worth of footage of Paul McCartney singing is not enough. There will never be enough. But somehow producer Rick Rubin has managed to compile his life's work into a six-episode docuseries that begins Friday, July 16. Covering every chapter of Sir Paul's career, it includes casual conversations between McCartney and Rubin interspersed with media clips, family movies and concerts. Watching Paul listen to audio of Paul, we see the memories reappear on his face as he begins to tell a backstory about writing, playing or love. The striking black and white film heightens the clarity of the music. This is a truly momentous collection of storytelling about, and by, a cultural legend. (Hulu)

Making the Cut, Season 2 — Tim Gunn and Heidi Klum are together again, passing judgment on 10 eager fashion designers in time-crunched creation challenges. Similar to their previous show, "Project Runway," this series features stressed-out, established clothing designers vying for a grand prize of \$1 million. The added incentive is seeing the ultimate winner's own collection featured and immediately available for purchase on Amazon. As always, Gunn's dry one-liners and Klum's vibrant energy provide levity just as competitors reach their daily breaking points. (Prime Video)

Black Widow (PG-13) — A year past its original planned release date, we finally have Marvel's action movie centered on the Natasha Romanoff character — code name Black Widow — played by Scarlett Johansson. It tells the previously unknown tales of Romanoff's early years before she was an Avenger. Trained killers always seem to have unfinished business with their past, and such is the plot here. The Black Widow says she's done running, but thankfully

she's still up for lots of plane jumping, kick-fighting and motorcycle trick-racing. (Disney+, theaters)

Dirty John Season 2 — The second installment in the series gives us Amanda Peet starring as privileged-wife-turned-husband-murderer Betty Broderick in a dramatization of actual events from 1989. In the role of John Broderick, Christian Slater is convincing as both the devoted young newlywed, and later as the conniving cheater. The eight-episodes wind through the Brodericks' 16 years of marriage and the slow unraveling of Betty's sanity as John's professional success leads him to stray and eventually file for divorce. Without John, Betty is a nobody, and that simply won't do for this San Diego trophy wife. As a bonus, the display of 1980s fashion and status symbols is an impeccably accurate guilty pleasure. (Netflix)



Disney/Marvel

Scarlett Johansson in "Black Widow"

Space Jam: A New Legacy (PG) — Cartoonized LeBron James lands in virtual space on a quest to find his kidnapped son, who is being held captive by an evil algorithm wittingly named Al-G Rhythm (Don Cheadle). Their only way out is for James to team up with the old Looney Tunes gang for a jamming basketball game against Al-G's team of all-stars. Despite the corny storyline, the film is fun and high energy, and the return of Bugs, Daffy and the rest is a joyous crush of nostalgia for middle-agers. (HBOMax)

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1. Dana won the Eurovision Song Contest 1970 with which song?

2. Name the band that released "Who'll Stop the Rain."

3. Which group had a hit with "Walk Away Renee"?

4. Who is the only musician who has been inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame three times?

5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "Way down South, in Birmingham, I mean South, in Alabama, There's a place where people go to dance the night away."

Answers

1. "All Kinds of Everything." Dana (born Rosemary Brown) had won the 1970 Irish National Song Contest with the same song. Her version climbed charts

around the world.

2. Creedence Clearwater Revival, on their "Cosmo's Factory" album in 1970. The album spent nine straight weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard chart.

3. The Left Banke, in 1966. "Walk Away Renee" was ranked No. 222 in Rolling Stone magazine's 500 Greatest Songs of All Time in 2004.

4. Eric Clapton, for the Yardbirds (1992), Cream (1993) and solo artist (2000).

5. "Tuxedo Junction," by the Manhattan Transfer in 1976. The vocal jazz group has covered many styles since forming in 1969, including pop, R&B and old swing. They took their name from the 1925 novel by John Dos Passos.

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Just Like Cats & Dogs by Dave T. Phipps



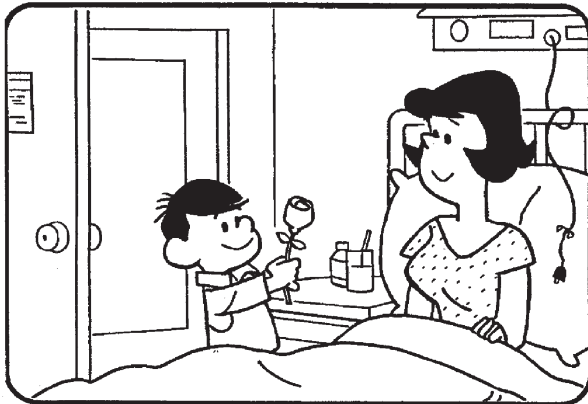
GRIN and BEAR IT ^{by Wagner}



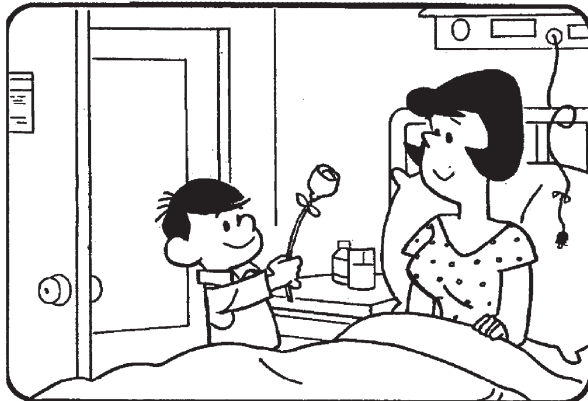
"I'm tired of keeping myself beautiful for him!"

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Rose stem is longer. 2. Straw is missing. 3. Cord is shorter. 4. Gown is different. 5. Hair is different. 6. Doorknob is lower.

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- Dill planted near tomatoes will draw caterpillars away from the fruits. And it's delicious.

- Potato salad will have more flavor if you whisk together all the dressing ingredients and add it to the potatoes when they are warm. The potatoes will absorb the ingredients better, and the flavor will develop even more during refrigeration.

- "I love to grill, and when it's nice out, we grill every weekend. I always put on extra and use the leftovers through the week. Chicken in salad, a nice flank steak for fajitas, etc. And it means less cooking for me!" —*Y.L. in Maryland*

- Here's a great recipe for an icy treat: Freeze orange juice or apple juice in ice trays. Throw a handful in the blender for a fruit slush that can't

be beat on a hot day.

- "A lot of smoke was coming off our grill, and our patio doors were wide open. Long story short: It swamped the living room with smoke. The smell was a little overwhelming. After we closed the door, my neighbor doused a kitchen towel with white vinegar, wrung it out and waved it around the room. It cleared out the smoke smell right away, and the vinegar smell went away just as quickly. What a miracle!"

—*F.F. in South Carolina*

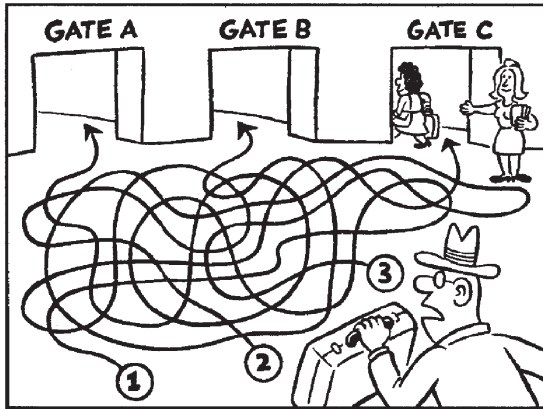
- Got poison ivy? The maddening itch might find relief from coffee grounds or a cooled cuppa. It contains anti-inflammatories.

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

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Junior Whirl

by Charles Barry Townsend

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IT'S FLIGHT TIME! Which route will get this late traveler to Gate C? Take a guess.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | | | P | L | A | N | E | | |
| 2. | | | P | L | A | N | E | | |
| 3. | | | | | P | L | A | N | E |
| 4. | P | L | A | N | E | | | | |
| 5. | P | L | A | N | E | | | | |
| 6. | | | | P | L | A | N | E | |
| 7. | | | | P | L | A | N | E | |
| 8. | | | | P | L | A | N | E | |

IT'S "PLANE" TO SEE!
You don't have to go to the airport to see "planes"! Below is a list of eight words, each of which contains a plane. Using the following hints, see if you can figure out what these words are:



1. It has two sets of wings.
2. Get off.
3. High-speed motorboat.
4. It smooths wood surfaces.
5. There are nine of these.
6. Light glider.
7. It lands on water.
8. It has one pair of wings.



1. Biplane. 2. Deplane. 3. Hydroplane.
4. Planer. 5. Planets. 6. Sailplane.
7. Seaplane.
8. Monoplane.

WEIGHTY PROBLEM! There are five carry-on bags. Bags 1 & 2 weigh a total of 24 lbs. Bags 2 & 3 = 27 lbs. Bags 3 & 4 = 23 lbs. Bags 4 & 5 = 16 lbs. Bags 1, 3 & 5 = 32 lbs. What is the weight of each bag?



Bag 1 = 11 lbs. Bag 2 = 13 lbs. Bag 3 = 14 lbs. Bag 4 = 9 lbs. Bag 5 = 7 lbs.

CITY SCRAMBLE! Our friends have logged a lot of air miles on their global holiday. The stickers on their luggage display the names of the cities they explored. However, we've scrambled the letters to make a puzzle for you. What cities did they visit? Time limit: 2 minutes.

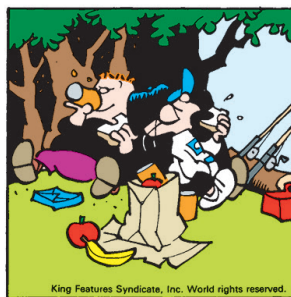
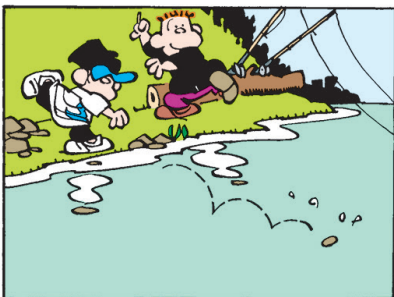
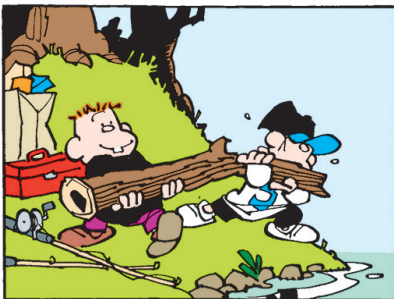


Illustrated by David Coulson

1. Rome. 2. Tokyo. 3. Moscow. 4. Paris. 5. Berlin. 6. London.

TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



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BUD BLAKE

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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Parking place
- 4 Toy block name
- 8 Narcissist's love
- 12 Bashful
- 13 Cameo shape
- 14 Russian river
- 15 Home
- 17 Wheels of fortune?
- 18 One of the Fab Four
- 19 Doze
- 20 Con games
- 22 Facebook action
- 24 Director Wertmuller
- 25 Tyrannize
- 29 Vichy water
- 30 Church keyboard
- 31 Big D.C. lobby
- 32 Realm
- 34 Hertz rival
- 35 Swiss peaks
- 36 Justice Kagan
- 37 Waterlogged
- 40 Mideast airline
- 41 Say it's so
- 42 Rectangular game pieces
- 46 Painter Magritte
- 47 Regarding
- 48 Shell-game

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| 12 | | | | 13 | | | | | 14 | | | |
| 15 | | | 16 | | | | | | 17 | | | |
| | | 18 | | | | | | 19 | | | | |
| 20 | 21 | | | | | 22 | 23 | | | | | |
| 24 | | | | | 25 | | | | | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| 29 | | | | 30 | | | | | | 31 | | |
| 32 | | | 33 | | | | | | 34 | | | |
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| 37 | 38 | 39 | | | | | 40 | | | | | |
| 41 | | | | | 42 | 43 | | | | | 44 | 45 |
| 46 | | | | | 47 | | | | | 48 | | |
| 49 | | | | | 50 | | | | | 51 | | |

- 30 Unique
- 33 "Amen to that!"
- 34 Actor Rickman
- 36 "Adam Bede" author
- 37 Poet Teasdale
- 38 Roasting spot
- 39 Bloke
- 40 911 responders
- 42 Wee dollop
- 43 Sugary suffix
- 44 Moray, for one
- 45 America's uncle
- 10 Hobbling
- 11 Broadway failure
- 16 "— Rock"
- 19 Epidermis
- 20 Rosebud, to Kane
- 21 Pisa farewell
- 22 Trademark symbols
- 23 One-named supermodel
- 25 Faucet problem
- 26 Letter holder
- 27 Ms. Brockovich
- 28 Tabula —
- 1 item
- 49 Initial chip
- 50 Optimum
- 51 Stately tree
- 1 Leary's drug
- 2 Discoverer's call
- 3 Ear membrane
- 4 Venue
- 5 Satan's forte
- 6 Lass
- 7 Flamenco cheer
- 8 Morose
- 9 Buffalo's lake

DOWN

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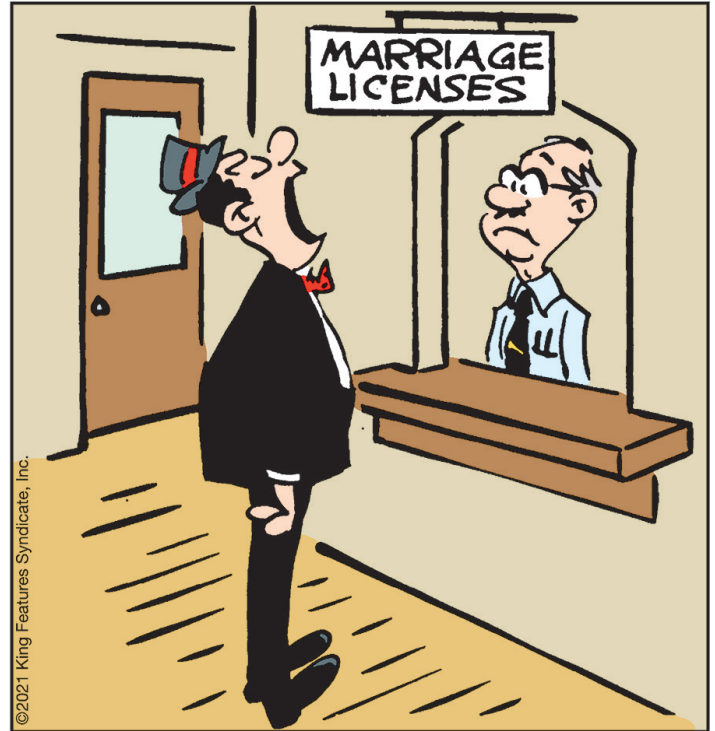
— King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 26 mins.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| L | O | T | | L | E | G | O | | S | E | L | F |
| S | H | Y | | O | V | A | L | | U | R | A | L |
| D | O | M | I | C | I | L | E | | L | I | M | O |
| | | P | A | U | L | | | S | L | E | E | P |
| S | C | A | M | S | | L | I | K | E | | | |
| L | I | N | A | | D | O | M | I | N | E | E | R |
| E | A | U | | O | R | G | A | N | | N | R | A |
| D | O | M | I | N | I | O | N | | A | V | I | S |
| | | | A | L | P | S | | E | L | E | N | A |
| S | O | G | G | Y | | | E | L | A | L | | |
| A | V | E | R | | D | O | M | I | N | O | E | S |
| R | E | N | E | | A | S | T | O | | P | E | A |
| A | N | T | E | | B | E | S | T | | E | L | M |

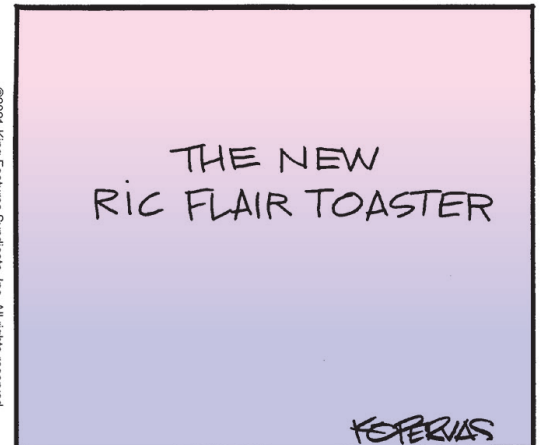
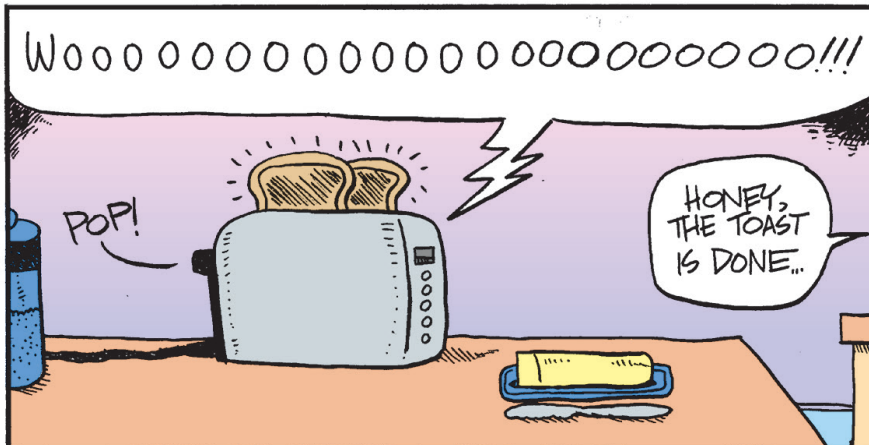
LAFF - A - DAY



"If you ever see me in here with a girl,
just ignore me!"

Out on a Limb

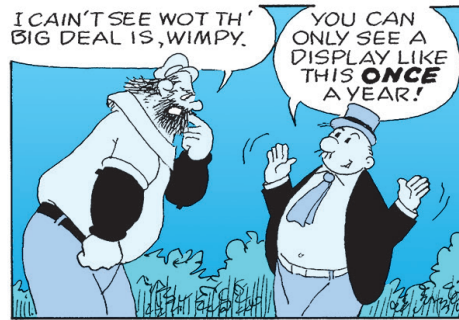
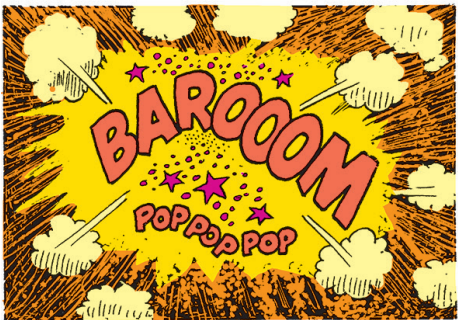
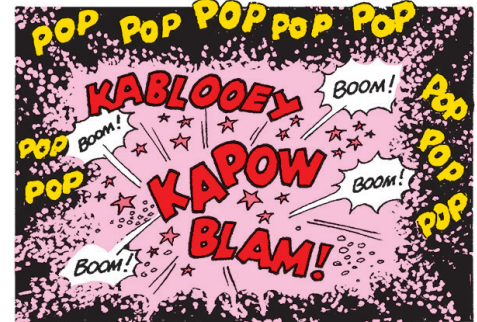
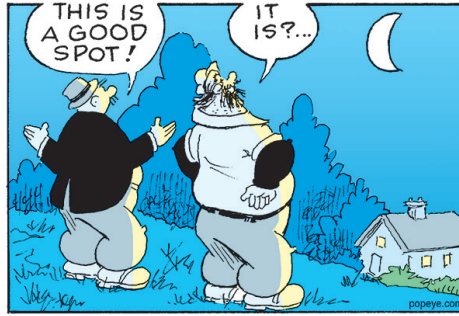
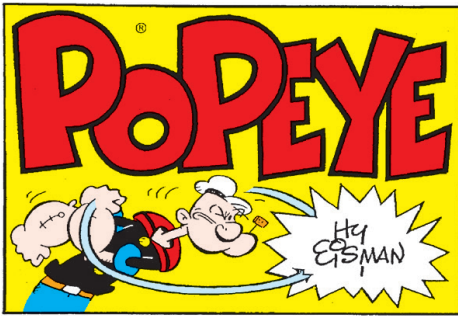
by Gary Kopervas



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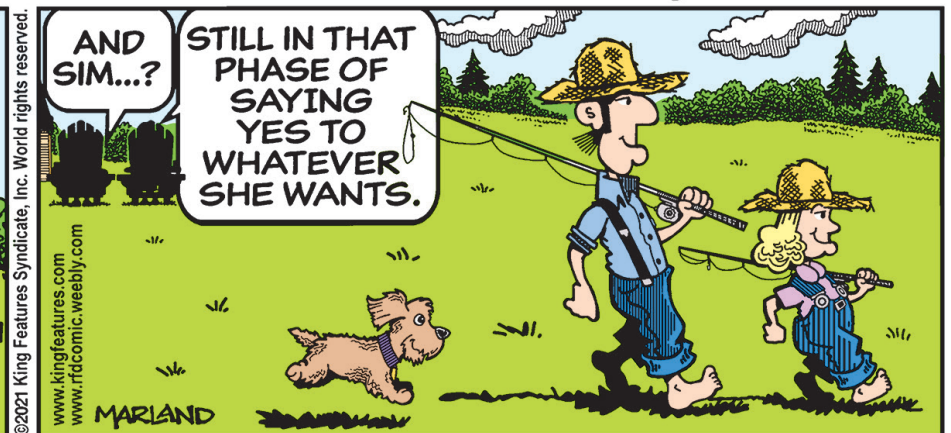
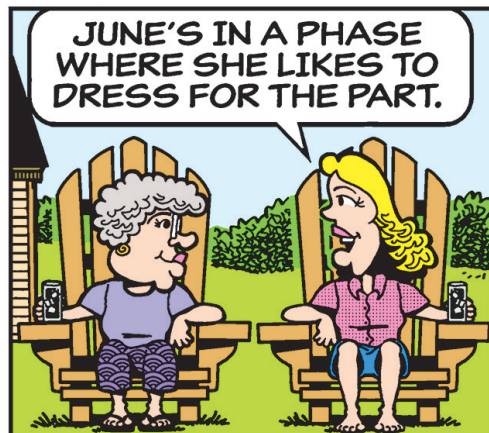
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R.F.D.

by Mike Marland



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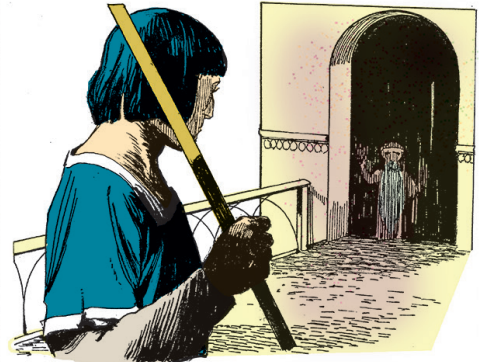
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Val Foster's
Prince Valiant
GIANNI AND SCHULTZ

VAL AND HIS COMPANIONS HAVE ENTERED THE WORLD OF THE LITTLE PEOPLE.



"THIS PLACE SEEMS DESERTED," PRUDENCE WHISPERS. BUT VAL IS WARY OF AMBUSH...



... AND COULD NEVER EXPECT THE SUDDEN EMERGENCE OF ONE LONE, ANCIENT GREYBEARD FROM A SHADY RECESS.



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THE CREATURE APPROACHES, WITH A HAND RAISED IN A CLEAR GESTURE OF PEACEFUL INTENT.

HIS GREETING, HOWEVER, LACKS DIPLOMATIC POLISH.



3822

"UNTIL 'HE' CAME, OUR HAVEN HAD NEVER BEEN FOULED BY HUMANS. NOW," HE SIGHS, "WE ARE LOUSY WITH YOU."



RUDE, THINKS VAL, BUT NOT THREATENING - AND WHO IS THIS 'HE'?

NEXT:
The Thua

Gianni
05-9-10

The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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Pickering

SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Are You a Victim of Elder Abuse?

Do you suspect, or know, that somebody has been stealing from you? Maybe it's items from your home? Or maybe it's your money? Or perhaps you're being pressured by someone to keep giving them cash. If so, you are not alone. It's called elder abuse.

The biggest problem is that these thefts are often not reported, typically because the one doing the abusing is a family member. Or maybe it's after the fact, and we're not certain. Or maybe we don't know where we should report it.

Finances and theft aren't the only forms of elder abuse. Others include emotional, sexual and physical abuse, neglect and exploitation. Emotional abuse, for example, can include threats, belittling and verbal attacks — anything that causes mental distress and pain. Exploitation can be fraud, undue influence over your cash or property and being pressured to sign papers you don't understand. Do you see yourself in any of those categories?

The National Center on Elder Abuse website (ncea.acl.gov) is a good place to start. Notice the red banner at the bottom of the page with "Safe Exit" in white letters. If you're looking at the site and fear that someone will come up behind you and read what you're looking at, quickly click that red banner and it will take you to an innocent-looking webpage.

If you are being abused in some way, help is available. In all states, there are professionals who are required to report suspicions of maltreatment. It's called mandatory reporting, and in some states the list of professions is very long and varied: chiropractor, occupational therapist, member of the clergy, attorney, animal control officer, bank employee and many others.

To get a referral for help, call the Elder-care Locator at 1-800-677-1116. If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

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1. Who was guest host of “Jeopardy!” when contestant Scott Shewfelt gave “Who wanted to kick that field goal?” as his Final Jeopardy answer?

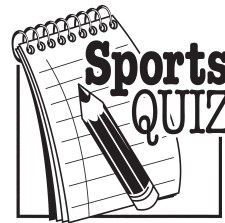
2. Name the Texas Tech Red Raiders basketball player whose glass-shattering slam dunk in the NCAA Tournament appeared on the March 25, 1996, issue of Sports Illustrated.

3. What St. Louis Blues defenseman suffered a cardiac arrest and collapsed on the bench during a February 2020 game vs. the Anaheim Ducks?

4. What NASCAR driver finished sixth in the 2014 Indianapolis 500 and won Indy 500 Rookie of the Year honors?

5. What Oscar-winning film from 1981 depicted the true story of British sprinters Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams, who both won gold medals at the 1924 Paris Summer Olympics?

6. At what stadium did the New York



by Ryan A. Berenz

Giants’ Willie Mays make his famous over-the-shoulder catch of a fly ball hit by the Cleveland Indians’ Vic Wertz in Game 1 of the 1954 World Series?

7. What two brothers combined for 93 goals during the 1999-2000 NHL regular season?

Answers

1. Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers.

2. Darvin Ham.

3. Jay Bouwmeester.

4. Kurt Busch.

5. “Chariots of Fire.”

