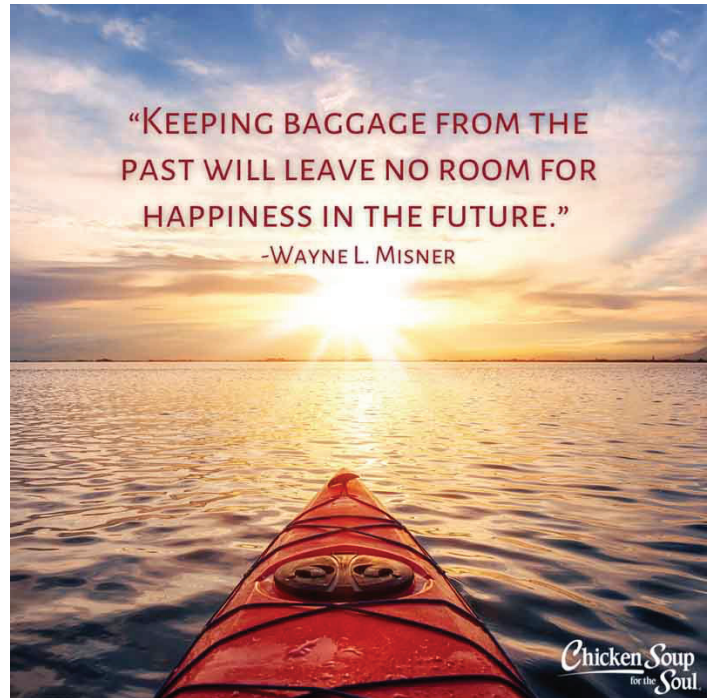


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- [1- Truss Pros Help Wanted Ad](#)
- [2- Bristol "Tea - A Taste of Happiness" Ad](#)
- [2- New Deal Tire Help Wanted Ad](#)
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The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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"Tea - A Taste of Happiness"

Ladies' Luncheon & Program
Wednesday, July 21st at Noon
Bethesda Lutheran Church, Bristol
Silent Auction at 10:30

Door Prizes

Skit by the WELCA members

Advance tickets required: \$10

Call Kay Espeland 605-492-3507
Alice Jean Peterson 605-216-2835

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.

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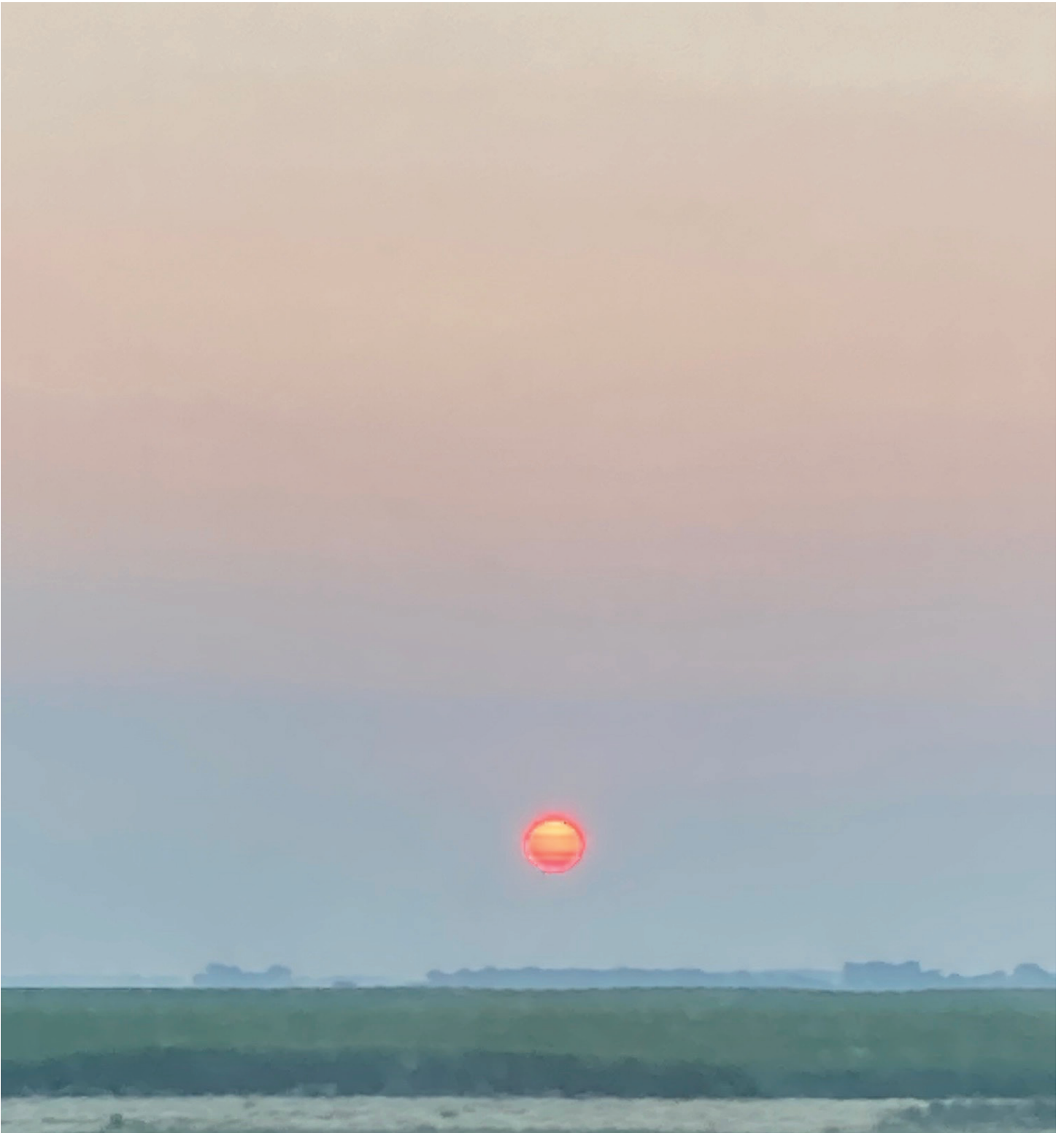
HELP

WANTED!

(0711.0808)

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The smoke in the sky creates for an eerie sunrise Saturday morning.

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Big families of geese can be seen at the trailer park north of Groton.



Master gardner David McGannon gives his garden a drink of water.



The elementary playground got a new lawyer of wood chips this week.

SDSU Extension to Offer Integrated Pest Management Field School Online

Brookings, S.D. - South Dakota State University (SDSU) Extension will kick off its 13th annual Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Field School Aug. 1. The virtual course, which will be available through Aug. 31, will cover multiple strategies for reducing input costs while maximizing yields for crops grown in South Dakota.

"Traditionally, the field school has been in one of three locations: the Northeast Research Farm, the Volga Research Farm or the Southeast Research Farm, and for a day-and-a-half; limiting who can attend," says SDSU Extension IPM Coordinator Philip Rozeboom. "Moving the field school to a virtual platform for one month allows anyone from South Dakota, and around the world, to learn from our Extension professionals about IPM."

The course will be broken into modules that will cover the management of weeds, diseases and insects. In addition, modules focusing on the utilization of cover crops, tillage and planting practices will also enhance the understanding of the alternative options available to growers and how they can enhance a production system, Rozeboom says.

The weed, insect and disease modules will also include information about pesticide resistance and the importance of preventing the development of resistant pest populations.

"At the end of this course participants will have an increased understanding of pest management that is not focused solely on the use of pesticides," Rozeboom says. "Many of the modules will be the same as previous years, but, in general, will cover the management of weeds, diseases and insects, cover crops and residue management, and soil health management. No module will focus on any specific condition within South Dakota since the course is a month long, but current conditions will be mentioned."

The course, and downloadable IPM and Extension publications, will be offered on Training House. Registration will open closer to August on the SDSU Extension Events page (extension.sdstate.edu/events).

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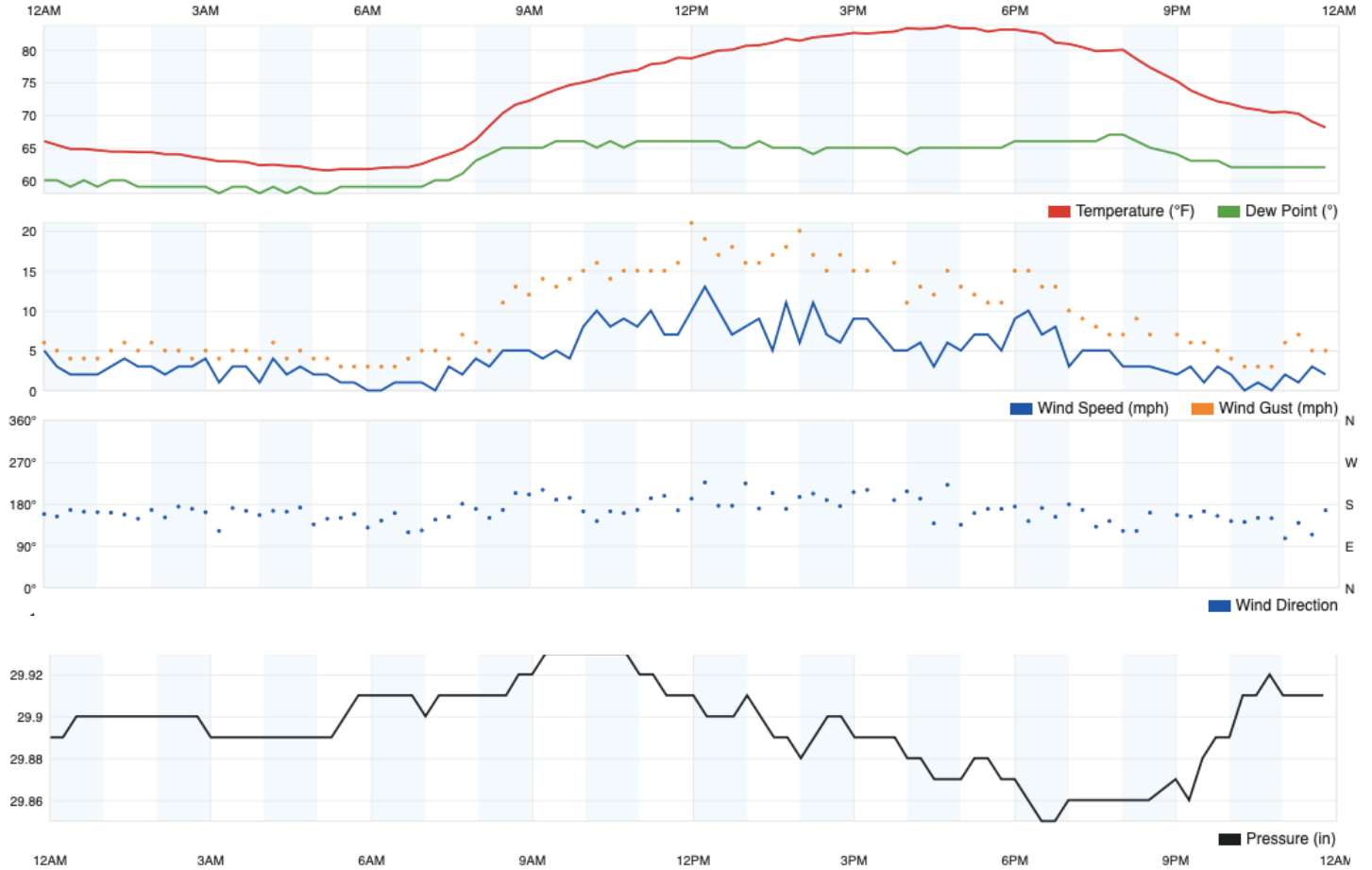
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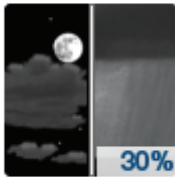