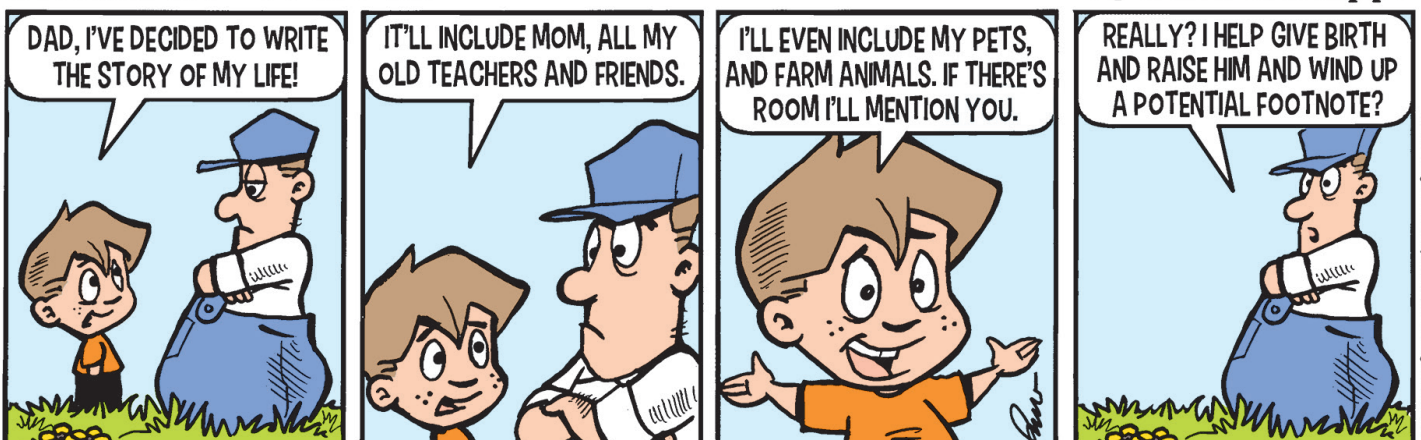
6. The Polo Grounds.

7. Pavel (58) and Valeri (35) Bure.

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



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Cat Owner Defends Free-Range Felines

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: As an owner of six indoor cats, I would like to respond to your recent article ("Cats shouldn't get free pass to poop"). In the past two years we have had to pay over \$300 for damage done by chipmunks to our car. We cannot have a raised garden here due to rabbits, groundhogs, deer and chipmunks.

When my cats used to be outdoors, I saw very few birds killed by them. Generally, it was mice and moles. My cats would kill snakes and scare off the squirrels.

I brought my cats indoors because of coyotes in the area. Also, one of my cats was attacked by a neighbor and had to be put to sleep.

If there were no cats, you would be totally overrun by mice and rats.

How would you like that? I suggest that you print this letter, that you do not shorten it, that you apologize for what you said about cats and that you think twice before you put something like this in writing again. Thank you. — *Debra in West Virginia*

DEAR DEBRA: I will apologize ... for shortening your letter, as we have limited space. You raise many good points based on your personal experience. Cats do keep many rodents at bay, because they are incredibly good hunters. But they are at grave risk being outdoors, from coyotes, from feral cats carrying diseases and from humans who do evil, foul things.

The article that offended you raised many good points about the damage that outdoor cats can do to neighbors' property, and the danger they pose to small creatures. I'm glad you're keeping your cats safe indoors. Doesn't your experience prove the point that cats are safer inside?

Send your comments, questions or tips to ask@pawscorner.com.

Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

ovophobe, or someone who is frightened of eggs.

- * Children of identical twins are genetically siblings, not cousins.
- * Notwithstanding the fact it has no feathers, beak or talons, the Goodyear Blimp is the official bird of Redondo Beach, California.
- * James Cameron sold the film rights to "The Terminator" for \$1. It went on to earn a worldwide total of \$78.3 million at the box office in 1984.
- * The comb jelly, aka the warty comb jelly, sea walnut or "*Mnemiopsis leidyi*," is the only known animal to have a transient anus -- or, in more common parlance, a disappearing butt.
- * The green code in "The Matrix" was actually created from symbols in the code designer's wife's sushi cookbook.
- * Comic Sans, designed by Vincent Connare in 1995, has been labeled the world's most hated font. Even its creator isn't much of a fan, admitting that he has only used it once, to write a complaint letter to his internet provider. At least he received a refund.
- * Australia's Lake Hillier and Hutt Lagoon are known for their vibrant pink and lilac hues, due to the presence of the algae "*Dunaliella salina*."

Thought for the Day: "There is something beautiful about all scars of whatever nature. A scar means the hurt is over, the wound is closed and healed, done with." -- Harry Crews

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* The fuller your refrigerator, the more energy-efficient it is.

* In 2005, a Powerball drawing had a stunning 110 second-place winners, all of whom attributed their luck to ... a fortune cookie. No foul play was involved, just a Chinese fortune cookie distribution factory named Wonton Food, which happened to correctly foretell five of the six winning numbers. Each grateful recipient took home between \$100,000 and \$500,000.

* Master of suspense Alfred Hitchcock was an

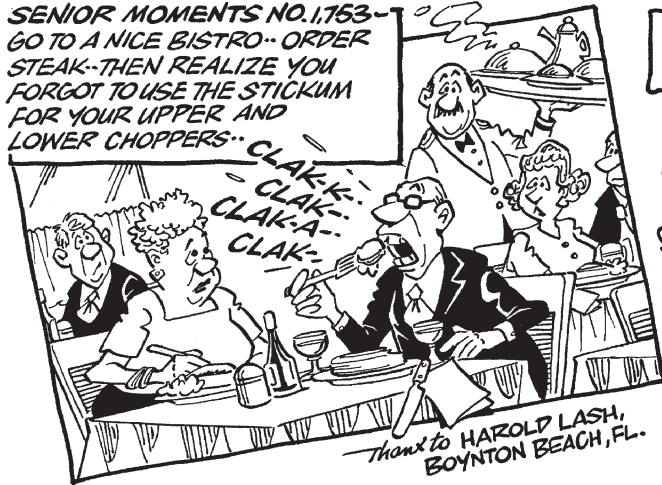
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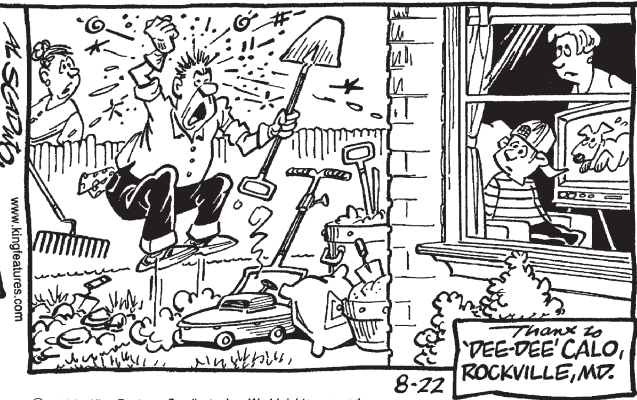
THEY'LL DO IT EVERY TIME

BY AL SCADUTO

SENIOR MOMENTS NO. 1,753--
GO TO A NICE BISTRO-- ORDER
STEAK-- THEN REALIZE YOU
FORGOT TO USE THE STICKUM
FOR YOUR UPPER AND
LOWER CHOPPERS--



WARNING DEPT-- TODAY'S LAWN CHORES MAY CONTAIN
MATERIAL, BEHAVIOR AND LANGUAGE OF A VIOLENT,
GRAPHIC NATURE. VIEWER DISCRETION IS ADVISED."



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SHOCK WAVES--

JIMSON!
WHAT ARE YOU
DOING HOME?

YOU HAVEN'T
LEFT COLLEGE
HAVE YOU? ER--
W-WHO'S YOUR
FRIEND?



OH-- NO, NO! NO PROBLEM--
NOT TO WORRY-- LIKE I
MEAN I GOT MARRIED-- THIS
IS LOOPINA-- WE'LL BOTH
BE GOING BACK TO
COLLEGE--

OH, YEAH! AND OF COURSE
PAPA WILL NOW BE
PAYING TWO TUITIONS--

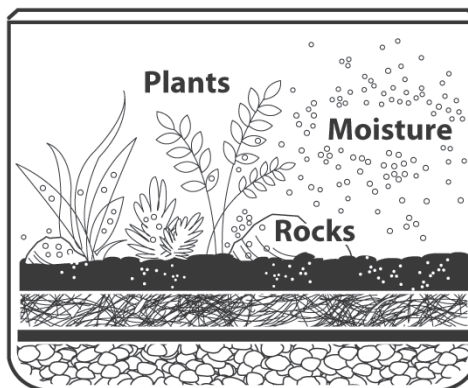


Terrarium

A terrarium is a group of plants

growing inside an enclosed, clear container. Once watered, these plants create a mini-environment, transpiring moisture through their leaves that condenses on the inside of the container and flows back to the soil. Some plants to consider using are arrow-head vines, begonias, ferns, swedish ivy and pothos. - Brenda Weaver

Source: www.thegardenhelper.com



Lid

Clear glass container

Soil

Sphagnum moss

Charcoal

Pebbles

Do not place it in full sun!

VETERANS ★ POST ★

by Freddy Groves

Don't Mess With the VA

This is a big no-no. An Ohio man threatened to kill a Department of Veterans Affairs social worker's daughters. You do not do that, no matter what your beef. You do not go after family.

The Ohio idiot didn't even do it anonymously, sending a threatening text message, and it wasn't long before the VA Office of Inspector General was all over it. Turns out he was known to the social worker because he'd availed himself of homeless-veterans services and had been given permanent housing. Several years later, he was evicted due to multiple complaints of physical threats and public intoxication. Upset, he sent the threatening text message.

At this point he's indicted. No established guilt. Court to be held later. At his arrest he was charged with disorderly conduct, resisting arrest and obstructing official business. I hope the federal charges are stronger than that. You do not threaten family.

This next case I don't understand.

Oh, I understand the theft and scamming part. What I don't understand is why it took so long.

In 2017, a VA employee who worked in the IT department was nabbed and indicted for attempting to sell the personal info of veterans and employees he'd grabbed off the computers. He'd even narrowed down the victims to those making over \$50,000 per year, saying that would be valuable to identity thieves. He selected veterans who'd received compensation or a pension, those who went to a VA medical center and those who'd had a VA financial assessment. He even made fake credit cards and had the equipment to do that. He was picked up in a bathroom when he went to the VA to steal a server.

In 2019, he pleaded guilty to one charge in exchange for having the others dropped. Fast-forward to now: He's just been sentenced to 46 months, plus two years of supervised release.

What took so long?

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#450 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Case rates continue to climb, as do hospitalizations. Fortunately, deaths have remained low, but they are creeping up too. We're getting closer to 34 million cases at 33,804,801 cases and 696,198 deaths in the US. We passed four million reported deaths worldwide a couple of days ago. No one seriously thinks these are accurate counts; they are almost certainly serious undercounts.

On July 9, 2020, one year ago today, things were awful. We were up to 3,129,800 total cases and 133,055 total deaths. We'd set record average new-case numbers every day for a solid month, and our ten worst days that far into the pandemic were the immediately past 10 days. States were setting records all over the place. Case numbers were declining in zero states. The best anyone could do was stay level, and most states weren't doing that. Test positivity rates were soaring; hospitals were filling up, some to critical levels; and we hadn't even experienced the full bump from the holiday yet. The only good news was that deaths were not rising as fast as case numbers. Contact tracing was being largely abandoned as a lost cause.

Scientists were begging the WHO and the CDC to update their guidance to indicate transmission of the virus could be airborne; they were realizing this could be a primary means of transmission, although it was a long while until these agencies acknowledged it. The experts were also predicting a big surge starting in the fall, likely October; we know now they weren't wrong about that either. Major League Baseball began workouts and "full baseball activities" just before the 4th, preparatory to beginning a modified season later in the month, and had 38 positive results in its first round of testing; so that wasn't going swimmingly. We finally had good evidence we were facing a new, much more transmissible variant that had become dominant in the US; this was the D614G which held sway across the country until the even-more-transmissible B.1.1.7 or Alpha, first identified in the UK, took over this spring. We were having trouble with testing capacity again, a long-standing issue in the US. Superspreader events were held across the country over the holiday, and the upcoming weeks would bear the fruit of those gatherings. Schools at all levels were trying to figure out whether and how to reopen for the new academic year. Colleges and universities, even with vastly reduced student numbers over the summer, were struggling with outbreaks and K-12 schools were facing competing concerns in their communities.

Globally, there had been 11,874,226 cases and 545,481 deaths reported. Central and South America were still dealing with soaring case numbers. Europe was embarked on a reopening attempt with mixed success. India and parts of Asia were seeing surges. Australia, which had had fairly good success controlling cases, had some hot spots developing.

Today, I think we're headed for trouble again; over 2000 counties that contain more than half the US population (30 states) have not met the administration's 70 percent goal for a first dose of vaccine. Those would be the same counties that have spikes in new cases and soaring test positivity rates—the percentage of Covid-19 tests done that come back positive. We have 1000 counties with fewer than 30 percent vaccination rates.

There are in the US 173 counties with case rates at or higher than 100 daily new cases per 100,000 residents (a case rate of 25 puts you in the red zone) accompanied by vaccination rates below 40 percent; more than nine million people live in those counties. That's enough to seed quite an outbreak nationwide, especially considering the rapid spread of B.1.617.2 or Delta, the highly-transmissible variant first identified in India. This is not a great situation. Last time we talked nearly a week ago, we mentioned over a quarter of the cases in the US were then accounted for by Delta; we're up to 51.7 percent in the two weeks that ended last weekend, so it's gaining on us fast. In low-vaccination counties, including some in Missouri, Kansas and Iowa, the rates of Delta are as high as 80 percent of cases sequenced, 74.4 percent in Western states, including Utah and Colorado, and 48.8 percent of infections in Southern states like Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. We've scaled back on testing, and yet 25 states have increasing seven-day new-case averages; because testing is so low, the real number of cases is likely very underreported. Seven-day average hospitalizations is also increasing just as we're traveling more and taking fewer precautions.

States with below-average vaccination rates have three times the new-case rate of states with above-

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average vaccination rates. The lowest-vaccination states have rates five times the national average. Of the 10 states with the highest new-case rates, nine were below-average in vaccinations. And the gap between the vaccination haves and the vaccination have-nots keeps growing. As cases get younger and younger, this is going to play out in totally unnecessary suffering. The current recommendations are that even vaccinated folks may wish to wear masks in public settings, especially crowded ones, if their area has high transmission rates. Research shows that an unvaccinated person in a highly-vaccinated region may have lower risk than a vaccinated person in a poorly-vaccinated area. If I lived or was planning to spend time in a low-vaccination area with a high transmission rate, I'd return to masking until one of these conditions eased. Where I live, I don't think there will be strong vaccination rates, so I'm watching the community transmission rates carefully this summer. The way the upcoming winter shapes up is going to be largely dependent upon what people do in these low-vaccination states. It looks like we're going to need something like 80 percent vaccination rates to blunt an otherwise-inevitable winter surge. I hope, but do not expect, we'll be able to do this. We're still in relatively good shape because of summer and school being out; but we expect far worse numbers in the fall and winter.

A Georgetown University analysis just released identifies 30 clusters of unvaccinated people who are sitting ducks for this variant, the five largest of which include over 15 million people who are only 27.9 percent vaccinated. The clusters are mostly in Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. These are states where we're seeing increases in case numbers statewide, primarily driven by small population areas—92 percent of the counties involved have populations smaller than 100,000. One person involved in the analysis, Shweta Bansal, associate professor of biology at Georgetown, told CNN, "Parts of the country are just as vulnerable if not more vulnerable than they were in December, 2020." Those who remember last December know this is not good news because these clusters put all of us—not just in the US, but across the world—at real risk as they act as test tubes for brewing new variants. We've talked about this risk many times, most thoroughly in my Update #377 posted March 6, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4500262516656786>.

Case in point: After pooh-poohing the infection risk for weeks now, Mississippi public health officials are recommending residents take measures to reduce the transmission of Delta in the state. Among these are encouragement for residents who are over 65 or with chronic conditions to avoid crowded indoor venues, for unvaccinated residents to mask indoors in public settings, and unvaccinated residents 12 years and older to receive vaccinations. Dr. Thomas Dobbs, the state health officer, said, "For the time being, if you're in one of these high-risk groups, it is very wise for you to avoid indoor mass gatherings where we are going to see significant transmission. We're going to remain vulnerable for a long time."

With the holiday gatherings and our new devil-may-care attitude, we were perfectly positioned to entertain a superspreader weekend over the holiday with younger and younger people infected. The biggest increase in cases lately has been in the 18 to 49 age group who now represent 43 percent of the hospitalized. About a quarter of those hospitalized are 65 and older and another quarter between 50 and 64. Almost all of these hospitalized people are unvaccinated; breakthrough cases in the vaccinated are very unlikely to be severe enough to require hospitalization. Some hospitals are reporting patient numbers that match their previous peaks. The surge appears to be driven largely by Delta. Many of the areas with surges have well over half of cases accounted for by Delta. We are also seeing cases of Delta+ popping up; we do not yet know what these represent, but it looks as though we're going to have enough experience with it to figure that out.

The CDC has issued new guidance for K-12 schools which leads with encouragement to fully reopen this fall and tailor public health measures to local data. Recommendations are to continue distancing (3' or more for students), masking for the unvaccinated, improved ventilation, regular testing, attention to handwashing, contact tracing, and quarantine of infected persons. It is recommended districts that choose to remove these protections do so one at a time, monitoring for increasing case rates, so that they can pull back at any time it is warranted. While severe disease in children has been relatively uncommon, there have been very severe cases, those very serious cases of an inflammatory syndrome, and some deaths;

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in addition, children over 12 appear to pose a significant infection risk in their communities. These new guidelines have met with approval from experts and, I would guess based on what was happening in schools by this spring, have very little chance of being implemented in much of the country. This appears to be largely because many communities would prefer sick children to any perception someone was telling them what to do. I don't think there's a vaccine for that.

Pfizer and BioNTech have been working up a vaccine targeted at the B.1.617.2 or Delta variant, first identified in India, and expect to begin clinical trials in late summer. They've also reported excellent results from trials in people who've received a third dose of their original vaccine, including the finding that a booster given six months after a second dose increases the effectiveness of antibodies considerably. They are asserting boosters may soon be necessary, but these claims are receiving a great deal of push-back from experts inside and outside of government agencies who are maintaining that there is not any need for a booster yet at this time and may not be for a good long while yet. Dr. Celine Gounder, infectious disease specialist at Bellevue Hospital Center in New York, told the New York Times, "There's really no indication for a third booster or a third dose of an mRNA vaccine, given the variants that we have circulating at this time. In fact, many of us question whether you will ever need boosters." I'm not rushing out to get one at the moment.

I have a little information about that new variant I mentioned last week, C.37 or Lambda, first recognized in Peru. We knew then that it spread across Peru and into neighboring countries very quickly, which raises suspicious it is going to turn out to be highly transmissible, but it's had months to spread beyond and hasn't, which raises suspicions it's not. It has a number of mutations we've seen in other variants, some of which are or may be problematic; but vaccine-elicited antibodies have tested as effective against it, which lowers our alarm level considerably. Doesn't appear anyone's getting too excited about it yet. I'll keep you

We humans are not the only ones reaping the benefits of vaccination for Covid-19: Animals are being vaccinated too. The Oakland Zoo is vaccinating bears, mountain lions, tigers, and ferrets through an experimental program from veterinary pharmaceutical company Zoetis, which has donated doses to 70 zoos. I want to be clear that this vaccine is not approved for use in humans and so is not diverting supply away from people who want to be vaccinated. This is the same vaccine we discussed back in March that was given to apes at the San Diego Zoo. We talked about this in my Update #375 posted March 4 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4494831047199933>. The vaccine is also being used to vaccinate minks on farms in Oregon; the state is requiring farmed mink to be vaccinated.

Now that we're caught up after the holiday, I'll sign off for a few days.

Be well. We'll talk again.

Groton Legion Post #39 Outdone By Post 7 Huron, 4-0

A single by Peyton Johnson in the second inning was a positive for Groton Legion Post #39.

Layne W earned the victory on the pitcher's mound for Post 7 Huron. The righty went seven innings, allowing zero runs on two hits, striking out 11 and walking zero.

Alex Morris took the loss for Groton Legion Post #39. The righthander allowed six hits and four runs over six innings, striking out seven and walking one.

Johnson went 2-for-3 at the plate to lead Groton Legion Post #39 in hits.

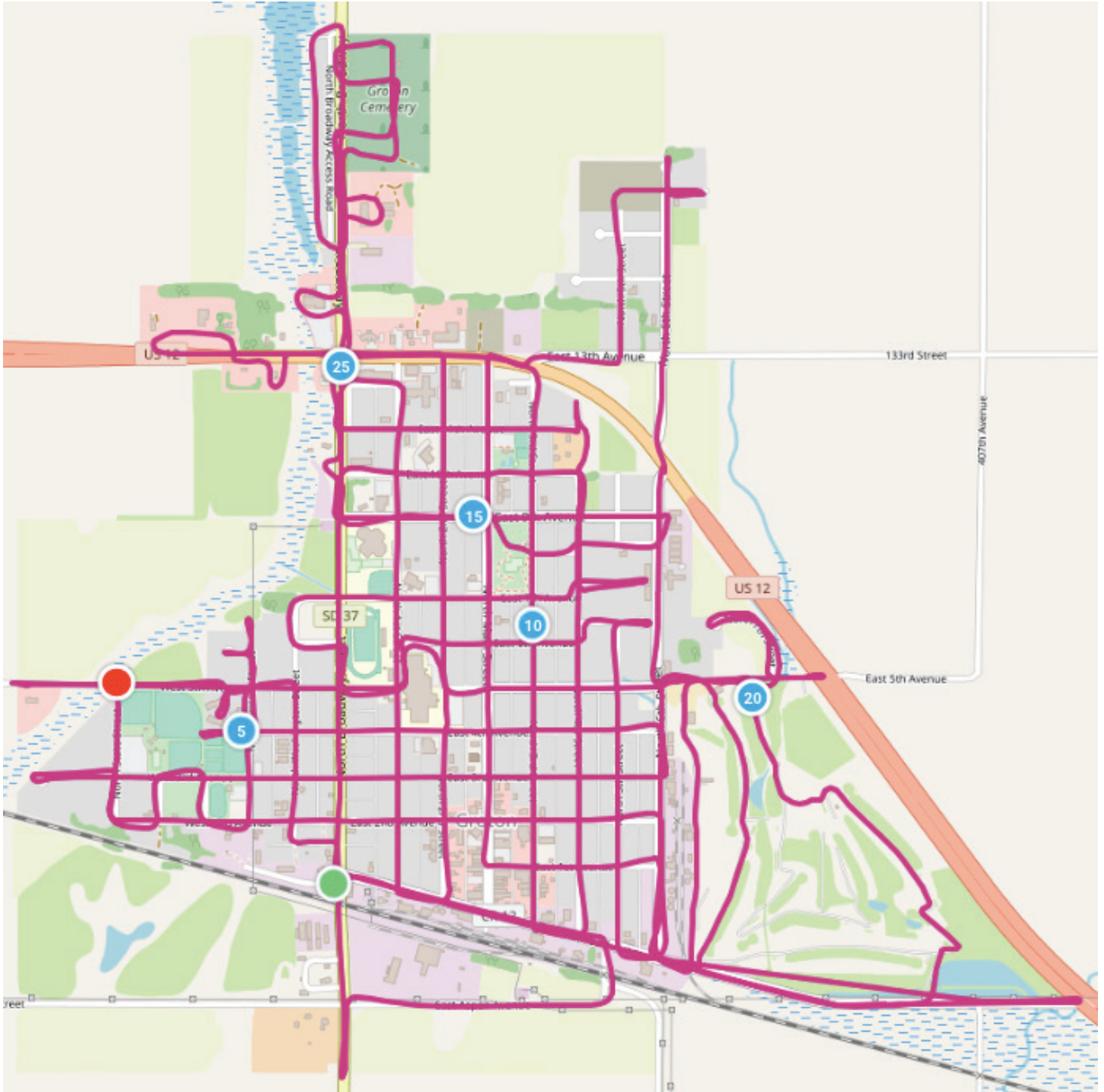
Peyton B led Post 7 Huron with two hits in three at bats.

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Adult Mosquito Control done last night



Wind was light and variable from NE to SE. Temperature in the low 70s. Used 8 gallons of Evolver 4x4.

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CONGRESSMAN
DUSTY JOHNSON
Representing **SOUTH DAKOTA** at large



Combatting Crime Rates

Crime is on the rise across America.

Since the beginning of 2021, cities have faced surging levels of violence. The most staggering statistics have emerged in Portland, where homicides and shootings have jumped by a disturbing 533% and 126% respectively, compared to 2020.

Rates are not likely to slow either, as summer is known to be the most violent time of year.

We all know 2020 was an unprecedented year given the COVID-19 pandemic and the protests that swept the nation last summer, but there are several factors contributing to rising crime rates in our nation.

It's notable that one commonality among the many cities that are seeing an uptick – including LA, NYC, Portland, Chicago, and Philadelphia – is a reduction in police department budgets in the last year.

Data is clear – the strength of law enforcement impacts crime rates. It's not surprising, but defunding law enforcement agencies diminishes their ability to carry out their duties effectively. Our nation's law enforcement has also faced a disheartening increase in police-targeted crime which has caused a significant decline in police recruitment and hiring across the country.

Rising crime rates are a threat to all of us, so it's important we channel our energy towards forming solutions rather than pointing the finger at one person or one party. Our men and women in blue need the resources to do their job and keep our communities safe.

That's why I'm supporting the Justice Act, which provides \$500 million for state and local law enforcement agencies to equip officers with equipment like body cameras to promote transparency and ensure our officers aren't wrongfully accused. The Justice Act also requires the development of a curriculum for de-escalation and mental illness training. Just this week, I signed the Police Pledge – I will never support defunding law enforcement while I'm in Congress.

I am also a strong advocate of mental health resources to those that need them the most. I believe many of the problems in our society stem from a lack of investment in mental health – that's why I worked to extend behavioral telehealth services during the pandemic and have supported mental health resources for Medicare beneficiaries and veterans.

From investing in economic development and behavioral health resources to sufficiently funding our law enforcement agencies, we can combat crime in America. Let's work together to stop the surge.

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South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

Where's the Beef?

America's meat supply is a matter of national security. If we don't control our own food supply, then we don't control our own destiny. South Dakota feeds the world, and we do it better than anybody else. We have more head of cattle per-person than any other state. But anticompetitive practices in the meatpacking industry are threatening that way of life. We need more competition, more transparency, and more options for our cattle producers to market their livestock.

Over time, the beef processing industry has consolidated into 4 mega-packers who control 85% of America's beef supply. That's bad for competition, and it leads to higher prices at the grocery store for the American people. Two of these companies are based out of Brazil. And these companies have such a tight control over the marketplace that beef producers are lucky if they make \$100 per head of cattle.

Recently, one of these Brazilian companies, JBS, was hacked, and 20% of America's beef supply went offline overnight. That shouldn't happen in this country. We need more options to ensure that America's food can't be held hostage by bad actors targeting foreign-based companies.

Last year, the US Department of Justice sent civil investigative demands to the 4 mega-packers, but we haven't heard any updates on this investigation since then. I recently wrote a letter to the DOJ that was co-signed by 5 other governors, and we urged them to continue this investigation so that we can root out anticompetitive practices in our beef supply chain.

In the meantime, South Dakota is taking action to help our cattle producers. My administration recently awarded \$5 million in grants to 99 small meat processors across the state of South Dakota. These grants will allow them to expand their operations or start new ones, which will give producers more options when it comes time to sell their livestock.

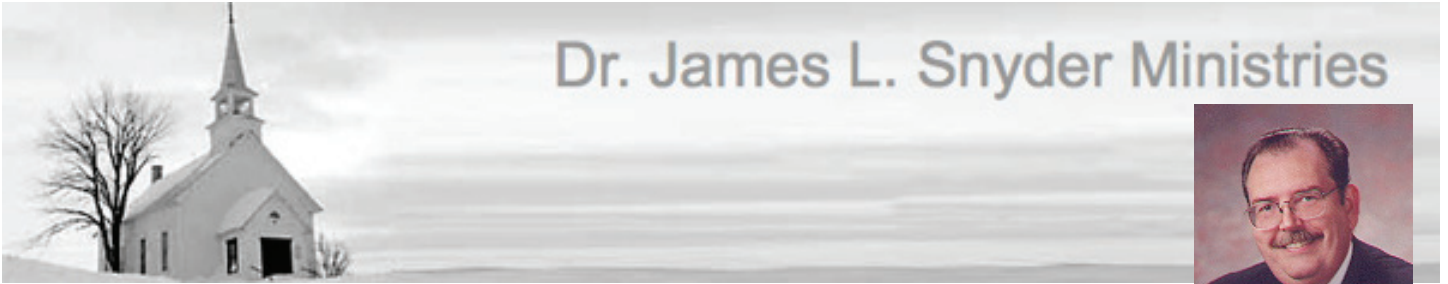
South Dakota also recently announced that we've signed a Competitive Interstate Shipping agreement with the US Department of Agriculture. This agreement will allow our producers to sell state-inspected beef across state lines, opening up even more avenues for increased competition.

I recently discussed next steps with our producers at the Governor's Ag Summit. The solutions are simple but will be tough to achieve: more competition and more price transparency. Frankly, it will take the support of the entire ag industry to get this done. These solutions will give producers more options to sell their livestock and negotiate better prices. They also will keep costs lower for consumers because the 4 mega-packers won't be able to completely control the price of beef at the grocery store.

Our food supply is a national security issue. Foreign adversaries shouldn't be able to take down entire supply chains by hacking a few overly large meatpackers. I pledge to keep working to increase competition in this industry so that we can protect the way of life for our farmers and ranchers while also keeping prices lower for the American people.

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Where Oh Where Is My Hair?

I must confess I sometimes get so busy that certain things have slipped my mind. I don't do this intentionally, but I try to prioritize things in my life.

With so many things going on, it is tough to keep up-to-date with everything, even personal items.

This is not true with the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. No matter how busy her day is, she always keeps up with everything. She knows things that are happening a week before they actually happen. How she does that, I don't know, and trust me, I am not going to inquire.

I just ask her if I want to know something, and I get the latest on everything. So, why should I waste my time trying to keep up with everything?

Maybe I should take her to the horse races this week and ask her today who's going to win.

Looking at my driver's license, I believe I have a birthday coming up this month. I'm not sure exactly which one it is, but someone in our residence will inform me of that information when it comes time.

I like to keep up with some things in the news, which is really hard these days because every day it changes. Particularly among politicians. What they say one day is the exact opposite of what they're going to say the next day. I guess that's what keeps them in office.

If a politician told the truth two days in a row, their pants would catch on fire.

I don't take anything seriously, like politics and so forth. But, once you focus on something and become very serious about it, it changes.

Like my computer and it's programs, as soon as I understand one program and know how it works, it is updated, and I have to start all over again. I'm tempted to go back to that antique called The Typewriter.

Change is not my modus operandi. I like things to stay the way they are. I haven't even bought a pair of new pants for several decades. Why buy a new pair when the old pair works just fine? The same with shirts.

Then something happened this past week that changed my thoughts along this line.

The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage found an old box of photographs from when we were first married. When I saw our wedding picture, I wondered who that young couple was getting married.

My wife informed me that that was us on our wedding day.

Then I went through a bunch of other photographs, and noticed something that, in a way, alarmed me.

I'm not easily alarmed, but sometimes something happens or doesn't happen that causes me some concern.

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As I look at these pictures of myself, I noticed something strange. I had lots of hair!

I don't like to take photographs of myself or have others do it to me. Most of these pictures were taken without me realizing that they were taking a picture of me. Why anybody would want a picture of me, especially me, is beyond my calculation.

I stared at one photograph for a while, and my wife said, "What are you looking at?"

Not wanting to expose my thoughts at the time, I just said, "I'm just looking at this picture."

Of course, as is always the case, she knew there was a little more than that.

"Okay," she said, "come clean with me. What are you really looking at?"

The choice was simple, either come clean with her or face this question for the rest of my life.

I nervously cleared my throat, coughed several times, blew my nose and then said, "I noticed that I had a lot of hair back in that day. Whatever happened to my hair?"

When she stopped laughing, which I did not see to be funny, she said, "You got older, and your hair couldn't put up with you getting old."

I involuntarily chuckled, but I wasn't really serious about chuckling.

When I looked in the mirror later, I discovered a lot of hair that did not show up for my mirror time. Trying to cover up the hairless spots on my head, I finally had to give up. I did not have enough hair to make up for those hairless spots.

It took me quite a while to come to terms with this. I never even noticed through the years that my hair was disappearing. My new identity came as a shock to me.

Thinking about that, I began to wonder what else have I not noticed that has changed in my life? I do not know where to start.

The only change I really like is the change in my pocket. Outside of that, I'm not a fan of change. Surely there comes a time when there's no more need for change.

I'm completely happy with the way things are right now. I don't want to lose any more hair. I don't want to gain any more weight. Surely, I don't need any more wrinkles.

I guess this is the cost of investing in old age.

While brooding over the subject, I ran across a verse of Scripture. "The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the grey head" (Proverbs 20:29).

Looking in the mirror again, I noticed my hair was indeed grey. If God thinks my grey head is beautiful, why should I think anything different?

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EARTHTALK

From the Editors of E - The Environmental Magazine

Dear EarthTalk: Is blimp travel really making a comeback? Is it eco-friendly? – J. Roe, Islip, NY

The blimp, forever besmirched due to the Hindenburg explosion in 1937—when one of the first commercial blimps caught on fire—never really fulfilled its potential as a commuting vehicle.

Fast forward to the 21st century, and companies like Hybrid Air Vehicles (HAV) are taking steps to reintroduce airships safely. HAV's Airlander 10, for example, uses inert helium for buoyancy instead of flammable hydrogen (which the industry began doing right after the Hindenburg disaster), thus eliminating the threat of disasters like the Hindenburg. Today's blimp can be an efficient cargo carrier, and can also seat 100 passengers and travel 200-300 miles quickly on hybrid (diesel/electric) power—making blimp travel one of the greenest ways to travel medium-length distances.

Traditional commercial jets are not only much more costly to make but also accelerate global warming and impact local air quality. Commercial aircrafts use large amounts of fossil fuels and emit harmful greenhouse gasses like carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and sulfate or soot particulates.

As a hybrid vehicle with a helium-filled balloon for buoyancy—the Airlander 10 drastically reduces the amount of fuel necessary to keep it airborne. HAV reports that the Airlander will emit 90 percent less carbon dioxide per passenger than a commercial jet. However, the company plans to replace all hybrid versions with 500 kW electric motors—two forward motors by 2025 and two rear motors by 2030—to make the aircraft fully electric and producing zero emissions.

HAV adds that while blimps created in the past could not withstand rough weather conditions, the Airlander “will be able to withstand lightning and icing and operate in most weathers.” With the ability to cover 4,000 miles, reach the altitude of 20,000 feet, and travel approximately 80 miles per hour, the Airlander maximizes energy efficiency and is designed to remain airborne for up to five days at a stretch.

“This isn't a luxury product, it's a practical solution to challenges posed by the climate crisis,” HAV Chief Executive Tom Grundy tells The Guardian.

In addition to commercial passenger and cargo transportation, the Airlander may just be the newest eco-tourism vehicle. With large windows that provide a clear view of the landscapes below and little predicted turbulence due to reduced engine usage, the Airlander is perfect for luxury eco-travel. In fact, Swedish travel firm OceanSky has already purchased an Airlander that will include a customized luxury cabin, where passengers can enjoy stunning, unparalleled views while flying over places like the North Pole.

Although an Airlander prototype crashed during a 2019 test flight, another test flight performed in 2021 proved successful. As with all commercial aircraft, the Airlander requires certification from regulators before operation. Though the Airlander does not yet have approval, HAV looks forward to building 12 Airlanders yearly with hopes of producing upwards of 250 over the next few decades.



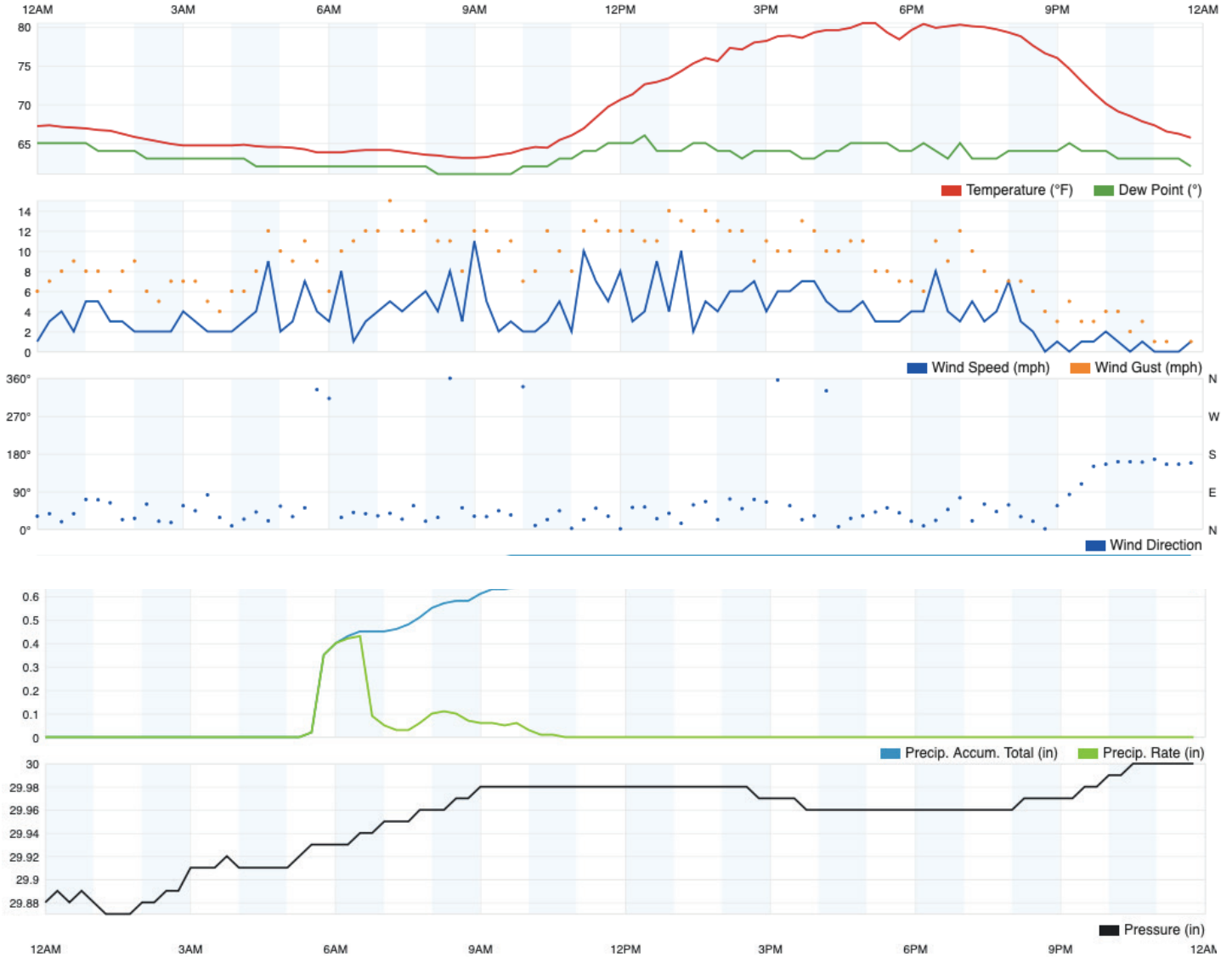
Believe it or not, blimps are making a comeback as a green short hop commuter travel option.

EarthTalk® is produced by Roddy Scheer & Doug Moss for the 501(c)3 nonprofit EarthTalk. See more at <https://emagazine.com>. To donate, visit <https://earthtalk.org>. Send questions to: question@earthtalk.org.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Areas Fog
then Sunny

High: 86 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 58 °F

Monday



Sunny

High: 86 °F

Monday
Night



Mostly Clear
then Slight
Chance
T-storms

Low: 60 °F

Tuesday



Sunny

High: 85 °F



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Dry & Warmer Today



Today



80s to low 90s

Sky may be hazy at times
due to smoke from
Canadian fires

Tonight



55 to 65°

Clear with southeasterly winds

Updated: 7/11/2021 4:17 AM Central

Expect dry and warmer conditions today, but smoke from Canadian wildfires may drift through the area and lead to a hazy sky at times.

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Today in Weather History

July 11, 1909: A deadly, estimated F2 tornado moved ESE across the Simpson Park section of Big Stone City in South Dakota. A bus was thrown from the road, and the driver was killed. Two homes and several barns were destroyed. As the tornado crossed the foot of Big Stone Lake, it tore apart a railroad yard and killed four of the 26 Armenian laborers who were living in box cars at Ortonville, Minnesota. Nineteen were injured.

July 11, 1981: Severe thunderstorms moved eastward across the entire length of the South Dakota along the northern portion of the state. Hail, with the largest up to nine inches in circumference, resulted in 100 percent crop loss, damage to numerous buildings and loss of livestock. Trees were stripped, and large limbs were broken. High winds also accompanied these storms. Storms lasted into the early morning hours on the 12. Thunderhawk in Corson County had estimated winds of 70 to 75 mph that destroyed a machine shop and seven metal grain storage bins. In and around Pollock, a silo was moved three feet off the foundation. Power and telephones lines were down. Rainfall measured 2.28 inches in two hours in Pollock.

1888 - Heavy snow reached almost to the base of Mt. Washington, NH, and the peaks of the Green Mountains were whitened. (David Ludlum)

1936: From July 5-17, temperatures exceeding 111 degrees in Manitoba and Ontario claimed 1,180 lives (mostly the elderly and infants) during the most prolonged, deadliest heat wave on record. Four hundred of these deaths were caused by people who drowned seeking refuge from the heat. In fact, the heat was so intense that steel rail lines and bridge girders twisted, sidewalks buckled, crops wilted and fruit baked on trees. Some record temperatures include; 112 degrees at St. Albans and Emerson, Manitoba, 111 at Brandon, Manitoba, 108 at Atikokan, Ontario, and Winnipeg, Manitoba.

1987 - Early morning thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 90 mph at Parkston, SD, and wind gusts to 87 mph at Buffalo, MN. Later in the day strong thunderstorm winds at Howard WI collapsed a circus tent injuring 44 persons. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced heavy rain in southern Texas, with totals ranging up to 13 inches near Medina. Two men drowned when their pick-up truck was swept into the Guadalupe River, west of the town of Hunt. Ten cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Baltimore, MD, reported a record high reading of 102 degrees for the second day in a row. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather from North Dakota to Indiana. Thunderstorms in North Dakota produced tennis ball size hail at Carson. Thunderstorms in Indiana produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Fort Wayne. Five cities in the Southern Atlantic Coast Region reported record high temperatures for the date, including Lakeland, FL, with a reading of 100 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990: The costliest hailstorm in U.S. history occurred along the Front Range of the Colorado Rockies. (Denver, Colorado): Softball-sized hail destroyed roofs and cars, causing more than \$600 million in total damage.

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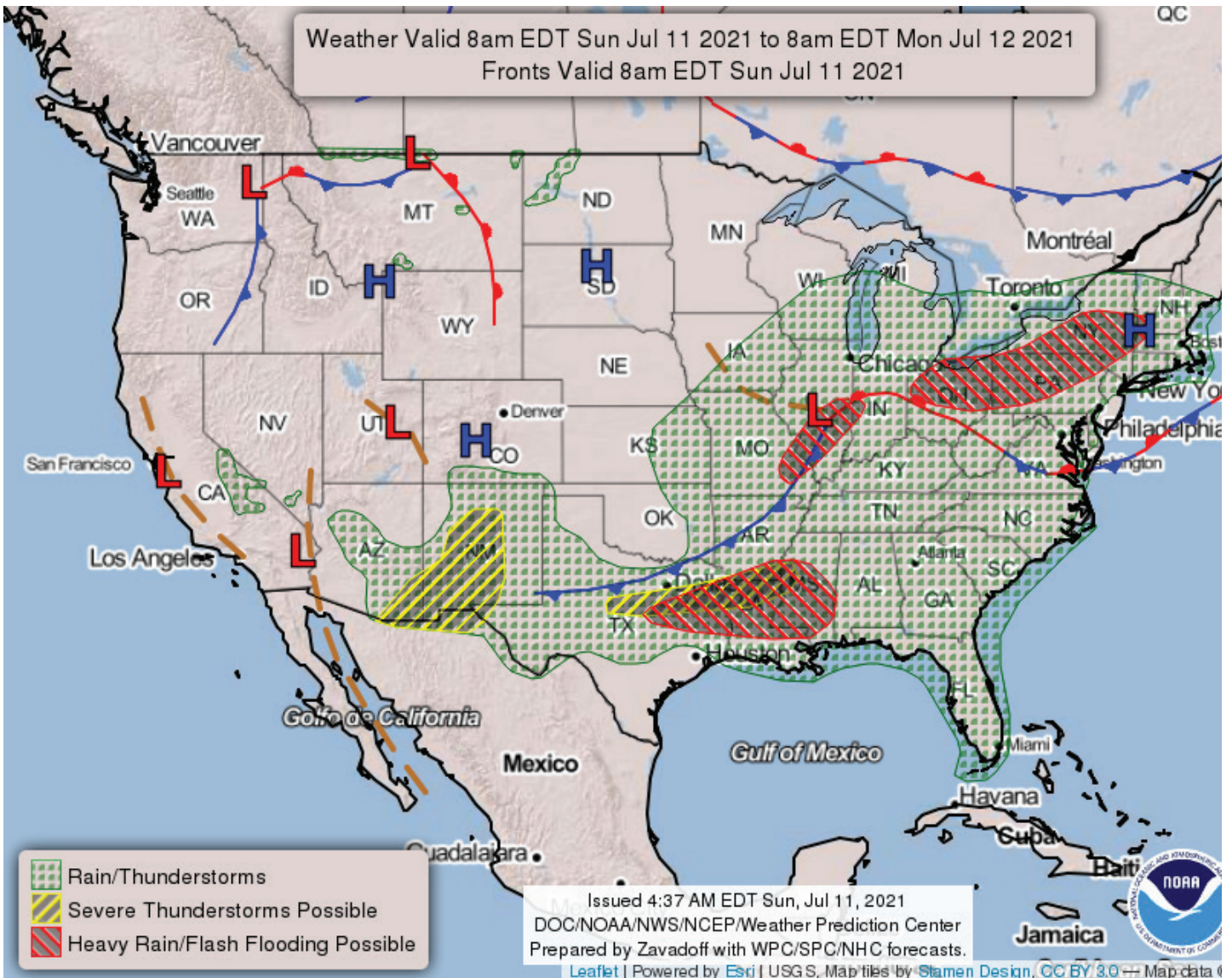
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 81 °F at 5:13 PM
Low Temp: 63 °F at 9:02 AM
Wind: 16 mph at 7:17 AM
Precip: Total Rain: 1.04

Today's Info

Record High: 110° in 1930
Record Low: 45° in 1941
Average High: 85°F
Average Low: 60°F
Average Precip in July.: 1.15
Precip to date in July.: 1.72
Average Precip to date: 12.16
Precip Year to Date: 6.47
Sunset Tonight: 9:22 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:57 a.m.



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WHY WORSHIP?

We live in a busy world. Days are crowded with more things to do than time allows. Instant texting and rapid responses to anything and everything, whether accurate or not, wants to dominate every moment of our lives. Everyone seems to have an opinion they think we need to hear on every subject – from the mundane to the insane, from the very important issues of life to “stuff” that does not matter. We have become conditioned to listen for something to listen to whether it matters or not.

Psalm 75 explodes with an important reminder. “We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks for Your Name is near! Men tell of your wondrous works!” The fact that the word thanks appears twice in one sentence intensifies its importance and significance. But we should not be surprised. We are to thank God not only for His wondrous works but because He is near to us – now and always! God Himself, the God Who created us as well as everything that is. He Who is in everything and sustains everything is close by.

Jesus once commanded Peter to cast his net into the water to catch some fish. He did and was amazed at the results. The disciple then falls at His feet in fear and wonder. What a miracle, we proclaim! When Jesus spoke, things happened. God’s presence and power in Him and through Him became a reality instantly.

The same is true today. While we may not see many extreme displays of His power and presence, nonetheless He is at work. The little gifts in our lives as well as the immense miracles he lavishes upon us and in us prove that He is near us and caring for us. How unfortunate it is if we are unaware of His presence and power in our lives.

Prayer: We cannot thank You enough, Father, for Your unending gifts in our lives. May we become more aware of Your presence and thank You continuously. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks for your name is near! Men tell of your wondrous works. Psalm 75:1

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2021 Community Events

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

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Saturday:

Dakota Cash

04-06-14-15-32

(four, six, fourteen, fifteen, thirty-two)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,000

Lotto America

06-14-27-28-43, Star Ball: 5, ASB: 2

(six, fourteen, twenty-seven, twenty-eight, forty-three; Star Ball: five; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$7.99 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$104 million

Powerball

01-05-29-54-62, Powerball: 3, Power Play: 2

(one, five, twenty-nine, fifty-four, sixty-two; Powerball: three; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$127 million

South Dakota official: Fatal crash may have been suicide

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's attorney general is attempting to access any psychiatric or psychological records of the man he struck and killed along a highway, alleging in court documents that the death may have been a suicide.

Attorney General Jason Ravensborg faces three misdemeanor charges related to his driving when he struck and killed Joe Boever the night of Sept. 12.

Investigators say Ravensborg was distracted and swerved out of his lane on Highway 14 near Highmore as Boever, 55, walked on the shoulder with a flashlight.

A motion filed Friday alleges a pattern of alcoholism and prescription drug abuse by Boever that caused at least one family member, a cousin, to believe that a depressed Boever killed himself by jumping in front of Ravensborg's car.

"Mr. Barnabas Nemeč (cousin) further explained that in December, 2019, Mr. Joseph Boever ... told me his preferred method of suicide would be to throw himself in front of a car," the motion stated.

Ravensborg's attorney, Tim Rensch, disputes law enforcement's findings that Boever was struck on the shoulder of the highway and instead believes he was hit on the roadway, according to the court filing.

"The evidence on the roadway and shoulder as examined by law enforcement the day after the death of Mr. Boever was different than it was the night before as there was wind, continued vehicle travel, and movement of the Ravensborg vehicle by law enforcement in the interim," the motion read.

The attorney general is charged with careless driving, operating a vehicle while on an electronic device and driving outside of his lane.

Nemeč's brother, Nick Nemeč, said he doesn't trust his sibling's analysis of the situation because he's prone to jump to conclusions.

"The attorney general can throw anything he wants at the wall to try to prove his innocence," Nick Nemeč said. "The fact the attorney general is stigmatizing someone who may have been diagnosed with depression is troubling and insulting."

Ravensborg told officials he never saw Boever and thought he struck a deer.

Hyde County Sheriff Mike Volek responded to the scene and let Ravensborg drive his car home to Pierre. Ravensborg said they didn't realize he hit and killed a person until he returned to the scene the next morning.

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GOP Gov. Kristi Noem, three law enforcement organizations and some legislators have called on Ravnsborg, a Republican, to resign.

Each charge against the attorney general carries a maximum penalty of 30 days in jail. A trial is scheduled to begin Aug. 26.

Tears, politics and money: School boards become battle zones

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Local school boards around the country are increasingly becoming cauldrons of anger and political division, boiling with disputes over such issues as COVID-19 mask rules, the treatment of transgender students and how to teach the history of racism and slavery in America.

Meetings that were once orderly, even boring, have turned ugly. School board elections that were once uncontested have drawn slates of candidates galvanized by one issue or another.

A June school board meeting in Loudoun County, Virginia, that dealt with transgender students and the teaching of “critical race theory” became so unruly that one person was arrested for disorderly conduct and another was cited for trespassing.

In Rapid City, South Dakota, and Kalispell, Montana, nonpartisan school board races devolved into political warfare as conservative candidates, angered over requirements to wear masks in schools, sought to seize control.

In Pennsylvania, a Republican donor is planning to pour \$500,000 into school board races.

“We’re in a culture war,” said Jeff Holbrook, head of Rapid City’s Pennington County GOP.

In South Carolina’s Lexington-Richland school system, a new majority of board members upset over pandemic restrictions forced out the superintendent, Christina Melton, who had pushed to keep a mask requirement in place through the end of the academic year. She had been honored just weeks earlier as the state’s superintendent of the year.

Melton broke into tears at a meeting in June as she offered her resignation. A board member also quit that day, complaining the body decided behind closed doors to force Melton out and avoid a public vote. The board censured the departed member at its next meeting.

“Now we’re known as the district with the crazy school board,” said Tifani Moore, a mother with three children and a husband who teaches in the district.

Moore is running for the empty board seat and promises to tamp down the political split, which she worries has crippled the board.

“It’s so thick, even the kids feel it,” she said.

School boards are typically composed of former educators and parents whose job, at least until recently, mostly consisted of ironing out budgets, discussing the lunch menu or hiring superintendents.

But online meetings during the pandemic made it easier for parents to tune in. And the crisis gave new gravity to school board decisions. Parents worried their children were falling behind because of remote learning or clashed over how serious the health risks were.

“I saw over and over again frustrated parents, thousands of parents, calling into their board meetings, writing letters and getting no response,” said Clarice Schillinger, a Pennsylvania parent who formed a group called Keeping Kids in School.