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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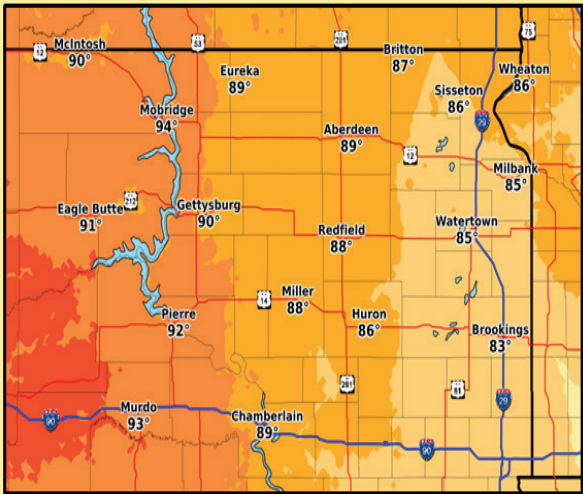
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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy then Chance Showers	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Clear	Hot
High: 89 °F	Low: 67 °F	High: 86 °F	Low: 65 °F	High: 92 °F

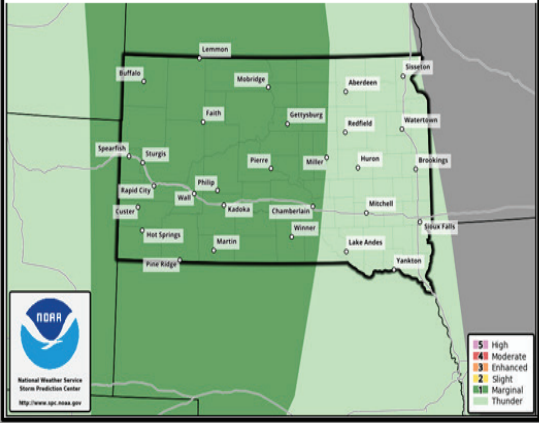
Warmer and a bit more humid today...

Partly Cloudy Skies

Highs: Mid 80s - Mid 90s



Severe Weather Outlook Late Afternoon-Tonight



...Storms Return

Storms possible late today into early Sunday morning

Temperatures will be a little warmer today underneath a partly cloudy sky. Southeast breezes will fall in between 10 and 20 mph. It could also feel a bit more humid through the day as well. More storms are expected to fire across western South Dakota late this afternoon and evening. Some of these storms will work across central portions of the state by late evening and persist into the early morning hours of Sunday. Some storms could be on the strong to severe side, especially west of the James valley. The main threats from the strongest storms will be damaging winds and hail.

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Today in Weather History

July 17, 1985: An F1 tornado touched down, ten miles east of Raymond, in Clark County, destroying two cattle sheds and damaged several buildings. A garage was moved off its foundation. Heavy rains, high winds and hail up to 2.75 inches in diameter produced considerable damage to farm buildings between Raymond and Garden City. Rainfall amounts of three to six inches caused additional crop losses from erosion. In the city of Clark, some basement flooding occurred, and water ran across Highway 212 west of Clark. Some storm total rainfall amounts include; 3.77 inches in Clark; 3.15 in Clear Lake; 2.85 in Redfield; and 2.31 inches in 3 miles NE of Raymond. This thunderstorm began near Kennebec, in Lyman County, where winds gusted to 80 mph, and small hail was observed. A few trees were uprooted, and numerous branches were downed. Several car windows were broke from the winds and small hail. A half inch of rain fell in ten minutes, filling ditches. High winds continued into Spink County where extensive damage to a farm estate east of Redfield occurred. Heavy rains of three to five inches caused road and basement flooding. A damage path from wind and hail continued to Clear Lake, to the south of Gary and into Minnesota to the east of Canby. Winds gusted to 70 mph, and hail ranged from one to almost two inches in diameter. In Clear Lake, four businesses were damaged, and power poles were downed. One building had the fiberglass siding and roofing torn off. A second building had a metal roof blown off. Highway 77, south of Clear Lake was impassable due to hail on the ground.

July 17, 1993: Torrential rains of three to seven inches fell in Grant County resulting in the overflow of Lake Farley into the city of Milbank. The dam held, but an emergency dike broke on the evening of the 17th releasing water into residential streets and a trailer court in Milbank. The broken barrier forced the evacuation of at least 200 people. Damage included 120 mobile homes, and 26 houses were affected by floodwaters. Also, a man died when his pickup truck hit a washout on a gravel road south of Milbank and was swept into the floodwaters of a nearby creek.

July 17, 2010: Several supercell thunderstorms moving southeast across the region brought large hail up to softball size along with damaging winds to parts of northeast South Dakota. Numerous homes, vehicles, along with thousands of acres of crops were destroyed. Hail up to the size of softballs occurred near Westport, in Brown County. Golf ball to baseball size hail fell at the National Weather Service office causing damage to several vehicles. The rear window was broken out of one of the vehicles. A supercell thunderstorm was tracking southeast across Clark County produced anywhere from a quarter to baseball size hail along with wind gusts over 70 mph from Crocker to Clark to Naples to Vienna. The large hail and winds caused extensive damage to homes, outbuildings, vehicles, and thousands of acres of crops. Many trees and gardens were also damaged or destroyed by the hail and high winds. The storm entered western Hamlin County. Winds measured at 90 mph in Hayti along with some large hail broke numerous windows out of several homes and vehicles, damaged several roofs, and downed many trees. A concrete silo was also destroyed. The highway shop lost half of its roof along with severe damage to the ceiling of a trucking business in Hayti.

1942: A great flood developed over the Smethport area in Pennsylvania, resulting in an estimated 34.50 inches of rain in just one day, including 30.60 inches in only six hours, setting a world record. The official observing site, Smethport Highway Shed, reported only 13.08 inches for the entire month because the flood consumed the gauge after 6.68" of rain. The total results from the substitution of the officially estimated amount for the amount measured.

1981: Severe thunderstorm winds ripped a 10,000 square foot hole in a 90-foot high pavilion at Sea World in Orlando, FL. The storm panicked a crowd of 550 tourists. One death occurred due to injury and heart attack, and 15 people were injured. The canopy was made of fiberglass and Teflon, designed to withstand 120 mph winds.

1987: Slow moving thunderstorms caused flooding on the Guadalupe River in Texas resulting in tragic loss of life. A bus and van leaving a youth summer camp stalled near the rapidly rising river, just west of the town of Comfort, or about 50 mile northwest of San Antonio. The powerful surge of water swept away 43 persons, mostly teenagers. Ten drowned in the floodwaters. Most of the others were rescued from treetops by helicopter.