She recruited nearly 100 parents to run in November for school boards across Pennsylvania. While the group coalesced around pushing for schools to fully open, its candidates have also sought to bar the teaching of critical race theory, which among other things holds that racism is embedded in America’s laws and institutions

Schillinger said the group is split 70-30 between Republicans and Democrats. But its priorities are unmistakably conservative. She said it is trying to counter the sway teachers unions have over school boards: “It’s really less government — that’s what this comes down to.”

Paul Martino, a venture capitalist who donates to Republican candidates and pledged a half-million dollars to the movement and the creation of a statewide political action committee, said the new PAC will

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support candidates committed to keeping schools open no matter what, "even if there is the dreaded fall COVID surge."

Conservative slates of candidates elsewhere across the country have also set their sights on school boards.

In Rapid City, four recently elected school board members will hold a controlling vote on the seven-member body, which oversees the education of roughly 14,000 students. In an area where Trump flags still fly, the four candidates for the usually nonpartisan board secured an endorsement in the June election from the local GOP.

In previous elections, seats on the board were often filled in uncontested elections. But this year, the campaigns turned into political battles, complete with personal attacks.

Critical race theory is not a part of the Rapid City school curriculum. But that didn't stop candidates from making it a central issue of the campaign.

"I believe with all my heart this is how they are going to slip socialism and Marxism into our schools," newly elected member Deb Baker said at a campaign event.

Curt Pochardt, who was unseated as the school board president in the election, said he worries the new partisan dynamic will hurt students' education.

"It doesn't help kids when there's tension on a school board," he said.

Education experts warn that school boards are squandering time that could be spent tackling issues such as recruiting teachers, ensuring students have internet access at home or improving opportunities for youngsters with disabilities.

"Every time we're not talking about those issues and we're talking about something else that's divisive and it may not be happening at all — or at least not to the level it's being portrayed — is lost opportunity for what we really need to be focused on," said Chip Slaven, chief advocacy officer for the National School Boards Association.

In Kalispell, one losing school board candidate who campaigned against mask mandates made it clear he is not finished.

"I am the barbed spine of the jumping cholla cactus," Sean Pandina told the board in May. "I'm the cholla in your flesh that you cannot remove. I'm comfortable with losing the election because I have latched on and am not going away."

Yellen: US regulators to assess risk posed by climate change

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen says she will lead an effort by top U.S. regulators to assess the potential risk that climate change poses to America's financial system, part of a wide-ranging initiative launched by the Biden administration.

Yellen says the regulatory review, which will be done by the Financial Stability Oversight Council, will examine whether banks and other lending institutions are properly assessing the risks to financial stability. She chairs the committee, which includes Treasury, the Federal Reserve, the Securities and Exchange Commission and other financial regulators.

"The current financial system is not producing reliable disclosures," Yellen said in remarks prepared for the Venice International Conference on Climate and released in Washington.

As part of President Joe Biden's whole-of-government approach, Yellen said, the council will examine what should be done to improve current regulations on climate-related financial disclosures.

The council was created by Congress in 2010 to improve regulatory coordination in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.

Banking executives are concerned that the administration's effort could lead to increased regulatory oversight that will drive up banks' cost of doing business and lessen their ability to make loans.

Yellen said the United States also intended to enlist the support of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and other multilateral development banks to focus more resources on combating climate change. The World Bank and the regional development banks are leading sources of the loans used by

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poor nations for dams and other development projects.

"Developing countries are particularly vulnerable to climate change with poverty, food security and health outcomes impacted by extreme weather shocks," Yellen said.

She said the administration is backing international efforts to mobilize \$100 billion per year from a variety of public and private sources to support efforts by developing countries to combat climate change.

Yellen said she planned to convene a meeting of the heads of the international lending institutions to discuss ways to better align their efforts with the Paris climate agreement. The Trump administration pulled the United States out of the Paris climate agreement, but Biden reversed that decision after taking office this year.

Since taking over as Treasury secretary, Yellen has been one of the leading voices in the administration to boost government efforts to combat climate change.

The administration is also making a big push to include huge investments to slow global warming in the multitrillion-dollar infrastructure spending measures Biden is pushing Congress to approve. That effort has run into Republican opposition with various Biden climate initiatives striped out of a bipartisan infrastructure measure.

Environmentalists say a larger, Democratic-only package that is now being developed needs to meet Biden's ambitious climate promises such as moving the country to carbon-free production of electricity and becoming a global leader in use of electric vehicles and the creation of millions of jobs in solar, wind and other clean-energy industries.

The Venice international conference on climate Sunday followed a meeting of finance officials from the Group of 20 major economies in Venice on Saturday. That group backed a sweeping revision of international taxation that includes a 15% global minimum tax on corporations to deter big companies from seeking out low-rate tax havens.

The measure is scheduled to be a key agenda item when Biden and other G-20 leaders meet for a summit in Rome on Oct. 30-31.

Myanmar caught off guard as cases surge, oxygen dwindles

By GRANT PECK Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Soe Win stood in line at a plant to buy oxygen for his grandmother, who is struggling with COVID-19 symptoms.

"I have been waiting since 5 in the morning until 12 noon but I'm still in line. Oxygen is scarcer than money," said the resident of Myanmar's biggest city, Yangon.

Consumed by a bitter and violent political struggle since the military seized power in February, Myanmar has been slow to wake up to a devastating surge in cases since mid-May. It has left many of the sick like Soe Win's grandmother to suffer at home if they cannot find a bed at an army hospital, or prefer not to trust their care to the widely disliked government.

Under Aung San Suu Kyi, the civilian leader ousted by the military, Myanmar had weathered its second coronavirus surge beginning in August last year by severely restricting travel, sealing off Yangon, and curbing election campaigning in virus hot spots where lockdowns were imposed.

Suu Kyi appeared frequently on television with stern but empathetic entreaties to the public on how to deal with the situation. Vaccine supplies were secured from India and China. Her ouster came less than a week after the first jabs were given to health workers.

Suu Kyi's removal by the military sparked widespread protests, and medical workers spearheaded a popular civil disobedience movement that called on professionals and civil servants not to cooperate with the military-installed government.

Military hospitals continued operating but were shunned by many, while doctors and nurses who boycotted the state system ran makeshift clinics, for which they faced arrest. The pace of vaccinations slowed to a crawl, threatening an explosion in infections.

"No wise person with a good heart and a sincere desire for truth would want to work under the junta's

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rule," said Zeyar Tun, founder of the civic action group Clean Yangon who helped out at quarantine centers. "Under Suu Kyi, the government and volunteers worked together to control the disease, but it is difficult to predict what the future holds under military rule."

Photos and news stories early last week of people lining up to buy oxygen in the city of Kalay in the northwestern Sagaing region brought home the reality that Myanmar's health care, already one of the world's weakest, was on its knees.

"From Myanmar, our U.N. colleagues on the ground say they're concerned about the rapid increase in the number of recorded COVID-19 cases," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in New York. "The U.N. team warns that a major outbreak of COVID-19 would have devastating consequences on both people's health and on the economy. They stress the importance of resuming the delivery of essential health services, implementing measures to prevent the spread of the virus, and to scale up vaccinations."

By the end of the week, residents of Myanmar's two biggest cities, Yangon and Mandalay, were also having trouble finding oxygen supplies.

Myanmar's new leader, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, in a Friday meeting on COVID-19 response ordered oxygen plants to work at full capacity, including converting industrial oxygen for the needs of patients.

Investment and Foreign Trade Minister Aung Naing Oo followed up on Saturday with an announcement that the government is dropping all duties and licensing requirements for the import of oxygen concentrators — devices that generate oxygen.

The Health Ministry on Saturday reported a record 4,377 new confirmed cases for a total of 188,752, as well as a record 71 deaths, bringing the toll to 3,756. The number of tested people found to be infected is hovering around 25%, and equally alarming is how quickly the numbers have been rising.

The data on vaccinations is not very clear, but it appears that as of last month, only 3.5 million doses had been administered to the country's 55 million people, meaning a maximum of 3.2% of the population would be fully vaccinated with two doses.

According to Johns Hopkins University, the seven-day rolling average rose from 1.18 cases per 100,000 people on June 25 to 6.08 cases per 100,000 people on July 9. In the same period, deaths jumped from 0.01 per 100,000 people to 0.08.

Even those numbers are likely an undercount.

According to aid group Relief International, Myanmar's major challenges are a lack of adequate screening, testing capacity and availability of vaccines.

The Health Ministry announced Thursday night that all schools would be closed for two weeks. Stay-at-home orders had already been issued for badly hit neighborhoods in several cities, including Yangon, and basic field hospitals set up.

Pope Francis makes first appearance since intestinal surgery

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis on Sunday made his first public appearance since major intestinal surgery last week, greeting well-wishers as he stood for 10 minutes on a hospital balcony, offering hearty thanks for all the prayers for his recovery and calling health care for all a "precious" good.

Francis, 84, has been steadily on the mend, according to the Vatican, following his July 4 scheduled surgery to remove a portion of his colon which had narrowed due to inflammation. But it hasn't said just when he might be discharged. On the morning after his surgery, a Holy See spokesperson said his hospital stay was expected to last seven days, "barring complications."

At first the pontiff's voice sounded on the weak side as he began his remarks after stepping onto a balcony outside his special suite at Gemelli Polyclinic at noon (1000 GMT; 6 a.m. EST).

That is the hour when traditionally he would have appeared from a window at the Vatican overlooking St. Peter's Square. Exactly a week earlier, in his noon remarks he had given no hint that in a few hours he would have entered the hospital for surgery that same night.

"I am happy to be able to keep the Sunday appointment," this time at the hospital, the pope said. "I

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thank everyone. I very much felt your closeness and the support of your prayers," Francis said. "Thank you from my heart!" exclaimed the pontiff.

Standing on the balcony with him were some children who are also hospitalized at the polyclinic, a major Catholic teaching hospital on the outskirts of Rome. The crowd below clapped often, in encouragement.

Reading from prepared remarks, he kept one or both hands on a lectern for support, including when he raised an arm in blessing.

Francis described his hospitalization as an opportunity to understand "how important a good health service is, accessible to all, as it is in Italy and other countries."

Although he stayed at a nonpublic hospital, Italy has a national public health service, and residents can often receive treatment at private hospitals, with the costs reimbursed by the government.

"We mustn't lose this precious thing," the pope said, adding his appreciation and encouragement for all the health care workers and personnel at hospitals.

As he usually does on Sundays, Francis spoke of current events and of issues close to his heart. In his balcony remarks, he reiterated his closeness to Haiti's people, as he recalled the assassination last week of its president and the wounding of the first lady. Francis prayed that the people of Haiti could "start going down a path of peace and of harmony."

The world's environmental fragility has been a major theme of his papacy since it began in 2013. On Sunday, as countless people vacation at the shore, Francis urged them to look after "the health of seas and oceans." "No plastic in the sea!" the pope pleaded.

Without citing specific issues, he also voiced hope that "Europe may be united in its founding values," a possible reference to tensions between the European Union leaders and member Hungary over LGBTQ rights crackdowns. Francis noted that Sunday marked the feast of St. Benedict, patron saint of the continent.

Francis ended with his usual invitation to faithful.

"Don't forget to pray for me," drawing rousing applause.

Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson flying own rocket to space

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN and MARCIA DUNN Associated Press

TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES, N.M. (AP) — After a lifetime of yearning to fly in space, Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson was poised to blast off aboard his own rocket ship Sunday in his boldest, grandest adventure yet.

The thrill-seeking billionaire joined five company employees also assigned to the test flight to the edge of space high above the southern desert of New Mexico.

Ever the showman, Branson dramatically counted down the days to liftoff via Twitter. He viewed the brief up-and-down trip as a confidence builder — not only for the 600-plus people already holding reservations and waiting in the wings, but potential space tourists willing to plunk down a few hundred-thousand dollars for a shot at space.

The London-born founder of the Virgin Group, who turns 71 in a week, wasn't supposed to fly until later this summer. But he assigned himself to an earlier flight after Blue Origin's Jeff Bezos announced plans to ride his own rocket into space from West Texas on July 20.

Virgin Galactic doesn't expect to start flying customers before next year. Blue Origin has yet to open ticket sales or even announce prices, but late last week boasted via Twitter that it would take clients higher and offer bigger windows.

Unlike Blue Origin and Elon Musk's SpaceX, which launch capsules atop reusable booster rockets, Virgin Galactic uses a twin-fuselage aircraft to get its rocket ship aloft. The space plane is released from the mothership about 44,000 feet (13,400 meters) up, then fires its rocket motor to streak straight to space. Maximum altitude is roughly 55 miles (70 kilometers), with three to four minutes of weightlessness provided.

The rocket plane — which requires two pilots — glides to a runway landing at its Spaceport America base.

Virgin Galactic reached space for the first time in 2018, repeating the feat in 2019 and again this past May, each time with a minimal crew. It received permission from the Federal Aviation Administration last

month to start launching customers.

Search at collapse site revives memories of past tragedies

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — The mangled concrete and twisted rebar from the collapsed high-rise near Miami triggered flashbacks for retired Oklahoma City Fire Chief Greg Marrs, who spent weeks with his crew digging through the rubble of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in 1995.

From afar, Marrs empathized with the Florida teams searching the debris that was once the 12-story Champlain Tower South condominium complex. The scenes in Surfside brought back memories of the urgent search for survivors after the Oklahoma City bombing, followed by the heartbreak of pulling out nothing but bodies, he said.

It was the same for other rescuers who responded to past tragedies. They say the crews in Surfside will carry on with the same commitment and care, even though authorities this past week officially gave up on finding any survivors.

Joseph Pfeifer, former counterterrorism and emergency preparedness chief for the New York Fire Department, was one of the first commanders on the scene after the World Trade Center towers came down in 2001. He said the Florida crews will preserve any human remains and separate any building pieces that provide clues to the cause of the collapse.

"They are literally going to peel off every layer. They will clean the site right to the very last piece," said Pfeifer, who teaches crisis leadership at Harvard and Columbia universities and has a 9/11 memoir, "Ordinary Heroes," set for publication Sept. 7.

When Marrs first saw photos of the Florida collapse, he said, the images were reminiscent of the destruction at the federal building after a truck filled with explosives was detonated outside. The blast killed 168 people.

In the aftermath, the shells of both buildings were still standing, or teetering, above mounds of broken concrete and twisted metal, with the interiors exposed.

The confirmed death toll from the tragedy in South Florida stood Saturday at 86, with another 43 people still missing. Authorities concluded that there was "no chance of life" in the remaining rubble, but the pressure has not waned for the crews to find victims so families can lay their loved ones to rest.

Recalling his own experience, Marrs was sure the Florida crews would be just as respectful in searching for the dead as they had been in looking for the living.

"They're certainly not going in there with bulldozers and moving that stuff out, you know, not caring about whether they run across a body or not — that's not something that's even considered," Marrs said.

The shift from a rescue mission to a recovery effort does not ease the urgency, Marrs said.

"They're just doing it in a way that is more cautious" and safer because there is no longer a race against time, he said. Crews are likely being encouraged to take fewer risks.

Pfeifer agreed: "It's a difficult task. First responders know this is something very important to the families. They want to do the job even though it's a difficult job."

Sometimes no identifiable remains are found. About 40% of the more than 2,600 people killed at the World Trade Center on 9/11 still have not been physically identified, Pfeifer said.

Crews in Florida, using their hands with help from heavy machinery, have removed 13 million pounds of concrete and debris from the site.

Heavier equipment has rolled in, making it easier to remove layers of debris, Miami-Dade Fire Chief Alan Cominsky said.

"We are expecting the progress to move at a faster pace with our recovery efforts," Cominsky said. He has said that recovering all the victims could take weeks.

Retired Miami-Dade County Fire Chief Dave Downey was part of a crew from South Florida that was dispatched to help in Oklahoma City — perhaps crossing paths with Marrs. He also rushed to the World Trade Center after terrorists attacked.

"Every disaster is different. Every disaster has its unique wrinkle," Downey said.

For the past two weeks, Downey has been in Surfside to help coordinate the rescue mission and now the recovery operation.

"What happens now is that you change your mindset," Downey said, describing the transition from seeking survivors to "knowing that we're going to bring closure to these families, but not in a positive way that we had all hoped."

"That doesn't mean we're not going to work as hard as we can," he said.

Conor McGregor injures leg, Poirier wins UFC 264 showdown

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Conor McGregor sat and seethed with his back on the cage, a temporary cast around his left shin and foot. The biggest star in mixed martial arts was convinced he had just been robbed of revenge on Dustin Poirier by a broken leg.

"I was boxing the bleedin' head off him, kicking the bleedin' leg off him," McGregor shouted. "This is not over! If we have to take this outside for him, we'll take it outside."

McGregor's animosity toward Poirier hasn't cooled, but this fight trilogy ended — for now, at least — with another victory for his more mild-mannered enemy.

Poirier beat McGregor for the second time in six months when McGregor was unable to continue after the first round at UFC 264 on Saturday night.

McGregor (22-6) fell to the canvas and never got up after a punch by Poirier (28-6), who will get the UFC's next lightweight title shot. McGregor's leg and ankle buckled when he stepped back from the blow, and Poirier finished the round raining blows down on the former two-division UFC champion.

"Just the thing had separated, and I bleedin' landed on the wonky leg like Anderson Silva that one time, something similar to that," McGregor said, referring to longtime middleweight champ Silva's infamously gruesome broken leg against Chris Weidman. "It's a mad business."

UFC President Dana White said he was told McGregor broke his shin near the ankle. McGregor will have surgery on Sunday morning.

Poirier said he thought McGregor's leg broke when he checked one of McGregor's kicks earlier in the fight. McGregor disagreed, saying there was "not one check."

"You never want to get a win that way, but what happened was the result of checking a kick," Poirier said. "I'm more than sure of it. He got what he had coming to him. Karma is a mirror."

McGregor dropped to 1-3 in the cage since 2016, when he abdicated his UFC title reigns and accepted a wildly lucrative boxing match with Floyd Mayweather. McGregor has been unable to recapture his fearsome MMA form over the past half-decade — and despite his protestations, there was little in the first round at UFC 264 to suggest McGregor was back in elite form.

Poirier was largely in control of the opening round, parrying McGregor's kicks and landing several strikes before getting control over McGregor on the ground. After McGregor got up from a long stretch of punches and elbows, Poirier knocked him down one last time — and McGregor's ankle bent gruesomely as he fell.

"It (stinks), because I was going to beat the guy if his leg held up," Poirier said. "I need to digest it all, because right now, it kind of feels weird. It's not a good feeling."

White confirmed Poirier will get the next shot at new lightweight champ Charles Oliveira. White also said he expects a fourth fight between McGregor and Poirier at some point after McGregor's leg heals.

"The fight didn't get finished," White said. "You can't have a fight finish that way. We'll see how this whole thing plays out. Who knows how long Conor is out? Poirier will do his thing until Conor is ready."

Poirier also said he intends to fight McGregor a fourth time — and it will be personal. McGregor returned to his verbose, mean-spirited promotional persona for this fight promotion, repeatedly insulting Poirier's wife and vowing to kill Poirier.

"We are going to fight again, whether it's in the octagon or on the sidewalk," Poirier said. "You don't say the stuff he said."

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Poirier stopped McGregor in the second round when they met in Abu Dhabi last January, avenging his first-round knockout loss to McGregor in 2014. Poirier's clear superiority in the fighters' second bout made a third showdown seem questionable just six months later, but McGregor demanded the chance to fix his mistakes and Poirier accepted the massive paycheck that comes from sharing a cage with McGregor.

Instead of taking an easier fight or another boxing match, McGregor wanted another shot at Poirier after getting stopped by strikes for the first time in his MMA career. He claimed he had been distracted by his plans to box Manny Pacquiao this year, and he vowed to devote his full attention to MMA in training camp.

McGregor has lost decisively to Khabib Nurmagomedov and twice to Poirier since 2016 while beating only an over-the-hill Donald Cerrone.

McGregor's star power has shown no significant decline despite the dwindling evidence of his once-transcendent skills. The celebrity-studded Vegas crowd was vocally behind McGregor, who strutted into the octagon with his usual flair.

But the steady, hardworking Poirier has earned the chance to recapture the lightweight title he held on an interim basis in 2019 before his loss to Nurmagomedov. That was the only defeat in nearly five years for Poirier, who has mostly maintained a decade of upward momentum in the UFC.

McGregor was charming and friendly to Poirier throughout the promotion of their second bout earlier this year, but that collegiality was gone for the third fight. Poirier refused to return insults to McGregor when the Irish fighter insulted Poirier's wife again after the fight.

"We don't talk like that," Poirier said. "I hope this guy gets home safe and gets to be with his family."

T-Mobile Arena was packed with a sellout UFC crowd for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic began, and President Dana White said the gate revenue was around \$16.5 million, ranking among the highest in UFC history. The celebrity crowd included Dave Chappelle, Mel Gibson, Miles Teller, Jared Leto, Steve Aoki, Jackass' Steve-O, Baker Mayfield and NFL owners Robert Kraft and Mark Davis.

Donald Trump also arrived for the final three fights and got a brief, loud burst of cheers and boos from the packed arena.

Gilbert Burns won a unanimous decision over Stephen "Wonderboy" Thompson in the co-main event, with the Brazilian bouncing back from his knockout loss to welterweight champ Kamaru Usman in February.

Earlier on the pay-per-view card, Australian heavyweight Tai Tuivasa celebrated his violent first-round knockout of former NFL player Greg Hardy by climbing onto the octagon fence and doing a shoey -- drinking booze from a shoe in proper Aussie celebratory style. Hardy, who lost his NFL career in 2015 after being convicted of domestic violence, has lost two straight fights after a 7-2 start to his MMA career.

Welterweights Michel Pereira and Niko Price put on the best show on the early undercard, and Pereira highlighted his narrow decision victory with a remarkable standing backflip and a scramble into full mount on a prone Price.

Historic Warsaw store, seeking rebirth, hit by pandemic

By VANESSA GERA and MONIKA SCISLOWSKA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — The Jablowski Brothers Department Store was once a Warsaw landmark that revolutionized shopping and brought goods to a modernizing society in the early 20th century. But unlike Harrods in London and other Western counterparts, the business was forced into bankruptcy and seized by Poland's communist regime that took power after World War II.

When communism fell in 1989, the Jablowski family heirs began a long legal struggle to regain their properties. They were preparing to launch when the coronavirus pandemic hit, dealing one more blow to a family business that has seen a history of hardship mirroring Poland's adversities.

"The pandemic hit us in a moment when we were almost ready to go," Monika Jablowska, one of the heirs, told The Associated Press.

The pandemic has created new uncertainty because it has accelerated a trend toward online shopping, leaving questions about what kind of in-store retail experiences consumers will embrace in the coming years.

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The family business started when Aniela Jablkowska began selling stationery from a chest of drawers in 1884. It expanded into the largest and most important department store across Eastern Europe. In 1914 — just as World War I began — the family opened its main building, a six-story gem of modernist architecture with soaring ceilings and stained glass windows that is now a historic landmark.

Today a European Union member, Poland was at the time carved up by foreign powers, with Warsaw part of the Russian empire. In its early years, the company sold its merchandise in rubles, with a catalogue and delivery service that sent goods as far away as the Russia's far-east city of Vladivostok.

The business pulled through two world wars, hyperinflation and even the flu pandemic of 1918-20. During World War II, when German occupying forces destroyed most of Warsaw, the building was among the few to survive.

What dealt the final blow to the business, though, was Poland's postwar communist regime, which imposed a huge tax forcing its bankruptcy, and then seized the store in 1950.

Jan Jablkowski, one of the heirs, says the family feels a "strong sense of obligation to continue" as an element of the city's heritage, and has turned down even attractive purchase offers.

"We believe that such firms, present for many generations — just like the material substance of the city, its squares, its monuments, the street names — are all elements of the identity of this city," said Jablkowski, a retired engineer who was formerly the head of Poland's Institute for Automation and Measurements.

According to Cezary Lazarewicz, author of a book about the business, "Six Stories of Luxury," the store offered a number of innovations to city shoppers -- not only all the clothes, toys and other goods for sale, but also neon advertisements, a terrace cafe, fashion shows and live piano music to stimulate shoppers.

He said the business was "revolutionary" in its introduction of catalogs, making it the Amazon of its age, and in its introduction of ready-to-wear clothing to a huge market.

"It wasn't just a department store," but a place that offered up a sense of magic, Lazarewicz said. "It was an exceptional place on the Warsaw map."

After the fall of communism, the family began a legal battle to get back the building, but it took more than 20 years because they first had to reconstitute the prewar business. Even after the property was legally returned in 2004, a bookshop refused to vacate the premises, triggering more court cases until the store was finally regained in 2013.

The heirs' initial plan was to revive the department store, but with department stores struggling to survive across the world — a trend accelerated by the pandemic — they realized that business model was no longer sustainable.

So they developed a new business plan to open it as a retail space of 4,500 square meters (48,500 square feet) with concept shops, restaurants, and spaces for cultural events. Then came the pandemic.

"The big question is how the business will look post-pandemic and whether the model will still be relevant afterwards," Monika Jablkowska said.

Even before the pandemic, Poland has seen a huge retail upheaval, with international companies like Marks & Spencer and The Gap coming in, only to later leave the dynamic but demanding market where foreign brands compete with Polish clothing makers like Reserved. Online shopping has also taken hold, with Amazon recently entering Poland.

The fact that people buy fewer clothes now and have embraced more casual clothing creates uncertainties about what stores might want to open up in their building, Jablkowska said.

Two business professors who have studied the Jablkowski company, Tomasz Olejniczak and Anna Pikos at the Kozminski University in Warsaw, argue it's in a weaker position financially than counterparts elsewhere because of the way Polish industry and businesses were stripped of their capital by communist authorities.

Other department stores from Tokyo to Paris to London "are struggling, but over their continuous history they have amassed enormous wealth and resources which they can now use to reinvent or redefine themselves in the age of luxury and e-commerce," Olejniczak and Pikos said in joint email.

"They have all the freedom they want to reinvent themselves, but they also have virtually no resources and very limited money," the two said about the Jablkowski project.

Jablkowski says the family is taking a cautious approach now to ensure its survival. During the pandemic,

managers and employees took voluntary pay cuts and the company again is earning revenue by hosting fairs and exhibitions. No key decisions will be made until the shape of the post-pandemic world comes into better focus.

"We remember the history of the past 100 or so years, and we are very sensitive about the secure functioning of the business," Jablkowski said. "For this reason, we are being cautious."

South Africa ramps up vaccine drive, too late for this surge

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Some in wheelchairs, others on canes, hundreds of South Africans waited recently on the ramps of an open-air Johannesburg parking garage to get their COVID-19 vaccine shots. Despite the masks, social distancing and blustery weather of the Southern Hemisphere winter, a celebratory atmosphere took hold.