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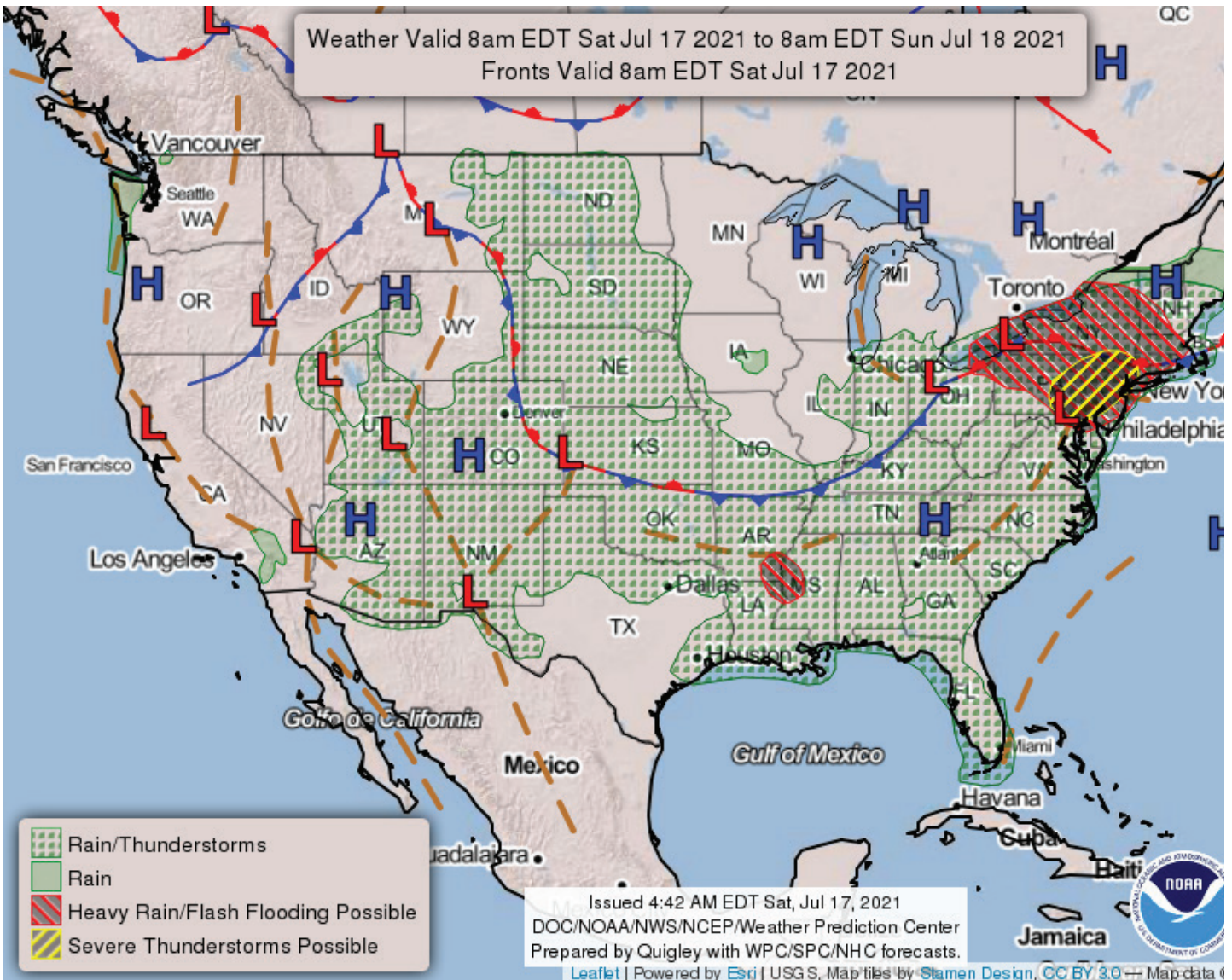
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 84 °F at 4:36 PM
Low Temp: 62 °F at 5:04 AM
Wind: 22 mph at 12:19 PM
Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 111° in 1936
Record Low: 44° in 1895
Average High: 85°F
Average Low: 60°F
Average Precip in July.: 1.80
Precip to date in July.: 1.73
Average Precip to date: 12.81
Precip Year to Date: 6.48
Sunset Tonight: 9:17 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:03 a.m.



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WISHING, HOPING AND FACTS

"Be careful what you wish for – it just might come true!" is a saying most of us have grown up with. It comes with no guarantee or assurance that what we ask for is what we will get. In fact, we may get the exact opposite which can result in serious problems.

Wishing is imagining something in our minds that we want to come true – believing that our lives will be better or filled with endless happiness and joy and riches. It is wanting our lives to be more complete or problem-free or better or happier without our having to do anything or making any effort to bring about changes.

But wishing is different from hoping – especially the hope that believers have in God. We can have unflinching and unwavering hope in God because He has done everything He has ever said He would do. There is no room for any doubt in Him or any of His promises. The fulfillment of His promises is well documented and are a testimony to the fact that God is faithful and can be trusted to keep His Word.

God's faithfulness, the psalmist reminds us, is so predictable that it has become "a law in Israel." And this testimony of God's faithfulness is to be passed on by fathers to their children so they put their hope in God and "never forget His deeds."

God wants fathers to teach their children that hope does not come from politicians or policies. Nor does He want fathers to teach their children that they are to place their hope in acquiring wealth or worldly goods. And He does not want fathers to teach their children to place their hope in the knowledge or skills or talents they possess. God wants everyone - fathers, mothers, and children to place their hope in Him.

Prayer: We pray, Lord that fathers (and mothers) will realize their responsibility to raise their children to hope only in You and be faithful and obedient. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: So the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Psalm 78:6

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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

South Dakota Supreme Court reverses parental rights ruling

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Supreme Court has ruled that a state judge and the Department of Social Services failed to consider improvements in a mother's parenting skills and living conditions before terminating her rights to her child.

The high court this week reversed a ruling by Circuit Judge Jon Erickson that assigned the toddler to the care of a relative and sent the case back to Beadle County for further action, KELO-TV reported.

The Supreme Court said that because the girl was born to an American Indian mother, the state had a heightened responsibility for reunification under the Indian Child Welfare Act, a federal law that governs jurisdiction over the removal of Native American children from their families in custody, foster care and adoption cases.

The girl was born in September 2017 and Social Services began working with the mother and father on a safety plan for the child the following July.

The toddler was placed in the protective custody of a relative in October 2018 after the agency deemed her living conditions with her parents was unsafe, that she was left unsupervised or alone for extended periods of time and that the couple illegally used drugs in the home.

In June 2019 review, the agency reported that the mother had stopped using marijuana and had separated from the father. In September the same year, the agency reported that the mother said she was still sober, was living with her boyfriend and the two were attending parenting classes together.

A behavioral analyst who began working with the mother in October 2019 reported that the home where the woman was living was "100% better than before" and that she observed a loving bond between mother and daughter. The counselor noted that the woman had moved in with her mother.

Nevertheless, Social Services moved ahead with termination of parental rights.

Erickson acknowledged that the mother had made some improvements, but not enough, and said she failed to show she could provide for the child's basic needs. He ordered the termination of parental rights.

In overturning that ruling, the Supreme Court said the Department of Social Services is required to actively take the parent through the steps of his or her case plan to prepare the parent for reunification, and didn't provide remedial or rehabilitative programs. The agency failed to do that from December 2019 to September 2020, the court determined.

Justices also said the lower court judge should have appointed a lawyer to represent the child.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

24-25-47-52-57, Mega Ball: 24, Megaplier: 4

(twenty-four, twenty-five, forty-seven, fifty-two, fifty-seven; Mega Ball: twenty-four; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$117 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$150 million

Woman charged in day care death in Watertown

WATERTOWN, S.D. (AP) — A Watertown woman is facing charges after a toddler was found unconscious while in day care and later died at a Sioux Falls hospital.

According to police, the 16-month-old child, who was not identified, suffered "injuries consistent with abuse." First responders were dispatched to an in-home day care in Watertown Wednesday and rushed

the child to Prairie Lakes Hospital.

The toddler was later transferred to Sanford Health in Sioux Falls and died there, the Argus Leader reported.

The 30-year-old woman was arrested and charged with abuse or cruelty to a minor. Police said additional charges are pending. She's being held on \$25,000 cash bond.

The South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation is assisting the Watertown police with the ongoing investigation.

GOP eyes Latinos in South Texas in effort to regain Congress

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

McALLEN, Texas (AP) — In Republicans' bid to retake control of Congress, this traditionally Democratic stretch of South Texas has quietly become a top battleground.

After making unexpected gains last November, the GOP is zeroing in on a trio of House seats in the region as key targets heading into next year's midterm elections. They include the 15th Congressional District, which hasn't sent a Republican to Washington since its creation in 1903, but where a GOP newcomer came within three points of winning in 2020.

Republican leaders believe the party is on the precipice of a political realignment among Hispanic voters in communities along the U.S.-Mexico border like McAllen. Inroads among Latinos could potentially offset the party's growing vulnerabilities among voters, particularly in the suburbs. The elections next year will determine whether these shifts are enduring or a more limited response to the turbulent politics of the Trump era, as Democrats hope.

But with Congress having just a six-seat majority in the House, Democrats in Texas say the party has to take the threat seriously.

"I don't think there's any question that we need to be concerned about it and we need to put more resources into it," said Gilberto Hinojosa, the chair of the Texas Democratic Party.

Republicans' top target in the area is the 15th District. It currently stretches from the border's Hidalgo County, which is more than 90% Hispanic, to the eastern suburbs of San Antonio. Voters here have never sent a Republican to Washington, which is why national party leaders were so stunned when Monica De La Cruz-Hernandez, a small business owner, came within 10,000 votes of beating Rep. Vicente Gonzalez, a two-term Democrat.

Sitting behind her office desk in Alamo earlier this month wearing cowboy boots and a campaign T-shirt, De La Cruz-Hernandez, who is running again, credited her performance to former President Donald Trump. She said his "colorful personality" had sparked new interest in national politics that changed many Texans' minds about politics.

"When they paid attention to what was happening on the national stage, I think that the lights started to turn on for people where they saw, you know what? My conservative values no longer align with the Democrat Party," she said. "The bottom line is that the Hispanic values are pro-God, pro-life and pro-country. And we are conservatives down here."

Border security, she said, is "number one issue from the north side of the district to the south side of the district," as border crossings have soared. And Republicans in the state have been laser-focused on the issue, with Trump staging a post-presidential visit to the border last month that drew hundreds of supporters.

Democratic state lawmakers have been focused on blocking a sweeping election overhaul bill and have been camped out in Washington — though some Democrats representing the Rio Grande Valley did not join them.

Nationally, the Pew Research Center estimates that about 38% of Hispanic voters supported Trump in 2020, compared with 28% in 2016. While Trump lost Hidalgo County by 17 percentage points in 2020, he more than doubled his support from 2016, when he lost by a whopping 40 points, earning just 28% of the vote. And he flipped a handful of other nearby districts, including Zapata County, which Democrat

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Hillary Clinton had won 66%-33%, and Kenedy, which Clinton carried 53%-45%

Beyond those gains, Republicans point to other data points to support their optimism. Javier Villalobos in June was elected mayor of McAllen, becoming the first Republican to hold the post in decades. Texas' redistricting process, which is controlled by state Republicans, could produce districts that are even more favorable to GOP candidates as the lines are redrawn to reflect the state's gain of two congressional seats.

Villalobos, who joined Trump at his border briefing and was hailed as a "superstar" by other officials at the event, said he saw his election as part of a trend driven both by Trump as well as economic changes as more Hispanics have entered the middle class.

"Historically, it's been Hispanic people are very conservative, but they vote traditionally Democrat. And little by little, even the older people are changing," he said. "And that's a beautiful thing. Competition is good."

It's unclear whether the gains Republicans made in 2020 will carry over when Trump isn't on the ballot in 2022. Democrats insist their poor performance last year was a one-off and point to unique circumstances, including the party's decision to largely forgo in-person campaigning during the pandemic. The McAllen mayor's race, they also note, was nonpartisan, and turnout was less than 10,000 votes.

Gonzalez, the Democratic incumbent in the 15th District, insists he's unfazed by the strong showing of De La Cruz-Hernandez. He described last year's results as "an anomaly" driven by a pandemic that devastated the district, killing thousands of residents, including some of his personal friends, and dissuaded many elderly voters from casting their ballots.

He pointed to concrete gains made under the Biden administration that he will campaign on, including an economic recovery, mass vaccinations and relief dollars that helped keep small businesses open.

"Everyone at the end of the day is running on results and the work that we've done and we will be running on what we've done for the people," he said.

But Hinojosa, the Texas Democratic chair, was more cautious. He acknowledged the party was caught off guard by a surge in first-time voters who cast ballots for Trump. Because no one thought the races would be competitive, little money and effort were spent on the contests, with no canvassing, phone banking or get-out-the-vote drives.

Trump's message, he said, also resonated with voters, especially in the Rio Grande Valley, where poverty rates are high and the economy remains hobbled by a shuttered southern border. He cited concerns about the future of the oil and gas industry, the border, and calls from some Democrats to "defund the police," which "freaked out" many voters who have ties to law enforcement.

"It was just almost a perfect storm for the Republicans down here," he said, noting the party lacked the "resources that were needed to shore up support down here" because the race's weren't considered competitive.

In preparation for next year's election, he said he has already held meetings across South Texas with local leaders, forming coalitions along the border, as well as hiring a full-time organizer.

"We're going to spend a heck of a lot more money and lot more time than we ever have before just to make sure that what Republicans say is going to happen won't happen," he said. "We're not going to take any chances."

But interviews with voters suggest there is work to be done.

Eryc Palomares, 42, who lives in McAllen and works in a medical laboratory, said he was thrilled to see others like him who had broken their allegiance to the Democratic Party "because that's all we've seen, that's all we've known here."

It's "as if they have you already brainwashed: Go vote Democrat. That's all it was here," said Palomares, who now tends to vote Republican.

"People are waking up," said Manuel Pescador Jr., 54, an occupational safety consultant and local activist who lives in McAllen.

Pescador Jr. said he switched parties seven years ago, rejecting what he saw as a culture of "handouts and false promises," and now rails against immigrants who enter the U.S. illegally.

"They come here, they refuse to assimilate and they're here to use everything they can, in any way they

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can. And so that's why I call them 'depleters,'" he said. "That's why that Hispanics that can vote, vote Republican, because we know who's coming in."

Joe Guerra, an independent who lives in McAllen, didn't vote in last year's presidential election, but said he wasn't at all surprised by the GOP's gains.

"The Republican Party was, for years, just a token presence here. But the conservative spirit has always been here," he said. "They were always there and (Trump) just had the ability to bring them out. That's who they've always been."

Cubans wonder what's next after antigovernment protests

By ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Less than a week after a rare series of antigovernment protests were broken up by police and government sympathizers, and elicited self-criticism from President Miguel Díaz-Canel, things appear calm in Cuba. But many wonder for how much longer.

Squares and parks were occupied by government sympathizers with flags on Friday, and the circulation of traffic and people was normalizing. But mobile internet data service — which authorities cut on Sunday — remained limited.

"There is political and social erosion ... There is a lot of disgust, we must talk more, do more things and things that were done wrong should be rectified," said Abel Alba, a 50-year-old civil engineer. "The president has tried to smooth things over a bit" but he waited "too long" to listen to the demands of the people in the streets.

The protests began Sunday when thousands of Cubans marched on Havana's Malecon promenade and elsewhere to protest food and medicine shortages, power outages and some even calling for political change. The protests continued in smaller numbers into Monday and Tuesday.

Díaz-Canel initially responded by looking for culprits, pointing to U.S. economic sanctions, the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic and a social media campaign by Cuban American groups. But he later acknowledged some responsibility by Cuba's leaders.

With this in mind, Cuban Cabinet ministers announced a mix of measures including permits for travelers to import food and medicine without limits and allowing the emergency registration of Cubans' supply books by people outside their place of origin.

"The Cuban government has just shown that it could have allowed the entry of food and medicine without quantity limits or tariffs all along but chose not to do so for more than a year of the pandemic," wrote José Jasan Nieves, director of the independent digital newspaper, El Toque. "People twisted their arms."

Authorities reiterated their intentions to finish authorizing the operation of small and medium-sized companies as a source of employment as well as a program for state companies to pay more than the current salary scale.

What officials also made clear is that they are not willing to make changes to the island's political model.

Street vendor Marlén Rodríguez, 66, was not optimistic following the government's announcements. "There are no medicines, there is nothing, there is no food."

According to Díaz-Canel, there were four sectors involved in the protests: radical supporters of the United States who waved that country's flag during the protests and demanded a humanitarian intervention from Washington, criminal groups who took advantage of the situation to loot, people genuinely desperate due to the impact of the crisis on their daily lives and young who have no projects in society.

The marches turned violent with police clashing with protesters, patrol cars being destroyed, shops looted, windows broken, stones thrown and violent arrests and injuries.

Some Cubans were upset by the vandalism and groups of government supporters took to the streets and clashed with protesters.

"They were coming down the Calzada de San Miguel (del Padrón) while we were going up. We tried to persuade them, but these comrades were violent and threw stones at us," said Julio César Pérez, a Communist Party member and employee of the Ministry of Construction. He said several members of his

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group were injured in the brawl.

One government opponent died in the protests and the exact number of people arrested is not known. Government opponents have said on social media that the number is more than 100.

On Friday, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, called for release of the protesters.

The measures announced by the government "are positive measures, but they are insufficient," said Cuban economist Omar Everleny Pérez.

"Without affecting the ideology, there is a lot of space in which the state can take action," he said, mentioning permits for private entrepreneurs to import goods without going through the state monopoly, allowing foreign companies to install retail markets or raising the ceiling for agricultural prices in order to increase supply.

But political analysts said the economic challenges are great.

"I think the government is just trying to signal to people that it understands their desperation and that it's going to try to alleviate some of the misery that they're experiencing. The problem is that the government just doesn't have much in the way of resources that it can devote to doing that," said William LeoGrande, an expert on Cuba at the American University in the United States.

LeoGrande said the unrest in Cuba and the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse have put the Caribbean back on the agenda of U.S. President Joe Biden.

"There is no question that the demonstrations in Cuba and the assassination of Haiti's president and the resulting unrest there have pushed the Caribbean to the top of President Biden's foreign policy agenda, even though they would have preferred that it stayed on the back burner for a much longer time," he said.

"What the administration will do on Cuba is still very much up in the air."

Death toll from Europe floods tops 150 as water recedes

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The death toll from disastrous flooding in Western Europe rose above 150 on Saturday as rescue workers toiled to clear up the devastation revealed by receding water and prevent further damage.

Police said that more than 90 people are now known to have died in western Germany's Ahrweiler county, one of the worst-hit areas, and more casualties are feared. On Friday, authorities gave a death toll of 63 for Rhineland-Palatinate state, where Ahrweiler is located.

Another 43 people were confirmed dead in neighboring North Rhine-Westphalia state, Germany's most populous. Belgium's national crisis center put the confirmed death toll in that country at 24 and said it expects the number to rise.

By Saturday, waters were receding across much of the affected regions, laying bare the extent of the damage.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier planned to travel Saturday to Erftstadt, southwest of Cologne, where a harrowing rescue effort unfolded on Friday as people were trapped when the ground gave way. At least three houses and part of a mansion in the town's Blessem district collapsed.

The German military used armored vehicles on Saturday to clear away cars and trucks overwhelmed by the floodwaters on a nearby road, some of which were still at least partly submerged. Officials feared that some people didn't manage to escape in Erftstadt, but by Saturday morning no casualties had been confirmed.

In the Ahrweiler area, police warned people of a potential risk from downed power lines and urged curious visitors to stay away. They complained on Twitter that would-be sightseers were blocking some roads.

Many areas were still without electricity and telephone service — something that, along with multiple counting in some cases, appeared to have accounted in part for large numbers of missing people that authorities gave immediately after the floods hit on Wednesday and Thursday.

Around 700 people were evacuated from part of the German town of Wassenberg, on the Dutch border, after the breach of a dike on the Rur river.

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Train lines and roads remained blocked in many areas of eastern Belgium. The national railway service said traffic would start returning to normal on Monday.

A cafe owner in the devastated town of Pepinster broke down in tears when King Philippe and Queen Mathilde visited Friday to offer comfort to residents.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo were visiting flood-damaged towns Saturday, according to Belgian state broadcaster RTBF.

In addition to worst-hit Germany and Belgium, southern parts of the Netherlands also have been hit by heavy flooding.

Volunteers worked through the night to shore up dikes and protect roads. Thousands of residents of the southern Dutch towns of Bunde, Voulwames, Brommelen and Geulle were allowed to return home Saturday morning after being evacuated on Thursday and Friday.

Caretaker Prime Minister Mark Rutte, who visited the region on Friday, said that the region faced "three disasters."