"What a relief!" said Vincent Damon, a 63-year-old electrical technician, after getting his second dose. "In the last four days, I've lost four friends. All of them under 60. This pandemic has gotten worse. It's frightening."

New infections in South Africa rose to record levels in recent days, part of a rapid rise across the continent, and experts say the surge here hasn't yet peaked. To fight the new wave, South Africa reimposed several restrictions, including shutting restaurants and bars and limiting alcohol sales — and its vaccination drive is finding its feet after several stumbles.

But even as the campaign gathers pace, experts say it's too late to reduce the deadly impact of the current spike. Instead, South Africa is now rushing to vaccinate enough of its 60 million people to blunt the impact of the next inevitable surge.

"Our vaccination campaign is gathering momentum, but obviously it's too late to do much in terms of reducing the impact of this current resurgence we're experiencing, which by all accounts is going to completely dwarf what we experienced either in the first or second waves in South Africa," said Shabir Madhi, dean of health sciences and professor of vaccinology at the University of Witwatersrand.

South Africa accounts for more than 35% of the 5.8 million cases recorded by Africa's 54 countries, although it is home to just over 4% of the continent's population. The seven-day rolling average of daily deaths in the country more than doubled over the past two weeks to more than 360 fatalities per day on July 9.

Its troubles reflect a broader trend. Neighboring Zimbabwe went back into lockdown on July 6, and Congo, Rwanda, Senegal and Zambia are among the 16 African countries battling the new surge of infections sweeping across the continent.

"Africa has just marked the continent's most dire pandemic week ever. But the worst is yet to come as the fast-moving third wave continues to gain speed and new ground," said Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organization's regional director for Africa.

"The end to this precipitous rise is still weeks away. Cases are doubling now every 18 days, compared with every 21 days only a week ago," she added Thursday.

The current upsurge comes while the continent's vaccination rates are painfully low: Just 16 million, or less than 2%, of Africa's 1.3 billion people are now fully vaccinated, according to the WHO.

More than 4 million South Africans, or about 6.5%, have received at least one dose, with 1.3 million fully vaccinated, according to government figures Saturday. Still, the drive is picking up speed after a bumpy campaign so far, marked by missteps and bad luck.

Although South African President Cyril Ramaphosa was quick to respond to COVID-19 and put the country into one of the world's strictest lockdowns in March last year, his officials were slow to place firm orders for vaccines, say critics.

This appeared to be resolved when South Africa's first delivery of vaccines — 1 million doses of AstraZeneca — arrived in February. Just as the government was to begin administering the shots to front-line health care workers, a small study showed that AstraZeneca provided low protection against the beta

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variant, which was dominant in South Africa at the time. The AstraZeneca vaccines were scrapped, and South Africa quickly pivoted to Johnson & Johnson, which was still in testing but appeared to show protection against the mutation.

At first, South Africa received such small shipments of the J&J doses that its campaign lurched from week to week. But then a South African pharmaceutical firm was contracted by J&J to produce its vaccine, using large batches of ingredients sent from the U.S. The South African company, Aspen Pharmacare, has the capacity to assemble and package more than 200 million doses of the J&J vaccine per year, one of very few firms in all of Africa with that capability.

But just as the first 2 million J&J doses produced by Aspen were about to be used to kick start South Africa's sputtering vaccination drive, the U.S. drug regulator recommended a pause in the distribution of the vaccine over concerns about rare blood clots. The suspension was brief, but South Africa eventually had to discard its doses because they were made with materials provided by a U.S. factory where there were concerns about contamination.

A further obstacle came when Health Minister Zweli Mkhize was suspended amid a corruption scandal in which his family members are accused of benefitting from an inflated government contract.

This all exacted a toll on South Africa's vaccination drive. By the middle of May, the country had inoculated just 40% of its 1.25 million health care workers — a segment of the population it had hoped to be finished vaccinating by that time before moving on to the general public.

In recent weeks, the supply issues have eased: Large shipments are arriving weekly of the 40 million Pfizer doses that South Africa purchased. The country is getting another 31 million J&J vaccines, most assembled in South Africa. Vaccinations began for those 60 and over in late May, and schoolteachers and police officers became eligible for vaccines in June. In early July, shots opened up to those age 50 and over, and later this month the eligibility will be expanded to those 35 and older.

Vaccination sites have multiplied from a few dozen to several hundred, and the country soon hopes to be on pace to inoculate two-thirds of its population by the end of February.

The increased supply can be seen at the vaccine center atop the Johannesburg parking garage. It started giving about 200 shots per day when it opened in May. In the first week of July it reached 1,000 a day and last week it was jabbing 2,000 daily, according to workers at the busy site.

Even if the country can manage to get about half of the population over 40 vaccinated in the coming months, expert Salim Abdool Karim said he thought it would blunt the impact of another surge.

"We could basically avert a significant fourth wave, maybe it could just be a minor fourth wave," said Abdool Karim, who is director of the Center for the AIDS Program of Research in South Africa. "But that is contingent on one thing: that we do not have to fight a new variant. As we've seen with the beta and delta variants, a new one could change everything."

Pyer Moss wows with couture show honoring Black inventors

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

IRVINGTON, N.Y. (AP) — This time, the weather gods were smiling on Kerby Jean-Raymond and his label, Pyer Moss. So too were the fashion gods.

Two days after torrential rains and lightning sent guests fleeing for cover and forced Jean-Raymond to postpone unveiling his hotly awaited first couture collection, the sun came out Saturday and the crowds came back. They were rewarded with a hugely imaginative, visually audacious show that blurred the lines between fashion and art as it paid tribute to the ingenuity of Black inventors often overlooked by history.

And so, there was the peanut butter dress — literally, a huge, soft sculpted jar of the stuff. There was a stunning hot roller cape — which was what it sounds like, hot rollers from head to toe. There was an ice cream cone with chaps for the cone. There was an air-conditioning unit, an old-fashioned mobile phone, a kitchen mop.

There was a pastel pink lampshade dress, with beaded fringes. There was a chess board, and a white metal folding chair, and a bottlecap — each costume a sophisticated work of sculpture. There was also a

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refrigerator with colorful letter magnets spelling out the phrase: "But who invented Black trauma?"

There were also dancers, a rap musician, a string section, and a history lesson from Elaine Brown — activist, writer and a former leader in the Black Panther Party.

Jean-Raymond, whose shows always entwine his ideas about fashion with those about culture, race and society, said in an interview after the show that his goal was "to highlight inventions by Black people and show them in a nontraditional way," involving 3D construction and sculpture.

All Pyer Moss shows attract intense interest, but this show had even more buzz because Jean-Raymond was the first Black American designer invited by France's Chambre Syndicale to show a collection during Paris Couture Week -- the event was livestreamed, with officials in Paris extending the length of Couture Week to accommodate the rescheduled show.

And the setting was deeply significant: Villa Lewaro, an early 20th-century mansion in leafy Irvington, N.Y., about 30 miles (48 kilometers) from New York City built by Madam C.J. Walker, the daughter of enslaved parents who became a hair-care magnate and a self-made millionaire.

"Madam C.J. Walker's wealth was more than money," Jean-Raymond wrote in the show notes. "Black prosperity begins in the mind, in the spirit and in each other. She knew that no dollar amount could ever satisfy the price tag of freedom — that green sheets of paper & copper coins could never mend souls, heal hearts or undo the evil we've endured."

Chartered shuttle buses ferried guests from Manhattan and Brooklyn, and the rescheduled show Saturday included a contingent from the public, adding to the excitement in the air.

It began with a speech by Brown, who gave a history lesson of sorts of the Black struggle for justice in America and asked the crowd, "Where do we go from here? Where does the freedom movement go from here?" She urged the crowd to look past differences and "get back on the freedom train."

Then came the dancers — men in white, who slowly shed their jackets and eventually their shirts as they accompanied rapper 22Gz performing several numbers, including "Sniper Gang Freestyle" and "King of NY," while the models walked the circular runway.

Jean-Raymond said he and his team had gone through an exacting and exhaustive process to meet the demands of a couture collection.

"We went through rounds and rounds of design," he said. "We started with a completely different concept. Then the team went out to Joshua Tree and did ayahuasca together. And then we came back with this concept."

"So it wasn't just couture in the traditional sense where were sewing up garments," he said. "There was welding involved and fiberglass molding. And we made shoes."

The hair curler outfit alone, he said, took months because "it was just people sitting there and curling real weaves onto hair rollers. You know, the bottle-cap took two months. Every time we made something, we we sat back, we thought, 'How can we make it better?' And every time the construction got more complicated."

Jean-Raymond was relieved to not have to contend with freak weather again on Saturday.

"It's been a long, long process to get this where we are right now," he said. "But I'm very happy with the results and that the audience gave us a second chance, after that monsoon on Thursday almost wiped us out."

Heat wave blankets US West as fires rage in several states

By DAISY NGUYEN Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Firefighters struggled to contain an exploding Northern California wildfire under blazing temperatures as another heat wave blanketed the West, prompting an excessive heat warning for inland and desert areas.

Death Valley in southeastern California's Mojave Desert reached 128 degrees Fahrenheit (53 Celsius) on Saturday, according to the National Weather Service's reading at Furnace Creek. The shockingly high temperature was actually lower than the previous day, when the location reached 130 F (54 C).

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If confirmed as accurate, the 130-degree reading would be the hottest high recorded there since July 1913, when Furnace Creek desert hit 1,34 F (57 C), considered the highest measured temperature on Earth.

About 300 miles (483 kilometers) northwest of the sizzling desert, the largest wildfire of the year in California was raging along the border with Nevada. The Beckwourth Complex Fire — a combination of two lightning-caused fires burning 45 miles (72 kilometers) north of Lake Tahoe — showed no sign of slowing its rush northeast from the Sierra Nevada forest region after doubling in size between Friday and Saturday.

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The California Independent System Operator warned of potential power shortage, not only because of mounting heat, but because a wildfire in southern Oregon was threatening transmission lines that carry imported power to California.

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Las Vegas late Saturday afternoon tied the all-time record high of 117 F (47 C), the National Weather Service said. The city has recorded that record-high temperature four other times, most recently in June 2017.

NV Energy, Nevada's largest power provider, also urged customers to conserve electricity Saturday and Sunday evenings because of the heat wave and wildfires affecting transmission lines throughout the region.

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A wildfire in southeast Washington grew to almost 60 square miles (155 square kilometers) as it blackened grass and timber while it moved into the Umatilla National Forest.

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.

Leaders of North Korea, China vow to strengthen ties

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The North Korean and Chinese leaders expressed their desire Sunday to

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further strengthen their ties as they exchanged messages marking the 60th anniversary of their countries' defense treaty.

In a message to Chinese President Xi Jinping, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said it is "the fixed stand" of his government to "ceaselessly develop the friendly and cooperative relations" between the countries, the state-run Korean Central News Agency said.

Xi said in his message that China and North Korea have "unswervingly supported each other," according to China's official Xinhua News Agency.

"The world has recently seen accelerating changes unprecedented over the past century," Xi said. "I wish to ... lead bilateral relations to unceasingly rise to new levels to the benefit of the two countries and their peoples."

North Korea has been expected to seek greater support from China, its major ally and aid benefactor, as it grapples with economic hardship exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic and crippling U.S.-led sanctions over its nuclear weapons program. China, for its part, sees preventing a North Korean collapse as crucial to its security interests and would need to boost ties with North Korea and other traditional allies amid fierce rivalry with the United States, some experts say.

Kim said in his message that the bilateral treaty "is displaying its stronger vitality in defending and propelling the socialist cause of the two countries ... now that the hostile forces become more desperate in their challenge and obstructive moves."

Under the 1961 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, North Korea and China are committed to offering one another immediate military and other aid in the event of an attack.

North Korea-China ties go back to the 1930s, when Kim Il Sung, the grandfather of Kim Jong Un, led Korean guerrillas as they fought alongside Chinese soldiers against Japanese colonizers in northeastern China. The two countries established diplomatic relations in 1949, one year before North Korea launched a surprise attack on South Korea and started a three-year war that killed hundreds of thousands of people.

China fought alongside North Korea during the 1950-53 Korean War, while U.S.-led U.N. forces supported South Korea. About 28,500 U.S. soldiers are still stationed in South Korea to deter potential aggression from North Korea. China doesn't deploy troops in North Korea.

Back in Cannes, Sean Penn directs again, with daughter Dylan

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

CANNES, France (AP) — Sean Penn has been to the Cannes Film Festival about a dozen times — from bumming around with Robert De Niro in 1984 to presiding over the jury.

But his last visit was rocky. Penn's film, 2016's "The Last Face," flopped with critics in way that would make some filmmakers gun shy about returning.

Penn, though, didn't hesitate. On Saturday night, he premiered in Cannes his latest film, "Flag Day," in which he also co-stars.

A few hours before walking down the red carpet, Penn sat comfortably in a hotel bar, excited to be back. The festival is the greatest in the world, he said. "Everyone knows it's the big game."

And it's a game Penn welcomes. Cannes is worth it, even if he takes a few lumps.

"The bad stuff, these days, I've been on such extreme ends on that. It's like: whatever," says Penn. "The thing is: I am confident that I know as much -- more -- about acting than almost any of these critics. And I'm very confident in the performance I'm most concerned about."

With that, Penn raises his hand and points toward where his daughter, Dylan Penn, is sitting. Dylan, 30, is the star of "Flag Day." She has dabbled before in acting but it's easily her biggest role yet. In the film, adapted from Jennifer Vogel's 2005 memoir "Flim-Flam Man: The True Story of My Father's Counterfeit Life," she plays Jennifer Vogel, the journalist daughter of a swindler and counterfeiter (played by Penn).

Her father's confidence isn't misplaced. Dylan is natural, poised and captivating. She looks a veteran, already, which might be expected of the child of Penn and Robin Wright. And those critics? Variety said the film "reveals Dylan Penn to be a major actor."

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But for a long time, Dylan never wanted the spotlight.

"Growing up, being surrounded by actors and being on set, it was really something that didn't interest me at all," Dylan says. "I always thought, and still think, my passion lies in working behind the camera. But as soon as I expressed wanting to do that kind of thing, both of my parents said separately: You won't be a good director if you don't know what it's like to be in the actor's shoes."

Dylan is stepping forward in movies the same time her father is withdrawing. Penn, 60, is in the midst of shooting Sam Esmail's *Watergate* series for Starz, with Julia Roberts. But he has recently pulled further away from Hollywood. Penn devotes more time to Community Organized Relief Effort (CORE), the nonprofit he started after the 2010 earthquake to help Haitians. Haiti has this week again plunged into crisis after the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, a situation Penn calls heartbreaking.

"These people have been working so hard to bring their country up and this kind of horrible violence, cynicism — whatever my suspicions the motivation was," he says. "I'm glad that our teams are safe for the moment, but it's horrible."

During the pandemic, CORE has erected testing and vaccination sites, including one at Los Angeles' Dodger Stadium, and dispensed millions of shots. In movies, Penn still has a pair of upcoming roles he says he promised to do years earlier. But beyond that?

"Then I just don't know. I'd be very surprised. I don't think I would start a movie without knowing if it was going to be a movie. And I don't think I'd direct something that wasn't a movie unless it was on the Broadway stage," he says, and then smiles. "There's a simpler way of saying that: I'm not interested in directing for the small screen."

Penn is increasingly at odds with Hollywood's dominant priorities. He's never made a franchise film. He laments Marvel movies and "how much it's taken up the space and claimed so much time in the careers of so many talented people." He misses cinema that isn't "just razzle-dazzle, Cirque de Soleil movies."

So-called "cancel culture," he has issues with, too. Arguing that today he wouldn't be allowed to play gay icon Harvey Milk (2018's *"Milk"*), Penn recently said that soon only Danish princes will play Hamlet.

But his biggest gripe may be with the onset of direct-to-streaming film releases. "The way I've always put it is: It's not the girl I fell in love with," Penn says.

MGM will release *"Flag Day"* theatrically Aug. 13; Penn considers himself "lucky to have a movie that's going to be a movie." But it took years to reach this stage. Dylan first read the book when her father optioned it when she was 15. Many possible iterations followed — Penn didn't initially plan to direct — but the prospect of doing the film with Dylan was appealing.

"I have always thought if she wanted to do it, I'd encourage it," Penn says.

For Dylan, the father-daughter relationship of *"Flag Day"* — Jennifer tries to help and stabilize her scamming father but also inherits some of his more destructive, conman habits — is a half-reflection of their own bond together.

"She always strived to have this really honest, transparent relationship with her father which she never got it in return," Dylan Penn says. "I've tried to have that with my dad and got it in return."

"It made us a lot closer than we've ever been," she adds. "Of course, there were times when I talked back or had an attitude, but it was like: You can't. This is your boss. This is work. This is not your dad right now."

Dylan grants the experience was so satisfying that she'd like to continue acting. Her dad, she feels, may be "passing the torch a little bit," she says. Hopper Jack Penn, her younger brother, also co-stars in the film. The rest of the cast is more veteran, including Josh Brolin and Regina King. Original songs by Cat Power, Eddie Vedder and Glen Hansard contribute to the score.

But the most vibrant parts of *"Flag Day"* are the scenes between Dylan and her dad.

"Dylan is -- and I can say this in equal parts for my feeling about her as a person and as an actress -- as uncontrived as it gets," Penn says. "That's a great quality to play off of."

California wildfire advances as heat wave blankets US West

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By DAISY NGUYEN Associated Press

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Shocker: US falls to Nigeria 90-87 in pre-Olympic opener

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — This is not how USA Basketball expected to open its Olympic summer.

Nigeria probably didn't expect it, either.

If there was any expectation of invincibility for the Americans heading into the Tokyo Olympics, it's already gone — after Nigeria beat the U.S. 90-87 on Saturday night, an international shocker pulled off by a roster primarily filled by little-known NBA players that found a way to beat a group of All-NBA, All-Star and max-contract performers.

"We just wanted to compete," said Nigeria's Gabe Nnamdi, who goes by Gabe Vincent when playing for the Miami Heat. "We know what USA Basketball means around the world and what they've stood for for so long."

The U.S. had lost 11 games before Saturday in major international play — Olympics and World Cups, mostly — since NBA players began filling the American rosters with the first Dream Team in 1992. None of those losses came against a team from Africa.

"I thought that the Nigerian team played very physically, did a great job in that regard and knocked down a lot of 3s," U.S. coach Gregg Popovich said. "Give them credit."

Nnamdi led Nigeria with 21 points. Caleb Agada scored 17 points, Ike Nwamu added 13 and Nigeria outscored the U.S. 60-30 from 3-point range.

Kevin Durant, who had never before played in a loss for USA Basketball in 39 senior international games, had 17 points. Jayson Tatum added 15, Damian Lillard had 14 and Bam Adebayo 11.

"Just goes to show that we have to play better," Tatum said.

A lot better.

The Americans had gone 39-0 in their last three Olympic seasons — including pre-Olympic exhibitions — on their way to gold medals and had been 54-2 in major exhibitions since NBA players began playing for USA Basketball in 1992. Plus, they'd beaten Nigeria by a combined 127 points in their last two meetings, one at the 2012 London Games, the other a warm-up for the 2016 Rio Games.

Nigeria lost to the U.S. at the 2012 Olympics by 83 points. Lost to the Americans again four years later in an exhibition, that time by 44 points.

Not this time.

"Nigeria's come a long way with their basketball," USA Basketball managing director Jerry Colangelo said.

Ike Iroegbu — a former Washington State player who some time in the G League — hit a 3-pointer with about 1:15 left to put Nigeria up 88-80. Durant scored the next seven points for the U.S.; a 3-pointer, two free throws following a turnover, then two more from the line with 16.5 seconds remaining.

Nnamdi made two foul shots with 13.2 seconds left to restore Nigeria's 3-point edge. The Americans ran 9.7 seconds off the clock on the ensuing possession without getting a shot off, and Zach LaVine missed a pair of free throws — the second intentionally — with 3.5 seconds left.

Precious Achiuwa got the rebound for Nigeria, and that was it. It's only an exhibition — but the upset was still of the massive variety, the 22nd-ranked nation by FIBA beating the No. 1-ranked team and three-time reigning Olympic gold medalists.

Popovich heard the final buzzer and shook hands with Nigeria coach Mike Brown, the Golden State assistant, as the Americans walked off stunned.

"At the end of the day, it doesn't mean much in the standings as far as where we're trying to get to," Brown said. "But it's a good win for us. I don't think any African team has been able to beat USA Basketball in an exhibition game or a real game. ... We're trying to get a little bit of momentum for Nigeria and for the continent of Africa."

The U.S. led 43-41 at the half, then pushed the lead out to 52-43 early in the third. But the Nigerians

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connected on 3s on their next three possessions — Vincent, Achiuwa and Nwamu all connected — and just like that, the game was tied.

Achiuwa took one 3-pointer all season with the Heat. It missed. But he connected in this one, as did Miye Oni — who made two 3s in the fourth quarter, including the one that put Nigeria up for good with 6:08 left. Oni averaged all of 1.9 points per game this season for Utah, and made two enormous shots late Saturday to help seal the U.S. fate.

“We kept the game simple,” Nnamdi said, “and came out on top.”

TIP-INS

Nigeria: Achiuwa had perhaps the night’s top defensive play with 1:23 left in the first half, reaching with his left hand to block a Durant dunk attempt. ... Nigeria outrebounded the U.S. 46-34.

USA: Darius Garland and Saddiq Bey were Select Team players who got into the game. The Olympic team needed extra players because Khris Middleton, Jrue Holiday and Devin Booker are at the NBA Finals. ... The U.S. got 32 free-throw attempts to Nigeria’s 10.

FREE THROW DEFENSE

Nigeria’s Chimezie Metu had a brilliant play in the third quarter — committing what would be goaltending in the NBA. Durant was taking a free throw, and as his shot bounced on the rim Metu reached up and knocked the shot away. That’s a legal play under FIBA rules.

INJURY SCARE

LaVine got hurt in the second quarter on a play where he was closing out against Nnamdi. He went airborne after a head fake and came down awkwardly, grabbing at his left ankle before getting up and going directly to the U.S. locker room. LaVine was fine and returned in the third quarter.

UP NEXT

Nigeria: Face Argentina on Monday in Las Vegas.

USA: Face Australia on Monday in Las Vegas.

‘An incredible day’ as Lee statue removed in Charlottesville

By SARAH RANKIN Associated Press

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — Cheers erupted Saturday as a Confederate statue that towered for nearly a century over downtown Charlottesville was carted away by truck from the Virginia city where it had become a flashpoint for racist protests and deadly violence.

It was a day of palpable joy and immense relief for scores of residents and visitors who lined neighboring streets to watch the larger-than-life figure of Gen. Robert E. Lee as it was hoisted from its pedestal and taken — at least for now — to storage.

The statue’s removal came more than five years after racial justice activists had renewed a push to take down the monument, an initiative that drew the attention of white supremacists and other racist groups, culminating in the violent “Unite the Right” rally in 2017.

“I’m ecstatic that we’re here now. It’s sad that it’s taken so much to get us to this point. But this is an incredible day,” said Don Gathers, a local Black activist who long advocated for the statue’s removal.

Work to remove Lee’s statue, and one of Confederate Gen. Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson shortly after, proceeded peacefully and without interruption. It was a project held up for years by a long, winding legal fight coupled with changes in a state law that protected war memorials.

Also removed Saturday was a statue depicting Sacagawea, and explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, which has been criticized for a depiction of the Native American guide and interpreter some view as subservient and weak.

Couples, families with small children and activists looked on Saturday. The crowd intermittently chanted and cheered as progress was made fairly quickly. Hymns at one point wafted down the street as musicians performed from the front steps of a church.

“Good atmosphere, good vibes, good energy,” said Jim Henson, a resident of a nearby community who

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came to witness the "historic" event.

Ralph Dixon, a 59-year-old Black man born and raised in Charlottesville, was documenting Saturday's activities, a camera draped around his neck.

Dixon said he was brought as a schoolchild to the park where the Lee statue stood. "All the teachers, my teachers anyway, were always talking about what a great person this was," he said.

He said his understanding of Lee's legacy and the statue's message evolved as he matured. He said it was important to understand the statue was erected not directly after the Civil War but during the Jim Crow era when Black Americans' rights were being stripped away.

Especially after the violence of Aug. 12, 2017, which left 32-year-old Heather Heyer dead and dozens more injured after a car plowed into a crowd of peaceful counterprotesters, he said there was no reason it should stay. A Virginia State Police helicopter assisting with the rally also crashed that weekend, killing the pilot and a trooper.

"Unite the Right" drew neo-Nazis, skinheads, Klansmen and other racist groups for what was the largest gathering of such far-right extremists in at least a decade.

They met at the base of the Lee statue and then brawled in the streets nearby with anti-racist counterprotesters before the car attack. The violence sparked a national debate over racial equity, further inflamed by former President Donald Trump's insistence that there was "blame on both sides."

The most recent push focused on removing the Lee monument began in 2016, thanks partly to a petition started by a Black high school student, Zyahna Bryant. After the City Council voted to remove it, a lawsuit was quickly filed, putting the plans on hold. White supremacists then began to seize on the issue.

"To the young people out there, I hope that this empowers you to speak up on the issues that matter, and to take charge in your own cities and communities," Bryant said, standing beside Mayor Nikuyah Walker while addressing the crowd before removal work began. "No platform for white supremacy. No platform for racism. And no platform for hate."

On Saturday, there were at least a handful of opponents of the removal present, including a man who heckled Walker after she spoke. But there was no visible, organized protest presence. Many who object to taking down Confederate monuments say doing so amounts to erasing history.

Charles "Buddy" Weber, a local attorney who was a plaintiff in the lawsuit against the city, said in a phone interview that he wondered if history will view the push to remove monuments as a sincere and effective attempt at racial reconciliation.

"My personal view is that this act is not going to improve the life of anybody in the city of Charlottesville," he said.

The city had announced the plans for Saturday only a day prior. Earlier in the week, Charlottesville had finally completed procedural steps necessary under a new state law to legally begin the removals.

After the Lee statue was gone, both workers and the crowd moved to a park about two blocks away for the Jackson statue removal. It took nearly an hour after a crane lifted the statue off its pedestal to situate the piece on a truck and secure it. But instead of dwindling, the crowd grew, many waiting with rapt attention to see it hauled away.

"It's quite a day. It's just a feeling of relief to see that statue be dragged out of here backwards and back into history where it belongs," Rabbi Tom Gutherz of the nearby Congregation Beth Israel said after the truck rumbled off, taking the Jackson monument away.

Only the statues, not their stone pedestals, were removed Saturday. They will be stored in a secure location until the City Council makes a final decision about what should be done with them.

Kristin Szakos, a former Charlottesville City Council member, said that "folks in this community have been trying to get these statues down for a hundred years."

She added: "I think that we're finally ready to be a community that doesn't telegraph through our public art that we are pretty fine with white supremacy."