"First, there was corona, now these floods, and soon people will have to work on cleanup and recovery," he said. "It is disaster after disaster after disaster. But we will not abandon Limburg," the southern province hit by the floods. His government has declared the flooding a state of emergency, opening up national funds for those affected.

Among other efforts to help the flood victims, Dutch brewery Hertog Jan, which is based in the affected area, handed out 3,000 beer crates to locals to help them raise their belongings off the ground to protect them from the flooding.

In Switzerland, heavy rain as caused several rivers and lakes to burst their banks, with authorities in the city of Lucerne closing several pedestrian bridges over the Reuss river.

European nations impose incentives, penalties to boost shots

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — European nations are scrambling to ramp up vaccination drives, using a carrot-and-stick approach to persuade the reluctant to get their shots as the more transmissible delta variant drives a surge in infections.

Greece became the latest to enact new restrictions on Friday, requiring proof of vaccination or recent recovery from COVID-19 for access to indoor restaurants, cafes, bars and movie theaters. Children can enter with negative tests.

The measure, part of a package of government incentives, had little immediate effect as virtually all public life moves outdoors during Greece's hot, dry summers. Sidewalk cafes and restaurants and open-air movie theaters remain accessible to all.

"At the moment it's the middle of summer, people prefer being outside, under the trees, and people don't want to sit indoors," said Sprios Bairaktaris, owner of a popular Greek taverna in the tourist district of Athens that has both indoor and outdoor areas.

Nevertheless, he was still implementing the government measure, only allowing customers with COVID-19 certificates to be seated inside.

"We adhere to all the measures with total safety. Whatever the doctors or scientists advise," he said.

Outdoor clubs and music venues in Greece will also be accessible only to the fully vaccinated or recently recovered, with capacity capped at 85% and no standing customers.

But just as the measure came into effect in Greece, the Russian capital repealed a similar one introduced last month.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin announced the requirement for restaurants to only admit customers with proof of vaccination or a negative test ends Monday as the pace of contagion has slowed. The restrictions had badly hurt restaurant owners, already reeling from the pandemic's impact, forcing many to close.

Some European countries have also introduced mandatory vaccinations for certain professions. Italy made vaccinations obligatory in April for health care workers and pharmacists. France and Greece announced

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mandatory vaccines this week for health care workers and care home staff, with France extending the requirement to those caring for an elderly or sick person at home.

France also announced mandatory COVID-19 passes for access to restaurants, bars, shopping malls and many tourist spots, as well as trains and planes, as of July 21. The passes are available to anyone fully vaccinated, recently recovered or who has a recent negative test.

The regulations have sparked protests, with thousands protesting Wednesday in Greek and French cities. More demonstrations are planned Saturday in France.

But the incentives appear to work for some people.

"On Tuesday, we realized that everything will be closed for us if we are not vaccinated so we started to look for an appointment," said 15-year-old Parisian Chloe Dril, waiting with her mother to get vaccinated. "We noticed that for train tickets it was much more complicated if we are not vaccinated, if we want to go abroad it will be more complicated, so it really pushed us to get vaccinated."

Some business owners are uncomfortable with having to enforce the rules.

"It's a shame that we got to the point where we have to create these incentives for people to get vaccinated," said Clément Léon, owner of Le Picoti bar in Paris. "On the other hand, forcing bar owners to play the part of border police officers asking for their clients' papers is also an issue. From a legal standpoint, it bothers me."

Greece has seen a surge in new infections driven by the delta variant, although the rate of new hospitalizations has been slower. Vaccines have been available to anyone 18 or over for several weeks and became available this week to those over 15. Incentives to get vaccinated have included 150 euros (\$180) credit to spend on entertainment and travel for anyone under 26 who gets a shot.

Cyprus has also seen an alarming increase in infections, prompting the government on Friday to announce new regulations. They include proof of COVID-19 status for access to public transport, banks, state services, businesses and to visit care homes. Dance clubs will only be open to the vaccinated and recently recovered.

Britain is also making vaccinations mandatory this fall for nursing home workers and the government has been considering extending that to National Health Service employees. Parliament approved the measure despite strong opposition from some lawmakers and warnings from nursing homes that it could worsen staff shortages.

"You'd expect this in a communist country," commented Conservative legislator William Wragg.

England plans to lift its remaining coronavirus restrictions on Monday. The Conservative government says it expects bars and nightclubs to check customers' COVID-19 status, but it won't be a legal requirement. Many businesses say they just won't do it.

Music Venue Trust chief executive Mark Davyd said vaccine passports were "a complete non-starter at the moment."

"Very, very few venues are going to do this," he said, noting that fake vaccine passports were already available online for eager partygoers.

Experts: Europe floods shows need to curb emissions, adapt

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Just as the European Union was announcing plans to spend billions of euros to contain climate change, massive clouds gathered over Germany and nearby nations to unleash an unprecedented storm that left death and destruction in its wake.

Despite ample warnings, politicians and weather forecasters were shocked at the ferocity of the precipitation that caused flash flooding that claimed more than 150 lives this week in the lush rolling hills of Western Europe.

Climate scientists say the link between extreme weather and global warming is unmistakable and the urgency to do something about climate change undeniable.

Scientists can't yet say for sure whether climate change caused the flooding, but they insist that it cer-

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tainly exacerbates the extreme weather that has been on show from the western U.S. and Canada to Siberia to Europe's Rhine region.

"There is a clear link between extreme precipitation occurring and climate change," Wim Thiery, a professor at Brussels University, said Friday.

Stefan Rahmstorf, a professor of ocean physics at the University of Potsdam, referring to the recent heat records set in the U.S. and Canada, said "some are so extreme that they would be virtually impossible without global warming.."

Taking them all together, said Sir David King, chair of the Climate Crisis Advisory Group, "these are casualties of the climate crisis: we will only see these extreme weather events become more frequent."

For Diederik Samsom, the European Commission's Cabinet chief behind this week's massive proposals to spend billions and force industry into drastic reforms to help cut the bloc's emissions of the gases that cause global warming by 55% this decade, this week's disaster was a cautionary tale.

"People are washed away in Germany ... and Belgium and the Netherlands, too. We are experiencing climate change," he said on a conference call of the European Policy Centre think tank. "A few years ago, you had to point to a point in the future or far away on the planet to talk about climate change. It's happening now — here."

And climate scientists point toward two specific things that have contributed to this week's calamity.

First, with every 1 degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) rise in temperature, the air can take in 7% more humidity. It can hold the water longer, leading to drought, but it also leads to an increase in dense, massive rainfall once it releases it.

Another defining factor is the tendency for storms to hover over one place for far longer than usual, thus dumping increasing amounts of rain on a smaller patch of the world. Scientists say warming is a contributing factor there, too. A jet stream of high winds six miles (nearly 10 kilometers) high helps determine the weather over Europe and is fed by temperature differences between the tropics and the Arctic.

Yet as Europe warms — with Scandinavia currently experiencing an unusual heat wave — the jet stream is weakened, causing its meandering course to stop, sometimes for days, Thiery said.

He said such a phenomenon was visible in Canada too, where it helped cause a "heat dome" in which temperatures rose to 50 C (122 F).

"And it is causing the heavy rain that we have seen in Western Europe," he said.

Even if greenhouse gas emissions are drastically curbed in the coming decades, the amount of carbon dioxide and other planet-heating gases already in the atmosphere means extreme weather is going to become more likely.

Experts say such phenomena will hit those areas that aren't prepared for it particularly hard.

"We need to make our built environment — buildings, outdoor spaces, cities — more resilient to climate change," said Lamia Messari-Becker, a professor of engineering at the University of Siegen.

Those that don't adapt will risk greater loss of life and damage to property, said Ernst Rauch, chief climate and geoscientist at the reinsurance giant Munich Re.

"The events of today and yesterday or so give us a hint that we need to do better with respect to being ready for these these type of events," he said. "The events themselves are not really unexpected, but the sort of the order of magnitude probably has surprised some."

Biz Markie, known for classic rap song 'Just a Friend,' dies

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Biz Markie, a hip-hop staple known for his beatboxing prowess, turntable mastery and the 1989 classic "Just a Friend," has died. He was 57.

Markie's representative, Jenni Izumi, said the rapper-DJ died peacefully Friday evening with his wife by his side. The cause of death has not been released.

"We are grateful for the many calls and prayers of support that we have received during this difficult time," Izumi said in a statement. "Biz created a legacy of artistry that will forever be celebrated by his

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industry peers and his beloved fans whose lives he was able to touch through music, spanning over 35 years. He leaves behind a wife, many family members and close friends who will miss his vibrant personality, constant jokes and frequent banter."

Markie, whose birth name was Marcel Theo Hall, became known within the rap genre realm as the self-proclaimed "Clown Prince of Hip-Hop" for his lighthearted lyrics and humorous nature. He made music with the Beastie Boys, opened for Chris Rock's comedy tour and was a sought-after DJ for countless star-studded events.

The New York-native's music career began in 1985 as a beat boxer of the Juice Crew, a rap collective he helped Big Daddy Kane join. Three years later, he released his debut album "Goin' Off," which featured underground hits "Vapors" and "Pickin' Boogers."

Markie broke into mainstream music with his platinum-selling song "Just a Friend," the lead single on his sophomore album "The Biz Never Sleeps." The friend-zone anthem cracked Rolling Stone's top 100 pop songs and made VH1's list of 100 greatest hip-hop songs of all time.

"This one hurts baad ... RIP to my Aries bro..." Q-Tip of A Tribe Called Quest said on Twitter, where an outpouring of mourning for Markie was growing, "ahhh man @BizMarkie damn im gonna miss u so so many memories."

Questlove said he learned from Markie early in his career.

"Biz built me man," Questlove posted on Instagram along with a picture of him and Markie. "In my early early stages it was Biz who taught me the REAL places to cop records....Biz taught me what cities had good digging....Biz taught me where to collect 45s.....Biz taught me where to collect 8TRACK TAPES!!"

After two successful albums, Markie was served with a copyright infringement lawsuit for a song on his third studio album "I Need a Haircut" in 1991. He and his label, Warner Bros Records, were sued by Irish singer Gilbert O'Sullivan who claimed that elements from his 1972 hit "Alone Again (Naturally)" were illegally sampled in Markie's "Alone Again"

The judge ruled to halt further distribution of the album, which was reissued without the illegal track. The judgment also changed the landscape of music sampling by dictating they were preapproved by the original owner.

Despite the setback, Markie released his fourth album "All Samples Cleared!" in 1993 that was an apparent reference to the court battle. He released his final album "Weekend Warrior" a decade later.

Markie kept his name relevant as he consistently booked more than 175 shows a year, according to the rapper's website. He's appeared on television shows including "In Living Color," "Empire" along with "black-ish" and the 2002 movie "Men in Black II," in which he played an alien parody of himself in the film starring Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones.

Markie also taught the method of beatboxing in an episode of the children's show "Yo Gabba Gabba!"

"We lost another Rap legend Mr. Biz Markie," Parliament-Funkadelic bassist Bootsy Collins tweeted. "To a lot of us he was more than Just a Friend."

Thailand tightens measures as daily cases cross 10,000

By CHALIDA EKVITTAYAVECHNUKUL Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand has tightened coronavirus restrictions and warned of further measures as daily cases surpassed 10,000 and the death toll hit a record 141 on Saturday despite an overnight curfew in Bangkok and several other provinces.

The surge since April has overwhelmed hospitals, strained the economy and thrown tourism recovery plans in doubt. The vaccine rollout, hindered by supply problems, is slugging with some 5% of the population fully vaccinated and 15% only partially.

"I would like everyone to realize our necessity to impose stricter measures soon. We all may get affected and be inconvenienced in many ways," Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha wrote on his Facebook page late on Friday.

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Cases have been climbing particularly in Bangkok and surrounding provinces. The government imposed additional measures overnight including a ban on any gatherings and activities that can spread the virus, including anti-government rallies that have criticized Prayuth's handling of the pandemic.

Violators face up to two years in prison and/or a fine of up to 40,000 baht (\$1,220).

Prayuth said the forthcoming additional measures seek to limit people's mobility as much as possible, close down virtually all non-essential places and implement strict work from home. He said the government's medical committee will discuss and study the lockdown measures in other countries carefully before approving the new ones.

To ease the pressure on hospitals, Prayuth said authorities are considering allowing people to test themselves at home with antigen test kits.

Thai health authorities said Wednesday they will seek to impose limits on exports of the locally produced AstraZeneca vaccine because the country doesn't have enough for its own needs. Production of the AstraZeneca jabs at a Thai factory has fallen short of its target, likely delaying the government's plan to acquire a total of 61 million doses until next May.

"The government will speed up securing as many vaccines as we can from everywhere and we've never blocked the private sector from securing alternative vaccines," Prayuth said on Facebook, addressing some of the criticism of his management of the crisis.

He has earlier announced plans to allow the entry of vaccinated travelers without requiring them to quarantine on arrival starting in mid-October. Since July 1, the government has reopened the tourist island of Phuket to fully vaccinated tourists under strict health conditions including staying on the island for 14 days while being tested for COVID-19. It had previously vaccinated most Phuket residents.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Thailand has reported 391,989 confirmed cases and 3,240 fatalities.

EXPLAINER: Could balloons power uncensored internet in Cuba?

By TALI ARBEL AP Technology Writer

Florida's Republican governor, Ron DeSantis, called this week on the administration of President Joe Biden to greenlight a plan to transmit the internet to people in Cuba via high-altitude balloons when their government has blocked access.

CAN INTERNET BE DELIVERED BY BALLOON?

Yes. For years, Alphabet — the parent company of Google — worked to perfect an internet-balloon division service called Loon. It shut down that project in January, saying it wasn't commercially viable.

Prior to the shutdown, Loon balloons had been providing service in mountainous areas in Kenya through a partnership with a local telecom, Telkom Kenya. The service also helped provide wireless communications in Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, which destroyed the island's mobile network. Loon partnered with AT&T to make service available.

HOW DOES THAT WORK?

The Loon balloons were effectively cell towers the size of a tennis court. They floated 60,000 to 75,000 feet, or 11 to 14 miles (18,000- 23,000 meters, or 18-22 kilometers), above the Earth, well above commercial jetliner routes. Made of the commonplace plastic polyethylene, the balloons used solar panels for electricity and could deliver service to smartphones in partnership with a local telecom.

Each balloon could serve thousands of people, the company said. But they had to be replaced every five months or so because of the harsh conditions in the stratosphere. And the balloons could be difficult to control. "Navigating balloons through the stratosphere has always been hard," wrote Salvatore Candido, who had been chief technology officer for Loon, in a December 2020 blog post. The company created algorithms that tracked wind patterns.

WHAT EQUIPMENT WAS REQUIRED?

Loon had said that beyond the balloons themselves, it needed network integration with a telecom to provide service and some equipment on the ground in the region. It also needed permission from local regulators — something that the Cuban government isn't likely to grant.

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COULD A NETWORK BE SET UP FROM AFAR?

Yes. Loon used multiple balloons to extend connections beyond the necessary ground link. In one 2018 test, Loon said the connection jumped 1,000 kilometers, or about 620 miles, over 7 balloons. Another time, it bridged a wireless connection over 600 kilometers, or about 370 miles, between two balloons. Cuba and Florida are only about 100 miles (160 kilometers) apart at their closest.

IS THAT FEASIBLE?

But experts aren't sure it would be that easy to set up a guerrilla internet service for Cuba this way. It would need an unused band of spectrum, or radio frequencies, to transmit a connection to Cuba, and spectrum use is typically controlled by national governments. Anyone trying this would have to find a free block of spectrum that wouldn't be interfered with, said Jacob Sharony, of Mobius Consulting, a mobile and wireless consulting firm.

Balloon- or drone-powered networks aren't likely to be economical over the long term, said Tim Farrar of TMF Associates, a satellite communications consultant. While they're suitable for bridging communications amid disasters or in war zones, the transmission capabilities of such networks isn't large — "certainly not enough to serve the entire population of Cuba or anything like that," Farrar said.

Another challenge: The Cuban government could also try to jam the signal.

WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE CUBA EFFORT?

DeSantis promoted the balloon idea Thursday alongside two Cuban-American members of Congress from the Miami area, Reps. Maria Salazar and Carlos Gimenez, FCC commissioner Brendan Carr and Cuban-American lawyer, businessman and museum director Marcell Felipe.

Felipe said he has been talking for about two years with a defense contractor who could deploy such balloons in a cost-effective way in airspace near Cuba, but declined to name the company. Felipe said his idea would involve transmitting internet connectivity directly to mobile phones on the island without the participation of any ground provider. In comments to The Associated Press, Felipe claimed it wouldn't be feasible for the Cuban government to block these balloon-delivered signals "in any significant manner," though he didn't cite any evidence.

None of the supporters provided a cost estimate. Salazar said that if the federal government endorsed the plan, she believes it could be funded entirely with contributions from members of the Cuban diaspora if necessary.

WHAT IS INTERNET ACCESS LIKE IN CUBA?

Internet access in Cuba has been expensive and relatively rare until recently. Starting in December 2018, Cubans could get internet access on their phones through the state telecom monopoly. More than half of Cubans today have internet access.

But the Cuban government restricts independent media and censors what's available to Cubans online, according to Human Rights Watch. It disrupts internet access in an attempt to head off protests.

Biden grappling with 'pandemic of the unvaccinated'

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two weeks after celebrating America's near "independence" from the coronavirus, President Joe Biden is confronting the worrying reality of rising cases and deaths — and the limitations of his ability to combat the persistent vaccine hesitance responsible for the summer backslide.

Cases of COVID-19 have tripled over the past three weeks, and hospitalizations and deaths are rising among unvaccinated people. While the rates are still sharply down from their January highs, officials are concerned by the reversing trendlines and what they consider needless illness and death. And cases are expected to continue to rise in coming weeks.

While the national emergency may have faded, officials say the outbreak is now a more localized crisis in communities where not enough people have rolled up their sleeves.

"Look, the only pandemic we have is among the unvaccinated," Biden said Friday, echoing comments made earlier in the day by Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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The rising numbers are being driven by large pockets of infection among the more than 90 million eligible Americans who have yet to get shots. Just four states with low vaccination rates made up 40% of new cases last week, and nearly half of them came from Florida alone.

However, there is little appetite in the White House for a return to broad mandates for masks or other measures, as 161 million Americans are already fully vaccinated.

Reflecting that mindset, Walensky said Friday that in low-vaccination areas with rising cases, "local policymakers might consider whether masking at that point would be something that would be helpful for their community."

Some communities are acting. Los Angeles County on Thursday reinstated its requirement that masks be worn in most indoor settings regardless of vaccination status, and health officials in Las Vegas recommended on Friday that workers and patrons in the tourism hotspot wear face coverings while inside.

With three highly effective vaccines authorized for use in the U.S., the Biden administration believes the most effective way to attack the virus is not trying to slow the spread with mass masking and such — something the U.S. showed it was not very good at last year — but to continue to press the importance of vaccinations.

It's no easy fix. Many Americans remain resistant or unmotivated to get shots, despite months of often-creative efforts by federal and state officials and the private sector to spread information about vaccine safety and accessibility.

Surgeon General Vivek Murthy added that while government can play an important role, "this has got to be an 'all of the above' strategy with everybody in," including schools, employers, technology companies and individuals.

In recent days, the administration has turned its focus to younger Americans. It enlisted pop star Olivia Rodrigo for a day-long White House visit Wednesday with Biden and top infectious disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci that was heavily documented for social media. Younger people are at lowest risk of adverse outcomes from the virus and have proven to be among the least likely to get vaccinated.