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

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By DÁNICA COTO and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press Writers
PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Haiti's interim government has asked the U.S. and U.N. to deploy troops to protect key infrastructure as it tries to stabilize the country and prepare for elections in the aftermath of President Jovenel Moïse's assassination.

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.

Mathias Pierre, Haiti's elections minister, defended the government's request for military assistance, saying in an interview Saturday with The Associated Press that the local police force is weak and lacks resources.

"What do we do? Do we let the country fall into chaos? Private properties destroyed? People killed after the assassination of the president? Or, as a government, do we prevent?" he said. "We're not asking for the occupation of the country. We're asking for small troops to assist and help us. ... As long as we are weak, I think we will need our neighbors."

On Saturday, a senior Biden administration official said the U.S. has no plans to provide military assistance at this time. The administration will send senior FBI and Department of Homeland Security officials to Port-au-Prince on Sunday to assess the situation and how the U.S. may be able to assist, said the official, who wasn't authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Haiti also sent a letter to the United Nations requesting assistance, U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said Saturday. The letter asked for troops and security at key installations, according to a U.N. source speaking on condition of anonymity because details of the letter are private.

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

On Friday, a group of lawmakers announced they had 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.

One of those lawmakers, Rosemond Pradel, told the AP that Joseph "is neither qualified nor has the legal right" to lead the country.

Joseph, who assumed leadership with the backing of police and the military, said he was "not interested in a power struggle."

"There's only one way people can become president in Haiti. And that's through elections," he said

Meanwhile, more details emerged about what increasingly resembled a murky, international conspiracy: a shootout with gunmen holed up in a foreign embassy, a private security firm operating out of a warehouse in Miami and a cameo sighting of a Hollywood star.

Among the 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 more than a dozen 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 at Moïse's home before dawn Wednesday also seriously wounded his wife, who was flown to Miami for surgery. She issued a statement Saturday implying the president was killed for trying to develop the country.

"The mercenaries who assassinated the president are currently behind bars," she said in Creole, "but other mercenaries currently want to kill his dream, his vision, his ideology."

Colombian officials said the men were recruited by four companies and traveled to Haiti via the Dominican Republic. U.S.-trained Colombian soldiers are often recruited by security firms and mercenary armies in conflict zones because of their experience in a decades-long war against leftist rebels and drug cartels.

The sister of one of the dead suspects, Duberney Capador, told the AP that she last spoke to her brother

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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.

Colombia's government said they're seeking to repatriate the bodies of those killed by police following the attack: "they have the right to a dignified burial."

"We express our solidarity with the families of the ex-military personnel who died in confusing circumstances that should be clarified for the good of Haitian democracy," the foreign ministry said.

It's not known who masterminded the attack. And 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 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, noncommissioned officers and professional soldiers, earned from their pensions.

CTU Security was registered in 2008 and lists as its president Antonio Intriago, who is also affiliated with several other Florida-registered entities, some 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 is a gray-colored warehouse that was shuttered Friday with no sign indicating who it belonged to. The other is a small suite under a different company's name in a modern office building a few blocks away. A receptionist 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.

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

Investigative Judge Clément Noël told Le Nouvelliste that the arrested Americans, James Solages and Joseph Vincent, said the attackers 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 residents of his Haitian hometown of Jacmel.

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.

Calls to the charity and Solages' associates went unanswered.

Joseph refused to specify who was behind the attack, but said that Moïse had earned numerous enemies while attacking 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 businessman Reginald Boulos and former Senate President Youri Latortue meet prosecutors 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 amid corruption and drug trafficking. The growing power of gangs displaced more than 14,700 people in Haiti last month alone as they torched and ransacked homes in a fight over territory.

Hundreds of Haitians gathered outside the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince Friday pleading for a way out of the country.

"This country has nothing to offer," said 36-year-old Thermidor Joam. "If the president can be killed with his own security, I have no protection whatsoever if someone wants to kill me."

Jimmy Carter, wife Rosalynn celebrate 75 years of marriage

PLAINS, Ga. (AP) — Former President Jimmy Carter on Saturday turned to his wife Rosalynn and thanked her for 75 years of marriage, telling her that she's always been right for him.

"I want to express particular gratitude for being the right woman that I chose for my wife," Carter said at a 75th wedding anniversary celebration in his hometown of Plains, Georgia. About 300 friends and family members attended the event at Plains High School, part of which was livestreamed.

Rosalynn Carter, sitting by his side, recounted how she didn't care for dating young men while growing up and never thought she'd get married.

"I didn't know how to talk to them, I didn't want to go out with them," she said. She added that she used to urge her mother to tell suiters calling for her on the phone that she wasn't around.

"And then, along came Jimmy Carter and my life has been an adventure ever since," she said.

In a recent interview, the 39th president told The Associated Press that the couple's marriage is "a full partnership."

The two met in Georgia when Jimmy Carter, at the time a young midshipman, was home from the U.S. Navy Academy. His younger sister set him up on a date with Rosalynn, who was a family friend who already had a crush on the future Georgia governor and U.S. president.

The two were married on July 7, 1946, in Plains, a town of fewer than 1,000 residents.

Their anniversary is the most recent milestone for the longest-married presidential couple in American history. Rosalynn Carter is 93. The former president, at 96, is the longest-lived of the 45 men who've served as chief executive.

Those who attended Saturday's celebration included former U.S. President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, along with U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Country music stars Trisha Yearwood and Garth Brooks; and media businessman Ted Turner also attended, the Carter Center said in a statement.

Carter, wearing a dark suit jacket with a yellow flower on the chest, closed his brief remarks with six simple words to those gathered: "I love you all very much."

The Latest: Largest Navajo Nation casino is set to reopen

By The Associated Press undefined

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — The largest of the Navajo Nation casinos is preparing to reopen for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic began.

The Twin Arrows Resort Casino east of Flagstaff has been closed since March 2020. Officials have planned a job fair Saturday ahead of the Monday reopening. The casino will have limited hours and a 50% occupancy level for now.

Tribal President Jonathan Nez recently signed legislation that allows visitors to travel on the reservation, paving the way for the casino to reopen. Casino patrons will be required to wear masks and have their temperatures checked. The tribe on Saturday reported 13 additional cases.

MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:

- New virus surge is sending younger patients to Spain's hospitals
- Indonesia short on oxygen, seeks help as virus cases soar
- Malta poised to become first EU member to require visitors to show proof of COVID-19 vaccination
- Mexico enters 3rd wave of coronavirus, infections up 29%

Follow more of AP's pandemic coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic> and <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccine>

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HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Florida health officials reported an increase in COVID-19 cases and a higher positive test rate over the past week.

The number of virus cases in Florida rose by about 8,000 compared with the week before, for a total of 23,747 new cases, the state Department of Health reported Friday.

New cases of the coronavirus have been on the rise in Florida over the past month. The rate of positive tests was 7.8% last week after trending at about 4% positivity in recent weeks.

There were 172 deaths in Florida from COVID-19 last week, the health department reported.

The state has recorded at least 2.4 million coronavirus cases and 38,901 deaths since the pandemic began.

Officials also said about 11 million Floridians have been fully or partially vaccinated, or 58% of those 12 and older.

ALBANY, N.Y. — New York is seeing an uptick in COVID-19 cases as vaccination rates slowly rise, according to the state's latest data released Saturday.

About 525 people each day tested positive for COVID-19 in New York for the seven days through Friday. That's up from 369 people for the prior week — a 42% increase.

It's unclear why more people in New York are testing positive at a time when fewer people are getting tested.

The state Department of Health says a higher percentage of cases are linked to more contagious variants. It is urging more people to get vaccinated.

New York City is driving much of the increase, though cases are also rising in parts of Long Island.

Hospitals reported 342 COVID-19 patients as of Friday, similar to 340 patients from last Friday.

About 55% of 20 million New Yorkers are fully vaccinated. That's up from nearly 48% as of June 6.

Vaccination rates are lowest in parts of western and central New York: about one-third of residents in Allegany County are fully vaccinated. Rates are also lower in parts of New York City: 43% of Bronx residents and 45.5% of Brooklyn residents are fully vaccinated.

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Health officials in Tennessee have linked a small coronavirus cluster to a meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention last month.

It was Nashville's first large-scale conference after lifting restrictions on gatherings.

The Tennessean reports that Metro Public Health Department epidemiologist Leslie Waller said eight to 10 infections have been detected among attendees, but the cluster is almost certainly larger. Waller said it's difficult to know how many other cases there might be because most of the more than 18,000 attendees live out of state.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued an alert asking health officials in other states to contact Nashville health officials if they discover more infections that trace back to the annual meeting of the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

Jonathan Howe, a spokesman for the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, said the organization has not alerted attendees about the cluster and is working with city and state health officials to identify its next steps.

MOSCOW — Coronavirus deaths in Russia have hit another daily record, with authorities reporting 752 more fatalities amid a continuing surge in infections.

Russia's coronavirus task force on Saturday reported 25,082 new coronavirus cases. The daily tally of confirmed infections has soared from around 9,000 in early June to over 23,000 in early July.

Officials have attributed a steady rise in infections and an increase in mortality to the spread of the delta variant.

Despite the surge, the Kremlin has said there are no plans to impose another lockdown. Russia had one nationwide lockdown in the spring of 2020 that lasted six weeks, and the government has resisted another one to avoid damaging the economy.

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The coronavirus task force has reported over 5.7 million confirmed coronavirus cases and a total of 142,253 deaths in the pandemic. However, reports by Russia's state statistical service Rosstat that tally coronavirus-linked deaths retroactively reveal much higher numbers.

BRUSSELS — The European Union says it now has enough doses to meet its goal of vaccinating 70% of the region's adult population by the end of this month.

With infections resurging in many European countries, the next challenge will be ensuring that the doses find takers, as demand wanes in some areas. According to the European Centre for Disease Control, 44% of the adult EU population is fully vaccinated, and 64% have received at least one dose.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Saturday that by Sunday 500 million doses will have been delivered to all regions of the 27-nation EU. She urged member countries to "do everything to increase vaccinations."

So far EU countries have administered 386 million doses for the overall population of 447 million, according to the ECDC.

PARIS — Music is pulsing from Paris nightclubs for the first time in 16 months as other European countries shut night life down again because of rising coronavirus cases.

The reopening of Paris dance clubs Friday night was the final step in France's process of lifting pandemic restrictions. The move was meant to mark victory over the virus, since night clubs were among the few venues that had remained closed since March 2020.

But the delta variant is spreading faster than vaccinations in France, and infections are rising again after weeks of decline. President Emmanuel Macron is expected to speak to the nation Monday about the situation, and the government could opt for new restrictions.

At the popular La Bellevilloise club, many people were eager to return to the dance floor. Parisian Laurent Queige called it "a liberation, an immense happiness to rediscover the clubbing, the party, friends."

La Bellevilloise owner Renaud Barillet said this weekend could serve as a useful test "to see how the public, the organizers, all that reacts and manages to adopt new habits."

TOKYO — Tokyo has reported 950 new coronavirus cases, the highest daily number in two months, as infections steadily spread less than two weeks before the city hosts the Summer Olympics.

Saturday's tally compared with 822 confirmed cases reported Friday. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has declared a state of emergency in Tokyo starting Monday to keep the infections from becoming explosive during the Olympics, which open on July 23.

His government initially planned to take less-stringent measures, but came under pressure to issue the emergency order as the more contagious delta strain spread in the Tokyo region.

Experts warned that caseloads could surge to thousands within weeks as people travel on summer vacations and the Olympics draws foreign and domestic visitors to Tokyo.

Despite the recent acceleration of Japan's vaccination program, only 16.8% of the population is fully vaccinated. Japan has reported about 812,000 cases and nearly 15,000 deaths in the pandemic.

HELSINKI — A passenger arriving in Finland may soon be fined hundreds of euros for refusing to take a coronavirus test.

A new amendment to the Finnish infectious diseases act with regard to border security imposes a fine to a tourist who enters Finland and opposes a required COVID-19 test. The law takes effect July 12 and is valid until Oct. 15.

It already was possible for the police to fine those refusing of COVID-19 tests, but authorities say the amendment will remarkably clarify the situation in judicial terms.

Konsta Arvelin, an inspector at the National Police Board, told the Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat on Saturday that the change creates a completely new criminal offense in Finland, titled "violation of the COVID-19 test."

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Finland has a population of 5.5 million and one of the lowest coronavirus figures in Europe. The Nordic country has maintained tight border control during the pandemic.

BEIJING — A Chinese vice foreign minister claims the possibility that the COVID-19 virus leaked from a lab in China has been ruled out, and called on Washington to release more information about how the virus originated as well as how it spread in the U.S.

Le Yucheng on Saturday cited a World Health Organization report saying the pandemic most likely began through the passing of the virus from animals to humans, not from Chinese laboratory. The vice foreign minister reiterated that the origin of the virus remains unknown.

Le said that, "If the U.S. actually respects the truth and transparency, it should accept an international investigation to find the source of the U.S. epidemic, the cause of the U.S.'s ineffective fight against the epidemic, and problems at U.S. biological laboratories."

While similar to earlier official statements, Le's comments come from a more senior official than in the past, indicating Beijing may be firming up its political stance in the dispute over the virus' origins.

China's outspoken Foreign Ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian, has thrown suspicion on the U.S. military biological laboratory at Fort Detrick, Maryland, calling for an investigation into the possibility the virus originated there. No evidence has been produced to support that claim or that the virus emerged from any U.S. military-run biological lab.

BUCHAREST — Moldova is set to receive half a million doses of Johnson & Johnson vaccines from the United States to help the small nation combat the coronavirus pandemic.

The first 150,000 doses of J&J are set to arrive in Moldova — a country of 3.5 million, Europe's poorest sandwiched between Romania and Ukraine — on July 12, U.S. Embassy officials in Moldova said in a statement.

Incumbent Moldovan President Maia Sandu thanked the U.S. for the vaccines and said that they will "help save lives, preserve the health of our citizens and reduce the force of the pandemic."

The announcement came days ahead of an early parliamentary election in Moldova that pits pro-Western reformists against a Russia-friendly bloc of Socialists and Communists, with recent polls giving a lead to the former.

Only 305,000 people in Moldova have so far been fully inoculated against COVID-19, around just 11% of the population. Moldova has reported more than 257,000 infections and 6,207 deaths.

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — Sri Lanka has launched a massive vaccination program aimed at inoculating tens of thousands of people in the country's tourism industry.

It's the latest attempt to contain the spread of the virus and to revive the lucrative tourism industry.

The vaccine drive took place in the country's southern coast which is famous among tourists for its white sandy beaches. On Saturday, more than 1000 hotel workers, tourist guides and safari drivers were inoculated, said the tourism ministry.

The Ministry said it plans to inoculate 500,000 people who are directly employed in the tourism sector.

COVID-19 has dealt a severe blow to the tourism, which is a vital economic sector for Sri Lanka. Workers and businesses linked to tourism are currently facing crippling employment losses.

Sri Lanka has so far recorded 269,946 confirmed cases and 3,391 deaths.

MADRID — Managers at the Hospital del Mar in Barcelona are facing a sharp surge in infections by, once again, rearranging staff shifts and moving patients around in their sprawling facilities.

The increase in Spain comes amid the advance of the delta variant that spreads far 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.

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At this facility, the number of COVID-19 patients has gone from eight to 35 in just two weeks. That is far from the hundreds that the hospital nursed at the height of previous virus 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.

VALLETTA, Malta — Malta is now requiring proof of vaccination for visitors to the Mediterranean island nation in hopes of stemming the latest rise in coronavirus infections.

Starting Wednesday, visitors must present a COVID-19 vaccination certificate that is recognized by Maltese health authorities, meaning certificates issued by Malta, the European Union or the United Kingdom.

The EU's green passport certifies people who are vaccinated, receive a negative PCR test result or have recovered from COVID-19. But Malta has decided to recognize only those who are fully vaccinated.

"Malta will be the first EU country taking this step," said Health Minister Chris Fearne.

Children aged 5-12 can present a negative PCR test, while those under age 5 are exempt.

Malta, which has a population of just over half a million, had 46 active cases on July 1 but the number rose to 252 on Friday. The government says 90% of new cases are among unvaccinated people. Currently 79% of Maltese adults are fully vaccinated.

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea has set a new high in daily coronavirus cases for the third straight day as officials prepare to enforce the strongest social distancing restrictions in the greater capital area.

The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency said Saturday that more than 1,000 of the 1,378 new cases were from capital Seoul and nearby Gyeonggi Province and Incheon, a region where officials from Monday will clamp down on private social gatherings of three or more people from 6 p.m. Nightclubs and churches will close, visitors will be banned at nursing homes and hospitals and weddings and funerals will be limited to family-only gatherings.

Dozens of new cases were each reported in major cities and regions across the country, including Busan, Daejeon, Ulsan, South Chungcheong Province and South Gyeongsang Province.

After adding 9,700 cases in July alone, the country's caseload is now at 166,722, including 2,038 deaths.

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 of 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.

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.

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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.

Arizona man accused of plowing truck into cyclists indicted

HOLBROOK, Ariz. (AP) — A man accused of plowing his pickup truck into a group of bicyclists taking part in a race has been indicted on aggravated assault and other charges.

Shawn Michael Chock, 36, was indicted earlier this week on nine counts of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, and one count each of fleeing an accident and unlawful flight. He is scheduled for an arraignment Monday in Navajo County Superior Court, according to the clerk's office.

Chock's attorney, Hunter T. Lewis, declined to comment on the charges Friday when reached by The Associated Press.

Several bicyclists were injured June 19 when Chock sped into a crowd gathered for the annual 58-mile (93-kilometer) Bike the Buff race in Show Low, a mountain city about three hours northeast of Phoenix, authorities said. Witnesses described seeing the bodies of cyclists flying left and right.

Chock then hit a telephone pole, and backed out of the crowd as cyclists pounded on the truck's windows, screaming for him to get out, witnesses said. Chock drove down the road, turned around and headed back toward the cyclists before driving away, witnesses said.

Police caught up with him outside a nearby hardware store and shot him. Chock was hospitalized in Flagstaff until his release July 2. He is jailed in Navajo County.

Ethiopia's ruling party wins national election in landslide

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (AP) — Ethiopia's ruling Prosperity Party on Saturday was declared the winner of last month's national election in a landslide, assuring a second five-year term for Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

The National Election Board of Ethiopia said the ruling party won 410 seats out of 436 contested in the federal parliament, which will see dozens of other seats remain vacant after one-fifth of constituencies didn't vote due to unrest or logistical reasons. Ethiopia's new government is expected to be formed in October.

The vote was a major test for Abiy, who came to power in 2018 after the former prime minister resigned amid widespread protests. Abiy oversaw dramatic political reforms that led in part to a Nobel Peace Prize the following year, but critics say he is backtracking on political and media freedoms. Abiy also has drawn massive international criticism for his handling of the conflict in the Tigray region that has left thousands of people dead.

June's vote, which had been postponed twice due to the COVID-19 pandemic and logistical issues, was largely peaceful but opposition parties decried harassment and intimidation. No voting was held in the Tigray region.

Abiy has hailed the election as the nation's first attempt at a free and fair vote, but the United States has called it "significantly flawed," citing the detention of some opposition figures and insecurity in parts of Africa's second most populous country.

The leader of the main opposition Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice party, Birhanu Nega, lost while opposition parties won just 11 seats. The Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice party has filed 207 complaints with the electoral body over the vote.

Popular opposition parties in the Oromia region, the largest of Ethiopia's federal states, boycotted the election. The ruling party ran alone in several dozen constituencies.

In a social media post late Saturday, Abiy called the election historic in that it was conducted by an electoral body "free from any influences." He promised to include some opposition figures who took part in the election in his new government.

The head of the electoral board, Birtukan Mideksa, said during Saturday's announcement that the vote was held at a time when Ethiopia was experiencing challenges, "but this voting process has guaranteed that people will be governed through their votes."

She added: "I want to confirm that we have managed to conduct a credible election."

Voter turnout was just over 90% among the more than 37 million people who had been registered to vote.

The Prosperity Party was formed after the dismantling of Ethiopia's former ruling coalition, which had been dominated by Tigray politicians. Disagreements over that decision signaled the first tensions between Abiy and Tigray leaders that finally led to the conflict in the region in November.

Though Abiy hinted in 2018 that Ethiopia will limit a prime minister's terms to two, it is not clear whether he will act on that.

Desalegn Chanie, a member of the opposition National Movement of Amhara who won a parliament seat, told The Associated Press the election board performed well overall but has failed in its main duty of being impartial and giving fair judgements for complaints.

"Local election officials, armed men and cadres were snatching the badges of election observers and even beating them," he 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 Russia's military forces and a British destroyer off Crimea last month.

The Sea Breeze 2021 maneuvers that ended 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

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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 maneuver 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 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."

Some Texas Democrats ready to walk as GOP digs in on voting

By ACACIA CORONADO and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The possibility of Texas Democrats staging a second walkout to again stop one of America's most restrictive new voting measures grew louder Saturday, as hundreds of people waited hours to rail against the GOP's plan in the largest turnout this year at the state Capitol.

As Republicans made clear they intended this weekend to advance a new election bill — which would prohibit 24-hour polling places, ban drop boxes and stop drive-thru voting — some Democrats who broke quorum in May are now describing it as their best, if not only, option again.

Texas is among several states with GOP-controlled statehouses where Republicans have rushed to enact strict voting laws in response to former President Donald Trump's false claims that the 2020 election was stolen from him. A second walkout by Texas Democrats would mark a high-stakes escalation of their efforts to deny Republicans a major priority, and in turn, put more pressure on President Joe Biden to act on voting at the federal level.

Beto O'Rourke, the Democratic former Texas congressman who is considering challenging Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in 2022, said he has already offered help, saying he was ready to raise money "literally to feed and house the legislators" if they go that route.

"Should we stick around? Hell no. For what?" Democratic state Rep. Jarvis Johnson said. "There's nothing being done in earnest. There's nothing be done with the utmost respect for one another."

For weeks, Democratic leaders in the Texas House have said they are not ruling out another revolt, but have also expressed hope of weakening the bill during the 30-day special session. Johnson, however,

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believes a large number of his colleagues are ready to deny Republicans a quorum for a second time, though most continue speaking cautiously.

"You may know my next move, but you can't stop it. You never knew when Mike Tyson was going to throw the uppercut, but you knew he was going to throw it," he said.

Another walkout may merely buy more time: Abbott could keep calling more 30-day special sessions until voting measures are passed. Paychecks for nearly 2,000 Capitol staffers could also be on the line, because Abbott vetoed funding for the legislative branch following Democrats' late-night walkout. He has signaled he will restore that funding this summer — if lawmakers are around to put a bill on his desk.

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, the elected head of the governing body for the county where Houston is located, said Abbott was "extorting" lawmakers to get the legislation passed. Hidalgo said she would support Democratic legislators breaking quorum again to block the bill's passage.

"It is very important to me to recognize voting rights should be above politics," Hidalgo said. "We can do that with all manner of issues, but not voting, not democracy."

The last time Texas Democrats left the state to deny a quorum was 2003, when they decamped to Oklahoma and New Mexico to try to block new GOP-drawn voting maps. They were gone more a month, but ultimately, Republicans passed a new redistricting plan.

On Saturday, both the House and Senate were expected to advance the revived voting bills, which no longer include two of the most contentious provisions: prohibiting Sunday morning voting, when many Black churchgoers go to the polls, and language that would have made it easier for a judge to overturn elections.

Hundreds of opponents packed overflow rooms at the Capitol and waited for hours to testify. It was the biggest turnout against a bill this year in Texas, where COVID-19 concerns have dampened crowds.

Republican state Sen. Bryan Hughes defended the election proposals as refining and improving the voting process, and said newly added provisions increase early voting hours and provide opportunities to fix rejected ballots.

"Your ballot is sacrosanct," Hughes said. "Everything else in the election process should be bathed in sunshine."

Nacal Tate said she woke up at 4 a.m. to drive from suburban Dallas to Austin to testify against the bill, even though it meant missing her grandniece's birthday party. She was joined by June Jenkins, president of an NAACP chapter in Collin County.

"Hopefully the impact of what we do today will be worth the sacrifice of what we needed to sacrifice," Jenkins said. "My compromise is to kill it."

G-20 finance ministers back plan to stop use of tax havens

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

Top finance officials representing most of the world's economy have backed a sweeping revision of international taxation that includes a 15% global minimum corporate levy to deter big companies from resorting to low-rate tax havens.

Finance ministers from the Group of 20 countries endorsed the plan at a meeting Saturday in Venice.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the proposal would end a "self-defeating international tax competition" in which countries have for years lowered their rates to attract companies. She said that had been "a race that nobody has won. What it has done instead is to deprive us of the resources we need to invest in our people, our workforces, our infrastructure."

The next steps include more work on key details at the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and then a final decision at the Group of 20 meeting of presidents and prime ministers on Oct. 30-31 in Rome.

Implementation, expected as early as 2023, would depend on action at the national level. Countries would enact the minimum tax requirement into their own laws. Other parts could require a formal treaty.

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The draft proposal was approved July 1 in talks among more than 130 countries convened by the OECD.

Italy hosted the finance minister's meeting in Venice because it holds the rotating chair of the G-20, which makes up more than 80% of the world economy. The event also attracted around 1,000 protesters under the banner "We Are The Tide," an umbrella group of environmental and social justice activists, including opponents of large cruise ships and the hordes of tourists they bring to the lagoon city. A small group scuffled Saturday with police after breaking away from an approved demonstration area.

The U.S. already has a minimum tax on overseas earnings, but President Joe Biden has proposed roughly doubling the rate to 21%, which would more than comply with the proposed global minimum. Raising the rate is part of a broader proposal to fund Biden's jobs and infrastructure plan by raising the domestic corporate tax rate to 28% from 21%.

Yellen said she was "very optimistic" that Biden's infrastructure and tax legislation "will include what we need for the United States to come into compliance" with the minimum tax proposal.

Republicans in the Congress have expressed opposition to the measure. Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas, the top Republican on the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee, has blasted the OECD deal, saying, "This is an economic surrender to China, Europe and the world that Congress will reject."

The international tax proposal aims to deter the world's biggest firms from using accounting and legal schemes to shift their profits to countries where little or no tax is due — and where the company may do little or no actual business. Under the minimum, companies that escape taxes abroad would pay them at home. That would eliminate incentives for using tax havens or for setting them up.

From 2000-2018, U.S. companies booked half of all foreign profits in seven low-tax jurisdictions: Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Singapore and Switzerland.

A second part of the tax plan is to permit countries to tax a portion of the profits of companies that earn profits without a physical presence, such as through online retailing or digital advertising. That part arose after France, followed by other countries, imposed a digital service tax on U.S. tech giants such as Amazon and Google. The U.S. government regards those national taxes as unfair trade practices and is holding out the threat of retaliation against those countries' imports into the U.S. through higher import taxes.

Under the tax deal, those countries would have to drop or refrain from national taxes in favor of a single global approach, in theory ending the trade disputes with the U.S. U.S. tech companies would then face only the one tax regime, instead of a multitude of different national digital taxes.

Awaiting news, families of condo victims bond together

By KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — At the Seaview Hotel, 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 Miami condo building.

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

On Saturday, authorities raised the confirmed death toll from the collapse of the Champlain Towers South condominium building in Surfside to 86, with 43 people still missing.

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.

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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 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 synagogue 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."

In Georgia, Kemp sets out to mend fractured GOP

By BILL BARROW and JEFF AMY Associated Press

PERRY, Ga. (AP) — Brian Kemp often tells supporters to "keep choppin' wood," the way the self-described "country guy" urges a steady, deliberate approach. Yet the Georgia governor also says he'll be "running scared" as he seeks a second term. Because precious little about Georgia politics is calm heading into 2022.

A swath of Republicans' right flank joins Donald Trump in blaming Kemp for not doing more to reverse the former president's loss last year. Some moderate Republicans, meanwhile, have cooled to a party under Trump's control. And Democrats have proven they can capitalize: They won both of Georgia's U.S. Senate seats in January runoffs two months after President Joe Biden won the state's 16 electoral votes.

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Now, the 57-year-old Kemp has to refashion the GOP coalition that helped him climb the state's political ladder.

"We need everyone engaged, because we know the Democrats are united," Kemp told a crowd of more than 300 supporters Saturday at his campaign kickoff in Perry, Georgia, south of Macon.

The governor's inner circle planned for as much since Kemp defeated Democrat Stacey Abrams by 55,000 votes - or 1.4 percentage points — out of more than 3.9 million ballots. In that contest, Kemp widened typical GOP margins beyond Georgia's metro areas. But his advisers recognized that four more years of a rapidly urbanizing, diversifying electorate could eliminate his narrow statewide advantage if Abrams, as expected, seeks a rematch.

What Kemp and his team didn't bargain for was Trump losing Georgia in 2020 and promising retribution against the governor and other state officials. Kemp has since been censured by multiple local GOP committees and booed by a minority of state Republican convention delegates who roared for long-shot primary challenger Vernon Jones. Even Saturday, one attendee in a crowd stacked for Kemp shouted "We need an audit," echoing Jones' calls to keep rehashing 2020.

A former Democratic state lawmaker, Jones thus far has proven no threat to Kemp in a primary. But that doesn't mean he couldn't damage the governor with the already roiled right flank, while reminding suburban moderates why they've drifted from Republicans in the Trump era.

"It used to be you never challenged the incumbent governor within your party," said Eric Tanenblatt, a former chief of staff to two-term Gov. Sonny Perdue and a top national fundraiser for Republicans. "That just makes you weaker as a party going into the general election."

Republicans need only look back to the January Senate runoffs for proof. With Trump making false claims of voter fraud, disputed by courts, election officials and his own attorney general, turnout sagged in GOP strongholds and Democrats exploited the melee in suburbs to send Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff to the Senate.

Kemp's plan so far echoes how he won three previous statewide contests including 2018: play to conservatives in rural and small-town Georgia, while appealing to enough moderates concentrated around Atlanta. His argument that pivots from Trumpian drama to continuing 20 years of GOP control.

"Our state's been on a tremendous path here for decades now," Kemp told The Associated Press in an interview before Saturday. "And it's because we've had good leadership, not only in the governor's office, but also in the General Assembly."

State House Minority Whip David Wilkerson, a Democrat from suburban Atlanta, gave Kemp begrudging credit for the approach: "I think he's an incrementalist." But Wilkerson said Kemp is getting credit for the money Democrats have pumped into the economy, saying he thinks people want "fundamental change."

For the GOP base, Kemp's strategy means hammering Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, a Democrat and Biden ally, amid a crime increase, publicizing a letter to the state school board urging members to ban critical race theory from Georgia classrooms and saying Democrats want "open borders."

To the middle, Kemp promotes a teacher pay raise, investments in rural broadband and a GOP version of Medicaid expansion. To all, he touts his "measured reopening" after the initial shutdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic and one of the lowest state unemployment rates nationally.

On the most contentious issue -- voting laws in the wake of 2020 -- Kemp walks his highest tightrope. In a nod to Trump's hardcore supporters, Kemp signed an overhaul by the Republican-led General Assembly that he insists will restore confidence in Georgia elections. The law mixes tighter restrictions on absentee voting and after-hours drop boxes, which Trump labeled as ripe for fraud, while expanding some in-person early voting opportunities. It also gives the state more power to usurp local authority over elections, a move Democrats and some civil rights advocates see as targeting strongly Democratic urban counties.

Yet Kemp avoids repeating Trump's assertion that November results were fraudulent and notes Abrams and her supporters questioned his election two years earlier. Kemp insists it's "simply not true" that the new law "was all done in reaction to the Big Lie" that Biden stole the election. He emphasized in an interview that more draconian proposals, such as scrapping no-excuse absentee voting altogether, "went too far" and thus never reached his desk.

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Liberal advocates have filed multiple federal suits challenging the law anyway, arguing it disproportionately affects minority voters, who lean Democratic.

Meanwhile, the governor's campaign trumpets that he's raised \$12 million so far -- an impressive early sum meant to quell talk that he can't compete with Abrams' national fundraising prowess if she reprises her effort to become the nation's first-ever Black woman governor.

The question, though, is whether Kemp can effectively present himself as an unapologetic but still mainstream conservative in a political climate where Trump casts the longest shadow.

Matt Donaldson, mayor of Twin City and a longtime Kemp supporter, predicted conservatives would "look at the facts" over "a lot of the rhetoric that's out there." But he tacitly acknowledged Trump's influence: "I would tell President Trump that I appreciate his service to our country, but I would hope that he would continue to support conservative candidates for office."

Reflecting Georgia's new tossup status, Democrats are perhaps more bullish on Kemp's ability to withstand the dynamics than some Republicans.

Rep. Debbie Buckner, the last rural white Democrat in the General Assembly, said Kemp made an impression just by coming in 2019 to tour tornado damage in Talbotton, east of Columbus. "That was very meaningful" to residents, she said.

Democrats also vowed to hammer Kemp over his handling of COVID-19, including an attempt to block local mask mandates, but aren't sure anymore of the issue's power as the pandemic fades. And Kemp can point to a strong economy and flush state coffers, even if buoyed by federal pandemic aid Republicans didn't support.

"I don't count the governor out," said Wilkerson, the Democratic floor leader, even if "he's going to have to run with Trump whether he likes it or not."

Democrats and Republicans also largely agree that Kemp has a potentially unifying variable awaiting: Abrams.

"I really feel like a lot of the race will be based on race," said Buckner, explaining that most white voters in her district aren't willing to vote for a Black woman for governor.

For his part, Kemp said "reminding people of my record, which I didn't have in 2018" will corral support. And even if Georgia Republicans run the gamut from archconservative Rep. Majorite Taylor Green to metro Atlanta residents who voted for Biden, Kemp disputed the idea the GOP is too factionalized for him to win a second term.

"It depends on where you are. Some people may say that Marjorie Taylor Greene's a problem for the party," Kemp said. "But, you know, if you're up in her district, she seems to be pretty well liked. I respect the voters. I'm going to campaign on who I am, running statewide."

Review prompted by building collapse closes Miami courthouse

By DAVID FISCHER Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — The Miami-Dade County Courthouse will begin undergoing repairs immediately because of safety concerns found during a review prompted by the deadly collapse of a nearby condominium building, officials said.

An engineering firm that examined the 28-story courthouse recommended that it undergo immediate structural repairs and that floors 16 and above be closed. All courthouse employees, including those who work on lower floors, will return to working from home, Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and other leaders said in a joint statement late Friday.

In its report, engineering firm U.S. Structures Inc. said that during its June 30 inspection, it found structural distress in various structural members such as support beams and joists, including steel columns that are in "poor condition" and concrete columns that have numerous cracks.

"In general, we observed numerous members with visible signs of structural deterioration that have been documented and reported by this and other firms for quite some time now. Many of these members are in an advance state of deterioration," inspector Jose Toledo wrote in the firm's Tuesday letter to Miami-

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Dade County officials.

The announcement about the courthouse, which is in Miami, came during the third week of the search for victims of the collapse of the Champlain Towers South building in nearby Surfside. On Saturday, authorities raised the confirmed death toll to 86, with 43 people still missing.

The courthouse, which was completed in 1928 and placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989, is where most civil cases are heard and contains some administrative offices. Separate courthouses for criminal, children's and family cases are not affected.

Workers only recently returned to the building after working remotely because of the coronavirus pandemic. Court operations will go back to a remote format until the safety concerns are addressed. The court planned to notify people with upcoming court proceedings of the changes.

"They had only been back in that building about a week," Levine Cava said at a Saturday news conference. "So they have everything they need to continue to operate remotely and also at other locations, so it should not disrupt substantially."

Authorities didn't disclose details about the specific types of repairs that are needed, and they still plan to inspect its basement to determine if additional ones are required.

In its report, the engineering firm warned that one column on the 25th floor needed "immediate attention" and urged that it be repaired within 30 days. It also found overhead beams and slabs that had cracks and spalling, which is when pieces of concrete break off and potentially allow water in. In addition, it advised officials to remove heavy items such as books, office supplies and sandbags that were stored on upper floors.

Miami-Dade County is in the early stages of constructing a new civil courthouse and had been planning to sell the current one, which has been beset by leaks, mold and issues with its facade over the years. It's unclear how the new findings might affect those plans to sell the building.

The building underwent a review following the June 24 collapse of the Champlain Towers South building, where efforts are ongoing to recover the bodies of those missing and presumed dead. Levine Cava said those efforts would continue throughout the day Saturday despite bad weather, though work was paused for about an hour Saturday morning due to a nearby lightning strike. She also said no asbestos has been found during the search of the rubble.

"Please pray for all those who've lost loved ones and for those whose hearts are broken by this unspeakable tragedy," she said.

Surfside Mayor Charles Burkett said crews were making good progress, especially in clearing debris from the section of the building that didn't collapse but was later demolished. That section will likely be cleared sooner than originally expected, he said.

"It's astounding the pace at which they're working in getting that rubble out of there," he said.

Several other buildings have been reviewed to search for any structural concerns, and some — such as a condo building in North Miami Beach — have been evacuated.

Auschwitz survivor who fought racism with music dies at 96

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Esther Bejarano, a survivor of the Auschwitz death camp who used the power of music to fight antisemitism and racism in post-war Germany, has died at 96.

Bejarano died peacefully in the early Saturday at the Jewish Hospital in Hamburg, the German news agency dpa quoted Helga Obens, a board member of the Auschwitz Committee in Germany, as saying. A cause of death was not given.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas paid tribute to Bejarano, calling her "an important voice in the fight against racism and antisemitism."

Born in 1924 as the daughter of Jewish cantor Rudolf Loewy in French-occupied Saarlouis, the family later moved to Saarbruecken, where Bejarano enjoyed a musical and sheltered upbringing until the Nazis

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came to power and the city was returned to Germany in 1935.

Her parents and sister Ruth eventually were deported and killed, while Bejarano had to perform forced labor before being sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943. There, she volunteered to become a member of the girls' orchestra, playing the accordion every time trains full of Jews from across Europe arrived.

Bejarano would say later that music helped keep her alive in the notorious German Nazi death camp in occupied Poland and during the years after the Holocaust.

"We played with tears in our eyes," she recalled in a 2010 interview with The Associated Press. "The new arrivals came in waving and applauding us, but we knew they would be taken directly to the gas chambers."

Because her grandmother had been a Christian, Bejarano was later transferred to the Ravensbrueck concentration camp and survived a death march at the end of the war.

In a memoir, Bejarano recalled her rescue by U.S. troops who gave her an accordion, which she played the day American soldiers and concentration camp survivors danced around a burning portrait of Adolf Hitler to celebrate the Allied victory over the Nazis.

Bejarano emigrated to Israel after the war and married Nissim Bejarano. The couple had two children, Edna and Joram, before returning to Germany in 1960. After once again encountering open antisemitism, Bejarano decided to become politically active, co-founding the Auschwitz Committee in 1986 to give survivors a platform for their stories.

She teamed up with her children to play Yiddish melodies and Jewish resistance songs in a Hamburg-based band they named Coincidence, and also with hip-hop group Microphone Mafia to spread an anti-racism message to German youth.

"We all love music and share a common goal: We're fighting against racism and discrimination," she told the AP of her collaborations across cultures and generations.

Bejarano received numerous awards, including Germany's Order of Merit, for her activism against what she called the "old and new Nazis," quoting fellow Holocaust survivor Primo Levi's warning that "it happened, therefore it can happen again."

While addressing young people in Germany and beyond, Bejarano would say, "You are not guilty of what happened back then. But you become guilty if you refuse to listen to what happened."

She also didn't shy away from criticizing present-day German officials, such as when tax authorities canceled the charitable status of the country's biggest anti-fascist organization. The decision was later reversed.

In a letter of condolence to her children, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier wrote that Bejarano had "experienced first-hand what it means to be discriminated, persecuted and tortured," and lauded her educational work.

"We have suffered a great loss in her death," he added. "She will always have a place in our hearts. "

Start the Barty! Australian wins Wimbledon for 2nd major

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

WIMBLEDON, England (AP) — Everything came so easily for Ash Barty at the start of the Wimbledon final. Hard to believe one player would grab the first 14 points of a major championship match.

Surely, it couldn't stay that one-sided, right? Of course not.

Still, Barty used that perfect start and a strong-enough finish to get the job done, holding off Karolina Pliskova's comeback bid to win 6-3, 6-7 (4), 6-3 at the All England Club on Saturday for her second Grand Slam title.

"It took me a long time to verbalize the fact that I wanted to dare to dream it and say I wanted to win this incredible tournament. ... I didn't sleep a lot last night. I was thinking of all the 'What-ifs,'" the No. 1-ranked Barty said. "But I think when I was coming out on this court, I felt at home, in a way."

She adds this trophy to the one she won at the French Open in 2019.

Barty is the first Australian woman to win Wimbledon since Evonne Goolagong Cawley in 1980. Barty was a teenager when they first met and she considers Goolagong Cawley an inspiration and a mentor.

"Evonne is a very special person in my life," said Barty, whose outfit was a tribute to the dress Goolagong Cawley wore when she won the tournament for the first time, 50 years ago. "I think she has been iconic

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in paving a way for young indigenous youth to believe in their dreams and to chase their dreams. She's done exactly that for me as well."

Barty, 25, was the Wimbledon junior champion a decade ago, then left the tennis tour for nearly two years in 2014 because of burnout. She played professional cricket back home, then eventually returned to her other sport.

Good call.

She was at her best at the beginning of each set against the eighth-seeded Pliskova, a 29-year-old from the Czech Republic with a big serve.

Pliskova dropped to 0-2 in major finals; she also was runner-up at the 2016 U.S. Open.

"Horrible start," said Pliskova, a former No. 1. "That's why I'm more, like, proud about the way (I found) a way back in that match."

She trailed by a set and a break in the second, and Barty served for the victory at 6-5.

But Barty sailed consecutive forehands long to get broken, then ceded the tiebreaker with a double-fault. "She dug deep," Barty said, "and found a way to claw herself back into the match."

In the first Wimbledon women's final to go three sets since 2012, Barty went up 3-0 in the decider and never relented. It also was the first since 1977 between two participants who never had been that far at the All England Club.

With an audience that included Prince William and his wife, Kate, and actor Tom Cruise, the match was played under a cloud-filled sky at Centre Court. Because of the threat of showers, Barty and Pliskova shared a warmup session under the closed roof at No. 1 Court earlier in the day.

They smiled and chatted during the coin toss before the final, but once things got serious, Barty didn't mess around.

Right from the get-go, there was not a hint of uneasiness or uncertainty. Her strokes were confident. Her demeanor, too. During the match-opening run that put her up 3-0, love-30 and, after Pliskova finally won a couple of points, 4-0 after 11 minutes, Barty showed off her varied skills.

She returned Pliskova's speedy serves — the ones that produced a tournament-high 54 aces entering Saturday — without any trouble. She lobbed Pliskova, who at 6-foot-1 is 8 inches taller than the 5-foot-5 Barty. She hit winners with heavy topspin forehands and set up others with sliced backhands. She threw in an ace of her own, and even compiled more than Pliskova, 7-6.

"She didn't really miss much. She played everything super deep," Pliskova said. "I think it was tough for me to really play my game in that moment."

The key stat probably was this: Barty won 22 of 31 points that lasted nine strokes or more.

As balls flew past Pliskova, and the murmuring in the full-capacity stands reached a crescendo, she watched with little more than a blank stare. She fiddled with her racket strings as if she'd rather be anywhere else and, indeed, said afterward: "I didn't feel like I (wanted) to be there."

Pliskova's coach, Sascha Bajin, who previously worked with Naomi Osaka and was Serena Williams' hitting partner, observed the scene with arms crossed.

Pliskova finally got the measure of her strokes in the second set. That could have shaken Barty. Except here's the thing: She speaks clearly about never letting anything get her too down, including the hip injury that knocked her out of the French Open last month and prevented her from her usual preparation for Wimbledon.

Actually, it wasn't until after Saturday's win that Barty's team told her that hip was much worse than she knew and should have required two months for a full recovery.

And so, with her typical grit, Barty managed to get back to the steadier version of herself down the stretch. When she got a second chance to serve it out, Barty didn't flinch, even when she had to stare down a break point.

When one last backhand miss from Pliskova ended it, Barty crouched at the baseline and covered her face with her arm.

"Being able to reset at the start of the third was really important, just for me to continue to turn up

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each and every point," said Barty, who climbed into the stands to hug her coach, Craig Tyzzer, and others. "That's all I was really focusing on, just trying to do the best I could every given point, regardless of what the scoreline was."

Abortion drama from Chad stirs Cannes Film Festival

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

CANNES, France (AP) — Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, whose drama "Lingui" has been a standout of the first week of the Cannes Film Festival, has a unique relationship as a filmmaker to his native country of Chad.

Haroun is one of the African nation's only film directors and easily its most prominent. That role — national cinematic spokesman — has given him a heavy responsibility.

"If I don't bring images from Chad, my country will be forgotten," Haroun said in an interview. "I have to make films to give other images of my country, rather than the cliché images of war, et cetera. It becomes more than a passion. It becomes a duty."

Haroun, who has lived in France since leaving Chad in 1982, has set all but one of his eight features there. "Lingui," which is in competition for the top Palme d'Or prize at Cannes, is his first film with a female protagonist.

Amina (played by Achouackh Abakar Souleymane) is a single mother and practicing Muslim whose 15-year-old daughter, Maria (Rihane Khalil Alio) is pregnant. On the outskirts of Chad's capital of N'Djamena, the unwanted pregnancy is a grave concern. It means certain ostracism for Maria — the same stigma that her mother knows herself.

Abortions are only legal in Chad if the woman has suffered sexual violence or her life is in immediate danger. The high hurdles to abortion mean access is all but impossible and often done dangerously at home.

"When I'm in Chad," says Haroun, "I have a lot of people telling me: 'You have to make a film about this subject. You are the filmmaker. You have to become our spokesman and make this film, this subject. We can't, because we are afraid of the government. You can.'"

"I belong to the community," he added. "I am the one who can tell stories that they deny."

The title of "Lingui" is Chadian word that translates as "common thread" or "sacred bond." Vividly filmed with vibrant local color and nonprofessional actors, it movingly captures a clandestine sisterhood in a male-controlled society. Haroun considers it a tribute to the nation's women.

For a year, Haroun was Chad's minister of culture before resigning in 2018 after disagreements with the government. In September, he will hold screenings of "Lingui" around the country, he says.

The film has been enthusiastically received by critics in Cannes, something Haroun says is heartening but not totally surprising to him.

"I'm a cooker, you know, so I know when something is well done," he says, grinning.

Only one film from Africa has ever won Cannes' top honor, the Palme d'Or: Algerian director Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina's "Chronicle of the Years of Fire" in 1975.

Haroun has previously taken a prize in Cannes with his civil war-set "A Screaming Man," which won the jury prize in 2010. At the last Cannes, in 2019, Mati Diop's Senegalese drama "Atlantics" won the grand prize. This year, there are two films from Africa in competition; the other is Moroccan director Nabil Ayouch's "Casablanca Beats."

"We are coming and coming and coming," says Haroun, smiling. "We knock on the door. We try."

With Harris and Hannah-Jones, Howard University is on a roll

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With the surprise twin hiring of two of the country's most prominent writers on race, Howard University is positioning itself as one of the primary centers of Black academic thought just as America struggles through a painful crossroads over historic racial injustice.

But then, Howard University has never exactly been low-profile.

For more than a century, the predominantly Black institution in the nation's capital has educated genera-

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tions of Black political and cultural leaders. Among them: Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, civil rights icon Stokely Carmichael, Nobel laureate Toni Morrison and Vice President Kamala Harris.

But even by those standards, the school has been on a hot streak lately, with new funding streams, fresh cultural relevancy and high-profile faculty additions. This past week's hiring of Nikole Hannah-Jones and Ta-Nehisi Coates serves as confirmation that Howard intends to dive neck-deep into America's divisive racial debate.

Hannah-Jones opted against teaching at the University of North Carolina after a protracted tenure fight centered on conservative objections to her work and instead chose Howard, where she will hold the Knight Chair in Race and Journalism. She rose to fame with The New York Times' "1619 Project," which reframed U.S. history through a racial equity lens and helped mainstream the idea of critical race theory — a topic that has become a core Republican talking point.

Coates has written critically on U.S. race relations for years and is closely associated with the argument for reparations for slavery.

Howard's president, Wayne Frederick, doesn't characterize either hiring as overtly political, but merely a natural extension of the university's motivating ethos.

"Howard University has been on that caravan for social justice for about 154 years," Frederick said in an interview. "Howard has a rich legacy. ... My responsibility is to contemporize that and to bring faculty to the university who are in the contemporary space, speaking to present-day issues."

Columbia University journalism professor Jelani Cobb, a Howard alumnus, described the moves as a pivotal jump in the university's national stature. Howard, he said, had gone from traditionally "punching above its weight class" to "moving up a whole division."

All this is just a few years removed from a period of internal tension and financial scandal. In 2018, six employees were fired amid revelations of more than \$350,000 in misappropriated grant funding, and students staged a nine-day occupation of the administration building over demands that included better housing and an end to tuition increases.

But even amid those problems, Howard has seen a boost in applications and enrollment as more Black students choose to attend historically Black colleges and universities. "I do think that we're seeing a renaissance, and that that's driven by the students more than the parents," said Noliwe Rooks, chair of Africana studies at Brown University. Rooks attended Spelman, an all-female HBCU in Atlanta.

Vice President Harris returned to Howard days after the hirings were announced. Speaking at a news conference on a voters' rights initiative sponsored by the Democratic National Committee, she received a rapturous welcome from a packed house that supplied church-style "amens" and burst into applause when she called Howard "a very important part of why I stand before you at this moment as vice president of the United States of America."

For current students, the school's rising profile is a confirmation of their choice to attend "The Mecca" — one of Howard's many nicknames.

"There's something truly intangible about this university," said Kylie Burke, a political science major and president of the Howard Student Association, who introduced Harris at the event. Like Harris, Burke came from Northern California to attend Howard, and she served as a legislative fellow in Harris' office when she was a senator. "Howard teaches you a thing about grit, it teaches you to remain focused, it teaches you to be persistent," Burke said.

The hirings capped a dizzying stretch for Howard.

Within the past year, Harris was elected vice president; MacKenzie Scott, ex-wife of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, donated \$40 million; and actor Phylicia Rashad returned to her alma mater as dean of the newly independent College of Fine Arts. That college will be named after the late Chadwick Boseman, a Howard graduate whose role as African superhero Black Panther made him an instant icon and shined a fresh cultural spotlight on the school.

Boseman expressed his love for the university in a 2018 commencement speech, calling it "a magical place." He cited one of the school's more modern nicknames, "Wakanda University," a reference to the movie's technologically advanced African utopia.

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Although there's rising interest across the HBCU network, Cobb said Howard will always attract a particular demographic of Black student such as Harris with an interest in politics and governance. The school has produced members of Congress, Cabinet secretaries and mayors. One of Cobb's undergraduate classmates was Ras Baraka, now mayor of Newark, New Jersey.

Rooks said Hannah-Jones' move could have ripple effects throughout academia.

Traditionally, Rooks said, Black academics were drawn to predominantly white universities because that's where the funding and the prestige lay. But Hannah-Jones didn't just bring her reputation; she also brought nearly \$20 million in funding.

"It's a whole other thing when you become the benefactor," Rooks said. "We all learn how to behave, how to act, in the presence of power. If you're the power and it's your money, you've taken a whole racial dynamic off the table."

Still, Howard's rising prominence does bring the risk that it will overshadow smaller HBCUs. Rooks said Howard and a handful of other big names such as Morehouse, Spelman and Hampton dominate the headlines and the funding. She said, half-jokingly, that most Black American students couldn't name more than 12 of the 107 HBCUs in the country.

One possible example of the phenomenon: In 2019, NBA star Steph Curry donated an undisclosed amount to allow Howard to launch Division I men's and women's golf teams, and fund them for six years. Curry was raised in North Carolina, home to 10 active HBCUs, and holds no particular connection to Howard.

The HBCU world still boils down to "five or six schools that really attract a lot of attention," Rooks said, and dozens of others that are "desperate for funding."

Howard's recent fortune, she said, is "not necessarily going to raise all the boats."

Léa Seydoux tests positive, may miss Cannes Film Festival

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

CANNES, France (AP) — Léa Seydoux, one of France's most famous actors, may miss the Cannes Film Festival after testing positive for COVID-19.

Seydoux has been fully vaccinated but she tested positive while working on a film, her publicist Christine Tripicchio confirmed Saturday. She is asymptomatic and isolating at home in Paris, hoping that negative tests on consecutive days could allow her to still attend the festival in the south of France.

Seydoux was set to be one of the most ubiquitous stars at Cannes this year. She stars in four films at the festival, including three that are vying for the top Palme d'Or award — an honor she shared in winning with 2013's "Blue Is the Warmest Color."

At Cannes, Seydoux stars in Wes Anderson's "The French Dispatch;" in Arnaud Desplechin's "Deception;" in Bruno Dumont's "France;" and in Ildikó Enyedi's "The Story of My Wife."

On Saturday, Cannes organizers trumpeted the success of the festival, which is requiring either proof of full vaccination or a negative test within 48 hours for entry to the festival hub. Masks are required inside theaters.

Cannes is also testing around 4,000 people daily. Frémaux, artistic director of the festival, said Saturday there were zero positive tests on Friday.