But another huge group has proven to be an even more vexing challenge: Republicans. The White House has long acknowledged that, given rampant disinformation about the vaccines and the nation's partisan divides, it would have little success convincing the GOP to get on board. Instead, administration officials have amped up criticism in recent days of public officials and social media companies for spreading or not condemning vaccine misinformation spreading among the GOP.

"They're killing people," Biden said Friday of social media companies, speaking a day after Murthy, the surgeon general, warned that false information about vaccines spreading on platforms like Facebook posed a public health risk to the nation.

Efforts for comment from major platforms were not immediately successful.

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

More than 99% of COVID-19 deaths and 97% of hospitalizations are among people who have not been vaccinated, according to the CDC.

The pandemic is now "one that predominantly threatens unvaccinated people," White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients said Friday.

He said the Biden administration expects cases to increase in the weeks ahead because of spreading in communities with low vaccination rates. But Zients added that there is a sign that the increased cases are driving more people in those communities to seek vaccination, reporting that "states with the highest case rates are seeing their vaccination rates go up" faster than the national average.

Unstable weather will continue to fuel huge Oregon blaze

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Dry, unstable and windy conditions will keep fueling a massive wildfire in south-

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ern Oregon, forecasters said, as the largely uncontained blaze grows by miles each day.

The Bootleg Fire was just one of numerous wildfires burning across the U.S. West.

Crews had to flee the fire lines of the Oregon blaze late Thursday after a dangerous "fire cloud" started to collapse, threatening them with strong downdrafts and flying embers. An initial review Friday showed the Bootleg Fire destroyed 67 homes and 117 outbuildings overnight in one county. Authorities were still counting the losses in a second county where the flames are surging up to 4 miles (6 kilometers) a day.

The conflagration has forced 2,000 people to evacuate and is threatening 5,000 buildings, including homes and smaller structures in a rural area just north of the California border, fire spokeswoman Holly Krake said. Active flames are surging along 200 miles (322 kilometers) of the fire's perimeter, she said, and it's expected to merge with a smaller, but equally explosive fire by nightfall.

The Bootleg Fire is now 377 square miles (976 square kilometers) — larger than the area of New York City — and mostly uncontained.

"We're likely going to continue to see fire growth over miles and miles of active fire line," Krake said. "We are continuing to add thousands of acres a day, and it has the potential each day, looking forward into the weekend, to continue those 3- to 4-mile runs."

A Red Flag weather warning was issued for the area through Saturday night.

The inferno has stymied firefighters for a week with erratic winds and extremely dangerous fire behavior, including ominous fire clouds that form from superheated air rising to a height of up to 6 miles (10 kilometers) above the blaze.

"We're expecting those same exact conditions to continue and worsen into the weekend," Krake said of the fire-induced clouds.

Early on, the fire doubled in size almost daily, and strong winds Thursday again pushed the flames rapidly. Similar winds up to 30 mph (48 kph) were expected Friday.

It's burning an area north of the California border that has been gripped by extreme drought, like most of the American West.

Extremely dry conditions and heat waves tied to climate change have swept the region, making wildfires harder to fight. Climate change has made the West much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

The blaze was most active on its northeastern flank, pushed by winds from the south toward the rural communities of Summer Lake and Spring Lake. Paisley, to the east of the fire, was also at risk. All the towns are in Lake County, a remote area of lakes and wildlife refuges with a total population of about 8,000.

The Bootleg Fire is one of at least a dozen major fires burning in Washington state, Oregon and California as a siege of wildfires takes hold across the drought-stricken West. There were 70 active large fires and complexes of multiple fires that have burned nearly 1,659 square miles (4,297 square kilometers) in the U.S., the National Interagency Fire Center said.

In the Pacific Northwest, firefighters said in early July they were facing conditions more typical of late summer or fall.

In California, the Tamarack Fire in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest quickly grew to 2.5 square miles (6.5 square kilometers) on Friday, prompting evacuations in the Markleeville area in Alpine County. The blaze prompted the cancelation of Saturday's "Death Ride," a 103-mile (165.76-kilometer) bicycle ride in the so-called California Alps over three Sierra Nevada mountain passes.

AP: Few AZ voter fraud cases, discrediting Trump's claims

By BOB CHRISTIE and CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona county election officials have identified fewer than 200 cases of potential voter fraud out of more than 3 million ballots cast in last year's presidential election, further discrediting former President Donald Trump's claims of a stolen election as his allies continue a disputed ballot review in the state's most populous county.

An Associated Press investigation found 182 cases where problems were clear enough that officials re-

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ferred them to investigators for further review. So far, only four cases have led to charges, including those identified in a separate state investigation. No one has been convicted. No person's vote was counted twice.

While it's possible more cases could emerge, the numbers illustrate the implausibility of Trump's claims that fraud and irregularities in Arizona cost him the state's electorate votes. In final, certified and audited results, Biden won 10,400 more votes than Trump out of 3.4 million cast.

AP's findings align with previous studies showing voter fraud is rare. Numerous safeguards are built into the system to not only prevent fraud from happening but to detect it when it does.

"The fact of the matter is that election officials across the state are highly invested in helping to ensure the integrity of our elections and the public's confidence in them," said Arizona Secretary of State Katie Hobbs, a Democrat. "And part of that entails taking potential voter fraud seriously."

Arizona's potential cases also illustrate another reality: Voter fraud is often bipartisan. Of the four Arizona cases that have resulted in criminal charges, two involved Democratic voters and two involved Republicans.

AP's review supports statements made by many state and local elections officials — and even some Republican county officials and GOP Gov. Doug Ducey — that Arizona's presidential election was secure and its results valid.

And still, Arizona's GOP-led state Senate has for months been conducting what it describes as a "forensic audit" of results in Phoenix's Maricopa County. The effort has been discredited by election experts and faced bipartisan criticism, but some Republicans, including Trump, have suggested it will uncover evidence of widespread fraud.

"This is not a massive issue," said Adrian Fontes, a Democrat who oversaw the Maricopa County election office during the 2020 election and lost his re-election bid. "It is a lie that has developed over time. It's been fed by conspiracy theorists."

The AP tallied the potential cases after submitting public record requests to all Arizona counties. Most counties — 11 out of 15 — reported they had forwarded no potential cases to local prosecutors. The majority of cases identified so far involve people casting a ballot for a relative who had died or people who tried to cast two ballots.

In addition to the AP's review of county election offices, an Election Integrity Unit of the state attorney general's office that was created in 2019 to ferret out fraud has been reviewing potential cases of fraud.

A spokesman for Attorney General Mark Brnovich told the AP in April that the unit had 21 active investigations, although he did not specify if all were from last fall.

A month later, the office indicted a woman for casting a ballot on behalf of her dead mother in November. A spokeswoman declined to provide updated information this week.

Maricopa County, which is subject to the disputed ballot review ordered by state Senate Republicans, has identified just one case of potential fraud out of 2.1 million ballots cast. That was a voter who might have cast a ballot in another state. The case was sent to the county attorney's office, which forwarded it to the state attorney general.

Virtually all the cases identified by county election officials are in Pima County, home to Tucson, and involved voters who attempted to cast two ballots.

The Pima County Recorder's Office has a practice of referring all cases with even a hint of potential fraud to prosecutors for review, something the state's 14 other county recorders do not do. Pima County officials forwarded 151 cases to prosecutors. They did not refer 25 others from voters over age 70 because there was a greater chance those errors — typically attempts to vote twice — were the result of memory lapses or confusion, not criminal intent, an election official said.

None of the 176 duplicate ballots was counted twice. A spokesman for the Pima County Attorney's Office, Joe Watson, said that the 151 cases it received were still being reviewed and that no charges had been filed.

Pima County's tally of referrals to prosecutors after last year's election was in line with those in 2016 and 2018. Prosecutors filed no voter fraud cases after the 2016 election and just one after the 2018 election, and that case was later dismissed, Watson said Friday.

But there were some new patterns this year, said deputy recorder Pamela Franklin. An unusually high

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number of people appeared to have intentionally voted twice, often by voting early in person and then again by mail. In Arizona, where nearly 80% of voters cast ballots by mail, it's not unusual for someone to forget they returned their mail-in ballot and then later ask for a replacement or try to vote in person, she said. But this pattern was new.

Franklin noted several factors at play, including worries about U.S. Postal Service delays. In addition, Trump at one point encouraged voters who cast their ballots early by mail to show up at their polling places on Election Day and vote again if poll workers couldn't confirm their mail ballots had been received.

The results in Arizona are similar to early findings in other battleground states. Local election officials in Wisconsin identified just 27 potential cases of voter fraud out of 3.3 million ballots cast last November, according to records obtained by the AP under the state's open records law. Potential voter fraud cases in other states where Trump and his allies mounted challenges have so far amounted to just a tiny fraction of Trump's losing margin in those states.

The Associated Press conducted the review following months of Trump and his allies claiming without proof that he had won the 2020 election. His claims of widespread fraud have been rejected by election officials, judges, a group of election security officials and even Trump's own attorney general at the time. Even so, supporters continue to repeat them and they have been cited by state lawmakers as justification for tighter voting rules across the country.

In Arizona, Republican state lawmakers have used the unsubstantiated claims to justify the unprecedented outside Senate review of the election in Maricopa County and to pass legislation that could make it harder for infrequent voters to receive mail ballots automatically.

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Senate President Karen Fann has repeatedly said her goal is not to overturn the election results. Instead, she has said she wants to find out if there were any problems and show voters who believe Trump's claims whether they should trust the results.

"Everybody keeps saying, 'Oh, there's no evidence' and it's like, 'Yeah well, let's do the audit.' And if there's nothing there, then we say, 'Look, there was nothing there,'" Fann told the AP in early May. "If we find something, and it's a big if, but if we find something, then we can say, 'OK, we do have evidence and now how do we fix this?'" Fann did not return calls this week to discuss the AP findings.

Aside from double voting, the cases flagged by officials mostly involved a ballot cast after someone had died, including three voters in Yavapai County who face felony charges for casting ballots for spouses who died before the election.