Violence erupts over jailing of South Africa's ex-president

By MOGOMOTSI MAGOME Associated Press

MOOI RIVER, South Africa (AP) — Supporters of former South African president Jacob Zuma are protesting his imprisonment, burning trucks, commercial property, and blocking major roads in KwaZulu-Natal province. They are demanding that he be released from prison.

Zuma started serving a 15-month sentence for contempt of court earlier this week. His bid to be released from the Estcourt Correctional Center was rejected by a regional court on Friday and he is set to make another attempt with the country's apex court on Monday.

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His supporters in KwaZulu-Natal, his home area, have been blocking roads, setting trucks alight and damaging and looting shops in various spots in the province. At Mooi River, near Pietermaritzburg, about 20 trucks were stopped and set on fire early Saturday, according to witnesses.

A truck ferrying new luxury vehicles could be seen burning along a major road. A truck for the U.N. World Food Program was also set alight, after protesters took bags of maize meal from the vehicle. A large retail supermarket in the area was also looted.

Police say have arrested 27 people involved in the burning and looting, spokesman for KwaZulu-Natal province Brig. Jay Naicker said. Increased numbers of police were deployed to affected areas where they monitored entrances to major highways and searched vehicles. Some motorists were turned away from areas hit by the protests.

Scores of Zuma's supporters who gathered outside his home in Nkandla last weekend had threatened violence should the former president be sent to prison.

Zuma turned himself over to police late Wednesday night.

Zuma has imprisoned for defying a court order to testify before a state-backed inquiry probing allegations of corruption during his term as president from 2009 to 2018.

Unopened Legend of Zelda game from 1987 sells for \$870,000

DALLAS (AP) — An unopened copy of Nintendo's The Legend of Zelda that was made in 1987 has sold at auction for \$870,000.

Heritage Auctions in Dallas said the video game sold Friday.

The auction house said it was a rare version that was created during a limited production run that took place during a few months in late 1987. The Legend of Zelda is a popular fantasy adventure game that was first released in 1986.

"The Legend of Zelda marks the beginning of one of the most important sagas in gaming; its historical significance can't be understated ... it is a true collector's piece," Valarie McLeckie, Heritage's video game specialist, said in a statement.

In April, the auction house sold an unopened copy of Nintendo's Super Mario Bros. that was bought in 1986 and forgotten about in a desk drawer for \$660,000.

Smoke, extreme heat pose harsh test for West Coast vineyards

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

TURNER, Ore. (AP) — The heat wave that recently hit the Pacific Northwest subjected the region's vineyards to record-breaking temperatures nine months after the fields that produce world-class wine were blanketed by wildfire smoke.

But when temperatures began climbing close to 120 degrees Fahrenheit (49 Celsius) in late June, the grapes in Oregon and Washington state were still young, as small as BB's, many still shaded by leaf canopies that had not been trimmed back yet.

The good news for grape growers, wineries and wine lovers is the historic heat wave came during a narrow window when the fruit suffered little, if any, damage. Earlier or later in the growing season, it could have been disastrous.

The bad news is that extreme weather events and wildfires are apt to become more frequent because of climate change. A less intense heat wave again hit parts of the U.S. West just about a week after extreme temperatures gripped the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia on June 25 and lingered for several days, causing what could be hundreds of heat-related deaths.

This cool, rainy part of the country normally experiences plenty of sunny summer days but winemakers are worried about what's still ahead amid a historic drought tied to climate change: Extremely high temperatures could hit yet again, and wildfires are expected to be ferocious.

That includes Christine Clair, winery director of Willamette Valley Vineyards in the city of Turner, just outside Oregon's capital. She watched rare winds last September smother the Willamette Valley, famed

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for its delicate pinot noir, in smoke from nearby flames.

"Last year was our first experience in the Willamette Valley with wildfires and smoke impact from them. Though it was considered a once-in-a-100-year east wind event, we believe we are at risk annually now," Clair said.

In recent years, wineries worldwide began hedging their bets against global warming and its fallout by moving to cooler zones, planting varieties that do better in heat and drought, and shading their grapes with more leaf canopy.

Similarly, in the wake of the Northwest heat wave, wineries plan to protect their crops from more blistering sunshine.

At Dusted Valley Vintners, in Walla Walla, Washington, less of the leaf canopy will be trimmed to keep the grapes shaded and prevent sunburn, co-owner Chad Johnson said.

Workers, who are restricted to morning work on very hot days, also will leave more grapes on the vine so the fruit ripens slower, Johnson said.

He has never seen conditions so early in the summer like those during the heat wave, with the thermometer climbing above 100 F (38 C) for several days in the eastern Washington town near the Oregon border.

"It is definitely unusual and unprecedented in my career since I've been making wine for 20 years here," Johnson said.

June 29 was the hottest day in Walla Walla's recorded history, reaching 116 F (47 C) and breaking the previous record by two degrees.

Climate change, Johnson noted, has become a major concern for him and other wine producers worldwide.

"If it's not this early horrible spring frost they're having over in Europe this year, it's wildfires in the West, with the drought. It's always something," Johnson said. "And it's getting just more severe every year."

The industry, meanwhile, has been totaling the damage from last year's wildfires that covered California, Oregon and Washington state in thick smoke.

So many California growers worried about unpleasant "smoke taint" in the wine produced from their grapes that they tried to get the fruit tested to see if the crops were worth harvesting.

The few testing labs were so overwhelmed they couldn't meet demand. Some wineries opted not to risk turning some of their own grapes into bad wine and hurting their brand and stopped accepting untested grapes from growers.

"Without question the financial toll on California winegrape growers has proven to be unprecedented," John Aguirre, president of the California Association of Winegrape Growers, said in an email.

Industry estimates show California growers had losses of \$601 million from wine grapes that went unharvested, Aguirre said.

"The risk of wildfires appears to be greater today than in the past and that is very, very troubling for many growers," Aguirre said, noting that they also must contend with heat, drought, frost, excessive rain, pests and disease.

Wineries can do little to prevent wildfires outside their property, but if they become inundated with smoke, they can try to minimize damage. For example, they may turn some of the grapes with heavier smoke exposure into rosé instead of red wine. That limits contact with the skin of the grape during wine production and can lower the concentration of smoke aroma compounds.

A report on California's harvest by the San Francisco-based Wine Institute said that despite the challenges, many winemakers are excited about the 2020 vintage.

Corey Beck, CEO and head of winemaking at Francis Ford Coppola Winery in Sonoma County, California, said he is optimistic based on small-batch fermentation trials.

"It was like, 'Oh my god, these wines are terrific,'" Beck told the Wine Institute.

Willamette Valley Vineyards also had fermented small samples of grapes to gauge whether smoke would affect the resulting wine. Its Whole Cluster Pinot Noir 2020 vintage received good ratings from Wine Enthusiast magazine.

But winemaking has become so difficult and competitive that when people ask Johnson for advice about

getting into the industry, he tries to dissuade them.

"The first thing I do is tell them that's probably not a good idea," he said. "It's really, really hard, and it's getting harder and harder."

Police arrest Bangladesh factory owners after fire kills 52

By JULHAS ALAM Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Police in Bangladesh arrested eight people Saturday on murder charges in connection with a factory fire that killed at least 52 people, many of whom were trapped inside by an illegally locked door, a senior police official said.

The blaze began Thursday night at the five-story Hashem Foods Ltd. factory in Rupganj, just outside the capital Dhaka, sending huge clouds of black smoke billowing into the sky. Police discovered piles of bodies Friday afternoon after the fire was extinguished.

"We have arrested them for murder charges," Jayedul Alam, police superintendent for Narayanganj district, told The Associated Press by phone. "They are in our custody now."

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said that among those detained is the managing director of Sajeeb Group, which owns the factory.

The minister did not provide further details, but said those responsible would be punished.

"It's a murder," Khan told reporters as he visited the factory site Saturday.

By Saturday evening, a court in Dhaka allowed all eight suspects to remain in police custody for four days for interrogation.

Bangladesh has a tragic history of industrial disasters, including factories catching fire with workers locked inside. Big international brands, which employ tens of thousands of low-paid workers in Bangladesh, have come under heavy pressure to improve factory conditions.

In similar cases, factory owners have faced culpable homicide charges for negligence, and it's illegal for a factory to lock its exits when workers are inside during production hours.

The main exit of the factory that caught fire Thursday was locked from the inside, a Fire Service and Civil Defense official said, and many of those who died were trapped.

One of them was 23-year-old Rima Akter, who made desperate calls to her family as the fire engulfed the factory.

On Saturday, her mother and other family members struggled to identify the young woman's remains in the morgue at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

"We have checked 36 body bags, but it is very difficult to identify her," her brother-in-law Arafat Rahman said.

Her mother, Josna Begum, cried as officials tried to reassure several families waiting outside the hospital that their loved ones' bodies would be returned once DNA tests were completed. Forensic experts worked to identify the dead, taking DNA samples from victims' family members, and by late Saturday afternoon samples from 33 of the deceased had been collected, officials at the hospital said.

"My daughter worked to provide for her educational expenses. She was attending online classes and exams. I have no one else in the world ... what is there left for me to do now?" Josna Begum said.

Prova Barman, father of Kompa Rani Barman, who died in the fire, spoke to reporters in front of the factory Saturday.

"My daughter's body was found over here. She was on the third floor. The supervisor locked in many girls there, including my daughter, during the fire. Many girls could not escape after the gate was locked," he said.

Other workers jumped from the upper floors, and at least 26 suffered injuries, the United News of Bangladesh agency reported Friday.

The factory is a subsidiary of Sajeeb Group, a Bangladeshi company that produces juice under Pakistan's Lahore-based Shezan International Ltd. 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

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and nations in the Middle East and Africa.

Despite the South Asian nation's rapid economic growth, corruption and lax enforcement have resulted in many deaths over the years.

In 2012, about 117 workers died when they were trapped behind locked exits in a garment factory in Dhaka.

The following year, more than 1,100 people were killed when a building that housed five garment factories collapsed, becoming the country's worst industrial disaster.

Investigators initially said those accused of wrongdoing would be charged with culpable homicide, which carries a maximum punishment of seven years in jail. They later changed the charges to murder due to the gravity of the disaster.

However, powerful factory owners often take advantage of the slow pace of the legal system, dragging out the process for years. The murder cases in the 2013 factory collapse are still ongoing.

The tragedy did spark tougher safety rules for the garment industry, but many other sectors fail to maintain safety standards and 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, killing at least 67 people.

Tears, politics and money: School boards become battle zones

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Local school boards around the country are increasingly becoming cauldrons of anger and political division, boiling with disputes over such issues as COVID-19 mask rules, the treatment of transgender students and how to teach the history of racism and slavery in America.

Meetings that were once orderly, even boring, have turned ugly. School board elections that were once uncontested have drawn slates of candidates galvanized by one issue or another.

A June school board meeting in Loudoun County, Virginia, that dealt with transgender students and the teaching of "critical race theory" became so unruly that one person was arrested for disorderly conduct and another was cited for trespassing.

In Rapid City, South Dakota, and Kalispell, Montana, nonpartisan school board races devolved into political warfare as conservative candidates, angered over requirements to wear masks in schools, sought to seize control.

In Pennsylvania, a Republican donor is planning to pour \$500,000 into school board races.

"We're in a culture war," said Jeff Holbrook, head of Rapid City's Pennington County GOP.

In South Carolina's Lexington-Richland school system, a new majority of board members upset over pandemic restrictions forced out the superintendent, Christina Melton, who had pushed to keep a mask requirement in place through the end of the academic year. She had been honored just weeks earlier as the state's superintendent of the year.

Melton broke into tears at a meeting in June as she offered her resignation. A board member also quit that day, complaining the body decided behind closed doors to force Melton out and avoid a public vote. The board censured the departed member at its next meeting.

"Now we're known as the district with the crazy school board," said Tifani Moore, a mother with three children and a husband who teaches in the district.

Moore is running for the empty board seat and promises to tamp down the political split, which she worries has crippled the board.

"It's so thick, even the kids feel it," she said.

School boards are typically composed of former educators and parents whose job, at least until recently, mostly consisted of ironing out budgets, discussing the lunch menu or hiring superintendents.

But online meetings during the pandemic made it easier for parents to tune in. And the crisis gave new gravity to school board decisions. Parents worried their children were falling behind because of remote learning or clashed over how serious the health risks were.

"I saw over and over again frustrated parents, thousands of parents, calling into their board meetings,

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writing letters and getting no response," said Clarice Schillinger, a Pennsylvania parent who formed a group called Keeping Kids in School.

She recruited nearly 100 parents to run in November for school boards across Pennsylvania. While the group coalesced around pushing for schools to fully open, its candidates have also sought to bar the teaching of critical race theory, which among other things holds that racism is embedded in America's laws and institutions.

Schillinger said the group is split 70-30 between Republicans and Democrats. But its priorities are unmistakably conservative. She said it is trying to counter the sway teachers unions have over school boards: "It's really less government — that's what this comes down to."

Paul Martino, a venture capitalist who donates to Republican candidates and pledged a half-million dollars to the movement and the creation of a statewide political action committee, said the new PAC will support candidates committed to keeping schools open no matter what, "even if there is the dreaded fall COVID surge."

Conservative slates of candidates elsewhere across the country have also set their sights on school boards. In Rapid City, four recently elected school board members will hold a controlling vote on the seven-member body, which oversees the education of roughly 14,000 students. In an area where Trump flags still fly, the four candidates for the usually nonpartisan board secured an endorsement in the June election from the local GOP.

In previous elections, seats on the board were often filled in uncontested elections. But this year, the campaigns turned into political battles, complete with personal attacks.

Critical race theory is not a part of the Rapid City school curriculum. But that didn't stop candidates from making it a central issue of the campaign.

"I believe with all my heart this is how they are going to slip socialism and Marxism into our schools," newly elected member Deb Baker said at a campaign event.

Curt Pochardt, who was unseated as the school board president in the election, said he worries the new partisan dynamic will hurt students' education.

"It doesn't help kids when there's tension on a school board," he said.

Education experts warn that school boards are squandering time that could be spent tackling issues such as recruiting teachers, ensuring students have internet access at home or improving opportunities for youngsters with disabilities.

"Every time we're not talking about those issues and we're talking about something else that's divisive and it may not be happening at all — or at least not to the level it's being portrayed — is lost opportunity for what we really need to be focused on," said Chip Slaven, chief advocacy officer for the National School Boards Association.

In Kalispell, one losing school board candidate who campaigned against mask mandates made it clear he is not finished.

"I am the barbed spine of the jumping cholla cactus," Sean Pandina told the board in May. "I'm the cholla in your flesh that you cannot remove. I'm comfortable with losing the election because I have latched on and am not going away."

Democrats craft voting bill with eye on Supreme Court fight

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As congressional Democrats gear up for another bruising legislative push to expand voting rights, much of their attention has quietly focused on a small yet crucial voting bloc with the power to scuttle their plans: the nine Supreme Court justices.

Democrats face dim prospects for passing voting legislation through a narrowly divided Congress, where an issue that once drew compromise has become an increasingly partisan flashpoint. But as they look to reinstate key parts of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, a landmark civil rights-era law diminished over the past decade by Supreme Court rulings, they have accepted the reality that any bill they pass probably will

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wind up in litigation — and ultimately back before the high court.

The task of building a more durable Voting Rights Act got harder when the high court's conservative majority on July 1 issued its second major ruling in eight years narrowing the law's once robust power.

"What it feels like is a shifting of the goal posts," said Damon Hewitt, the president and executive director of the left-leaning Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

Sparring in Congress for months has focused on a different Democratic bill overhauling elections, known as the For the People Act, which Republican senators blocked from debate on the chamber's floor last month.

Separately, however, Democrats have held a marathon series of low-key "field hearings" to prepare for votes on a second measure, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which could come to the House floor for a vote in September. The bill would allow courts and the Department of Justice to once again police changes to voting rules in places with a history of electoral discrimination against minorities, a practice the Supreme Court put on hold in 2013.

Democrats hope the hearings they have conducted with little fanfare will help build a legislative record that could withstand a court challenge. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Friday that the process will document what he called "the disgraceful tactics that Republican-led state legislatures are using across the country to keep people from voting."

That's criticism that Republicans reject, arguing that the courts and Democratic administrations have selectively enforced the law in the past.

"It's not a coincidence that a decade of court cases were only focused on Republican states," said Rep. Rodney Davis, an Illinois Republican who sits on a committee that conducted the field hearings.

Pressure has built for months on congressional Democrats to counteract a concerted state-level Republican push to enact new voting restrictions, inspired by President Donald Trump's false claims of a stolen 2020 election. But there is a new sense of urgency among many in the party's activist base following the Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee*, which upheld two restrictive Arizona laws and will limit the ability to challenge voting restrictions in court.

"We cannot wait until October or November," said Rep. Joyce Beatty, an Ohio Democrat who chairs the Congressional Black Caucus.

While the specifics of the legislation have not yet been released, it would develop a new formula for determining which states and local governments would be subject to a review process known as "pre-clearance." The court blocked the practice in 2013, reasoning that the formula used to determine which places are subjected to it was outdated and unfairly punitive. But the court also ruled that Congress could develop a new formula.

Though laws and rules already in place wouldn't be subject to a retooled Voting Rights Act, future ones would.

"We want to get our work done, but it has to be data-focused and defensible within the courts," said Rep. Pete Aguilar, a California Democrat who serves on a committee that has held many of the hearings.

Yet serious questions remain about whether the Supreme Court, which has a new and expanded conservative majority, would still be receptive to a new preclearance formula.

There's also been a major shift in the Republican Party.

The Voting Rights Act enjoyed bipartisan support in Congress for decades. It was reauthorized five times with commanding majorities, the most recent in 2006. But the bipartisan support eroded dramatically after the court's first ruling, in 2013, in the case of *Shelby County, Alabama, v. Holder*.

"If you look at the sea change in the politics, it all stems from Shelby and the political opportunity that it offers," Hewitt said.

Republicans say vast strides have been made in ballot access since the civil rights era, which is when the law's preclearance formula was first established. The initial law targeted states and localities with low minority turnout and a history of using hurdles such as literacy tests and poll taxes to disenfranchise minority voters.

Such barriers are no longer used, and Republicans point to a swell of minority turnout in the last election as proof that many conservative-leaning states, particularly in the South, should not be subjected to

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preclearance.

They also point blame at Democrats, who in 2019 rejected a bipartisan bill to reestablish preclearance. Many Democrats instead favored their own measure, which would have eschewed the use of minority voter turnout data, a pillar of the original Voting Rights Act, while leaning heavily on looser standards, such as using the number of legal settlements and consent decrees issued in voting rights cases, to pull places into preclearance.

That would, Republicans argue, play into the hands of Democrats, who have built a sophisticated and well-funded legal effort to challenge voting rules in conservative-leaning states.

"It shunned objective data," said Jason Snead, executive director of the conservative Honest Elections Project. "They want to target Georgia and Texas and Florida. But when you actually look at turnout data, it's Massachusetts that has half the Black turnout rate that Georgia does. That's why you get these games being played."

Regardless, Democrats have a difficult climb to enacting their new bill under current Senate filibuster rules, which require 60 votes to advance legislation in a chamber that is split 50-50 between Republicans and Democrats.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has made clear his opposition. He said last month that Democrats were aiming to achieve through the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act what they couldn't through their other elections bill, the For the People Act.

"It's against the law to discriminate in voting on the basis of race already," he said. "It is unnecessary."

Tokyo Olympics: Spectators also barred from outlying venues

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Two more prefectures outside the immediate Tokyo area have decided to bar fans from attending Olympic events because of rising coronavirus infections, Tokyo Olympic organizers confirmed on Saturday with the pandemic-delayed games opening in just under two weeks.

Tokyo organizers and the IOC earlier in the week barred all fans from venues in Tokyo and three neighboring prefectures. They make up the overwhelming majority of Olympic venues, although a smattering of outlying areas were allowed initially to have limited attendance.

All fans from abroad were banned months ago.

Now, two prefectures that were permitted to have fans have backed out of those plans.

Fukushima prefecture in northeastern Japan has decided to hold its baseball and softball events without spectators. It has been joined by the northern prefecture of Hokkaido, which will hold soccer games without fans at the Sapporo Dome.

"Many people including children have been looking forward to the games, and I'm very sorry to take away their chance of watching baseball and softball at the stadium," Fukushima Governor Masao Uchibori said Saturday. "It was a very tough decision to make."

Fukushima was the early focus of the Olympics, trying to shine a light on recovery efforts in an area devastated in 2011 by an earthquake, tsunami, and the subsequent meltdown of three nuclear reactors.

Uchibori said the move by Hokkaido on Friday encouraged him to follow suit. He said it was important to have consistency among prefectures.

A few other events being held in the outlying prefectures of Miyagi, Shizuoka and Ibaraki will go ahead with limited spectators, organizers said Saturday.

IOC President Thomas Bach probably didn't notice, but on Saturday about 40 people staged a small anti-Olympic protest outside the five-star hotel where he is self-isolating after arriving in Tokyo on Thursday.

"He (Bach) seems not to have thought anything about our critical situation and suffering, which makes me more angry," protester Ayako Yoshida said.

Polls have shown between 50-80% of Japanese oppose holding the Olympics, depending on how the question is phrased. But opponents have failed to marshal large turnouts in the streets.

Protesters carried a sign in English that read "Cancel the Tokyo Olympics" and one that had a red line

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drawn through the face of Bach and was captioned: "You Are Not Welcome."

Tokyo registered 950 new infections on Saturday, the 21st straight day that infections were higher than a week previous. It was the highest since 1,010 were reported on May 13.

Japan has attributed about 15,000 deaths to COVID-19 with 16.8% of the population fully vaccinated. The pandemic has not been as severe in Japan as other places, but the country has not performed as well as some of its Asian neighbors.

Infections are popping up as thousands of athletes and officials start entering Japan with the opening ceremony set for July 23.

Organizers on Saturday said 18 people holding Olympic accreditations have tested positive since July 1. Most are listed as "residents of Japan." Organizers include few details in the list, which they say is to protect privacy.

Only two of the 18 are listed as "non-residents of Japan." Most are listed as "contractors" working for Tokyo 2020. One member of the "media" is included. Three cases are listed as "games-connected personnel."

Organizers say the list does not include all positive tests. Athletes who may have tested positive in training camp situations may not be included.

A Lithuanian Olympic swimmer who arrived Wednesday and tested negative subsequently tested positive at his training camp venue. On Saturday, he tested negative at a local hospital in Hiratsuka City near Tokyo, the city said.

About 11,000 Olympic athletes are to enter Tokyo along with tens of thousands of support staff, judges, officials, media, and broadcasters. The Paralympics involve 4,400 athletes and open on Aug. 24.

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 issued draft measures that 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.

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"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.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, July 11, the 192nd day of 2021. There are 173 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 11, 1995, the U.N.-designated "safe haven" of Srebrenica (sreh-breh-NEET'-sah) in Bosnia-Herzegovina fell to Bosnian Serb forces, who then carried out the killings of more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys.

On this date:

In 1798, the U.S. Marine Corps was formally re-established by a congressional act that also created the U.S. Marine Band.

In 1804, Vice President Aaron Burr mortally wounded former Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton during a pistol duel in Weehawken, New Jersey. (Hamilton died the next day.)

In 1859, Big Ben, the great bell inside the famous London clock tower, chimed for the first time.

In 1936, New York City's Triborough Bridge (now officially the Robert F. Kennedy Bridge) linking Manhattan, Queens and The Bronx was opened to traffic.

In 1955, the U.S. Air Force Academy swore in its first class of cadets at its temporary quarters at Lowry Air Force Base in Colorado.

In 1960, the novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee was first published by J.B. Lippincott and Co.

In 1966, the game show "The Newlywed Game," hosted by Bob Eubanks, premiered on ABC-TV.

In 1972, the World Chess Championship opened as grandmasters Bobby Fischer of the United States and defending champion Boris Spassky of the Soviet Union began play in Reykjavik, Iceland. (Fischer won after 21 games.)

In 1979, the abandoned U.S. space station Skylab made a spectacular return to Earth, burning up in the atmosphere and showering debris over the Indian Ocean and Australia.

In 1989, actor and director Laurence Olivier died in Steyning, West Sussex, England, at age 82.

In 1991, a Nigeria Airways DC-8 carrying Muslim pilgrims crashed at the Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, international airport, killing all 261 people on board.

In 1995, the United States normalized relations with Vietnam.

Ten years ago: Rupert Murdoch's media empire was besieged by accusations that two more of his British newspapers engaged in hacking, deception and privacy violations. So Yeon Ryu (soh yahn yoo) won the U.S. Women's Open, defeating fellow South Korean Hee Kyung Seo (soh) by three shots in a three-hole playoff.

Five years ago: Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced that the United States would send 560 more troops to Iraq to transform a freshly retaken air base into a staging hub for a long-awaited battle to recapture Mosul from Islamic State militants. Two bailiffs at the Berrien County, Michigan, courthouse were shot to death by a jail inmate during an escape attempt; the inmate was also killed.

One year ago: In Portland, Oregon, where nightly protests since the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis had frequently turned violent, a protester was hospitalized in critical condition after being hit in the head

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by a round fired by a federal law enforcement officer. (Videos showed that Donovan LaBella had been standing with both arms in the air, holding a large speaker, across the street from the federal courthouse when he was hit.) President Donald Trump wore a mask during a visit to a military hospital; it was the first time he had been seen in public with one. Okinawa's governor said dozens of U.S. Marines at bases on the Japanese island had been infected with the coronavirus. As virus cases surged in Florida, Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom and Animal Kingdom reopened with new rules in place to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Susan Seaforth Hayes is 78. Singer Jeff Hanna (Nitty Gritty Dirt Band) is 74. Ventriloquist-actor Jay Johnson is 72. Actor Bruce McGill is 71. Actor Stephen Lang is 69. Actor Mindy Sterling is 68. Actor Sela Ward is 65. Reggae singer Michael Rose (Black Uhuru) is 64. Singer Peter Murphy is 64. Actor Mark Lester is 63. Jazz musician Kirk Whalum is 63. Singer Suzanne Vega is 62. Rock guitarist Richie Sambora (Bon Jovi) is 62. Actor Lisa Rinna is 58. Rock musician Scott Shriner (Weezer) is 56. Actor Debbe (correct) Dunning is 55. Actor Greg Grunberg is 55. Wildlife expert Jeff Corwin is 54. Actor Justin Chambers is 51. Actor Leisha Hailey is 50. Actor Michael Rosenbaum is 49. Pop-rock singer Andrew Bird is 48. Country singer Scotty Emerick is 48. Rapper Lil' Kim is 47. U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona is 46. Actor Jon Wellner is 46. Rapper Lil' Zane is 40. Pop-jazz singer-musician Peter Cincotti is 38. Actor Serinda Swan is 37. Actor Robert Adamson is 36. Actor David Henrie is 32. Actor Connor Paolo is 31. Former tennis player Caroline Wozniacki is 31. R&B/pop singer Alessia Cara is 25.