In Yuma County, one case of a voter attempting to cast two ballots was sent to the county attorney for review. Chief Civil Deputy William Kerekus told the AP that there was no intent at voter fraud and the case was closed without charges.

Cochise County Recorder David Stevens found mail-in ballots were received from two voters who died before mail ballots were sent in early October. Sheriff's deputies investigating the cases found their homes were vacant and closed the cases. The votes were not counted.

US probes rash of health incidents among diplomats in Vienna

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is investigating a recent rash of mysterious health incidents reported by American diplomats and other government employees in Vienna, Austria, U.S. officials said Friday.

Some of the symptoms are similar to those first reported by U.S. diplomats and spies in Havana, Cuba, in 2016 and 2017 for which no definitive cause has yet been determined, according to the officials, who said more than 20 new cases were being looked at by medical teams at the State Department and elsewhere, including the Pentagon and CIA.

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"In coordination with our partners across the U.S. government, we are vigorously investigating reports of possible unexplained health incidents among the U.S. Embassy Vienna community," the State Department said. "Any employees who reported a possible UHI received immediate and appropriate attention and care."

Some believe the unexplained injuries, which include brain damage, are the result of attacks with microwave or radio wave weapons. However, despite years of study there is no consensus as to what or who might be behind the incidents or whether they are, in fact, attacks.

The Vienna-based employees have reported suffering from mysterious symptoms since President Joe Biden was inaugurated, according to the officials. The Vienna cases were first reported Friday by The New Yorker magazine.

Vienna has for centuries been a center for espionage and diplomacy and was a hub for clandestine spy-versus-spy activity during the Cold War. The city is currently the site of indirect talks between Iran and the United States over salvaging the nuclear deal that was negotiated there in 2015.

Those talks are now in hiatus and it was not immediately clear if any members of the U.S. negotiating team were among those suffering from injuries.

The problem has been labeled the "Havana Syndrome," because the first cases affected personnel in 2016 at the U.S. Embassy in Cuba. In May, officials said at least 130 cases across the government are were under investigation, up from several dozen last year.

People who are believed to have been affected have reported headaches, dizziness and symptoms consistent with concussions, with some requiring months of medical treatment. Some have reported hearing a loud noise before the sudden onset of symptoms.

Particularly alarming are revelations of at least two possible incidents in the Washington area, including one case near the White House in November in which an official reported dizziness.

Although some are convinced the injuries are the result of directed energy attacks, others believe the growing number of cases could actually be linked to "mass psychogenic illness," in which people learning of others with symptoms begin to feel sick themselves.

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Gloria Richardson, civil rights pioneer, dies at 99

By BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — Gloria Richardson, an influential yet largely unsung civil rights pioneer whose determination not to back down while protesting racial inequality was captured in a photograph as she pushed away the bayonet of a National Guardsman, has died. She was 99.

Tya Young, her granddaughter, said Richardson died in her sleep Thursday in New York City and had not been ill. Young said while her grandmother was at the forefront of the civil rights movement, she didn't seek praise or recognition.

"She did it because it needed to be done, and she was born a leader," Young said.

Richardson was the first woman to lead a prolonged grassroots civil rights movement outside the Deep South. In 1962, she helped organized and led the Cambridge Movement on Maryland's Eastern Shore with sit-ins to desegregate restaurants, bowling alleys and movie theaters in protests that marked an early part of the Black Power movement.

"I say that the Cambridge Movement was the soil in which Richardson planted a seed of Black power and nurtured its growth," said Joseph R. Fitzgerald, who wrote a 2018 biography on Richardson titled "The Struggle is Eternal: Gloria Richardson and Black Liberation."

Richardson became the leader of demonstrations over bread and butter economic issues like jobs, health care access and sufficient housing.

"Everything that the Black Lives Matter movement is working at right now is a continuation of what the Cambridge Movement was doing," Fitzgerald said.

In pursuit of these goals, Richardson advocated for the right of Black people to defend themselves when attacked.

"Richardson always supported the use of nonviolent direct action during protests, but once the protests were over and if Black people were attacked by whites she fully supported their right to defend themselves," Fitzgerald said.

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Richardson was born in Baltimore and later lived in Cambridge in Maryland's Dorchester County — the same county where Harriet Tubman was born. She entered Howard University when she was 16. During her years in Washington, she began to protest segregation at a drug store.

In 1962, Richardson attended the meeting of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Atlanta and later joined the board.

In the summer of 1963, after peaceful sit-ins turned violent in Cambridge, Gov. J. Millard Tawes declared martial law. When Cambridge Mayor Calvin Mowbray asked Richardson to halt the demonstrations in exchange for an end to the arrests of Black protesters, Richardson declined to do so. On June 11, rioting by white supremacists erupted and Tawes called in the National Guard.

While the city was still under National Guard presence, Richardson met with U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy to negotiate what became informally known as the "Treaty of Cambridge." It ordered equal access to public accommodations in Cambridge in return for a one-year moratorium on demonstrations.

Richardson was a signatory to the treaty, but she had never agreed to end the demonstrations. It was only the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that began to resolve issues at the local level.

She was one of the nation's leading female civil rights' activists and inspired younger activists who went on to protest racial inequality in the late 1960s and into the 1970s.

Richardson was on the stage at the pivotal March on Washington in 1963 as one of six women listed as "fighters for freedom" on the program. However, she was only allowed to say "hello" before the microphone was taken.

The male-centric Black Power movement and the fact that Richardson's leadership in Cambridge lasted about three years may have obscured how influential she was, but Fitzgerald said she was well-known in Black America.

"She was only active for approximately three years, but during that time she was literally front and center in a high-stakes Black liberation campaign, and she's being threatened," Fitzgerald said. "She's got white supremacist terrorists threatening her, calling her house, threatening her with her life."

Richardson resigned from Cambridge, Maryland, Nonviolent Action Committee in the summer of 1964. Divorced from her first husband, she married photographer Frank Dandridge and moved to New York where she worked a variety of jobs, including the National Council for Negro Women.

She is survived by her daughters, Donna Orange and Tamara Richardson, and granddaughters Young and Michelle Price.

Iowa duo deny any involvement in Mollie Tibbetts' death

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — Two childhood friends named by defense lawyers as alternate suspects in the killing of University of Iowa student Mollie Tibbetts said Friday they had nothing to do with the crime.

Lawyers for Cristhian Bahena Rivera, the man convicted of killing Tibbetts, named Gavin Jones and Dalton Hansen as perhaps responsible for Tibbetts' 2018 stabbing death in court filings this week.

They made that assertion after inmate Arne Maki came forward in May to say Jones told him that Jones and Hansen killed Tibbetts after she was kidnapped and briefly held at a home used for sex trafficking. Jones' ex-girlfriend came forward independently the same day to say that Jones, 21, also told her that he killed Tibbetts.

A prosecutor said in court Thursday that there's "zero" evidence to substantiate Jones' alleged confessions and that there should be no doubt Bahena Rivera killed Tibbetts.

Reached by phone separately Friday by The Associated Press, Jones and Hansen said they had no involvement in Tibbetts' disappearance from her hometown of Brooklyn, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) west of Iowa City, or her violent death. They said they hadn't spoken with investigators but were eager to do so in order to clear their names.

"The cops haven't talked to me. No one has talked to me. You are the first person that has called me," said Jones, of Oskaloosa. "I wasn't involved in anything. I have alibis and everything. I am just waiting for

someone to come talk to me.”

He ended the interview without answering whether he had made prior statements about Tibbetts’ death.

The 24-year-old Hansen, of Sigourney, said allegations that he was involved in Tibbetts’ death are “crazy” and starting to spread online.

“I have no clue why my name even got brought up with this,” Hansen said.

Jurors convicted Bahena Rivera in May after a two-week trial during which prosecutors argued that the 27-year-old farmhand stalked and approached Tibbetts while she was out for an evening run. They said he killed her after she threatened to call police and dumped her body in a cornfield.

Bahena Rivera claimed in his courtroom testimony that two masked men broke into his trailer and forced him to drive them around at gunpoint. He said they came upon Tibbetts, and that one of them stabbed her to death and loaded her body in his car’s trunk before instructing him to dispose of it.

Maki and Jones’ ex-girlfriend came forward later that day to tell authorities about Jones’ alleged confessions, which Maki thought were bluster until hearing Bahena Rivera’s testimony.

The defense argues that their testimony could have changed the guilty verdict, and Judge Joel Yates agreed to delay Bahena Rivera’s sentencing while he considers whether to order a new trial.

Yates on Friday denied the defense’s request to order prosecutors to turn over information about prior sex trafficking investigations in the area, saying that would be “nothing more than a fishing expedition.”

Hansen said he and Jones grew up together in the small town of Sigourney and were friends off and on until about two years ago. He said that like Jones, he was housed at the Keokuk County jail at the same time as Maki but didn’t know him well.

Hansen and Jones both said that they’d never heard of a 50-year-old man who defense lawyers have suggested may have also been involved in the case.

Bahena Rivera attorney Chad Frese said he wasn’t surprised by the denials and noted that Jones and Hansen have criminal records involving other violent crimes.

“They aren’t going to stand up and say they did it,” he said.

Members of multimillion-dollar opioid drug ring sentenced

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The final legal chapter of a multimillion-dollar online opioid drug ring ended Friday as a group of millennials who helped run the dark-web operation based in suburban Salt Lake City were sentenced to prison.

Drew Crandall helped start the operation that eventually grew to shipping tens of thousands of fake pills laced with the deadly opioid fentanyl to people nationwide in 2016. He cried as he grappled with his role in the operation that prosecutors have linked to multiple overdose deaths.

“I just want to say that I’m so sorry for everything I have done,” said Crandall, now 35. “So many people were affected by it. I need to pay my debt to society, and I need to take responsibility for my actions.”

He pleaded guilty to drug distribution and money laundering charges and was sentenced to 4 1/2 years in federal prison.

The punishment for him and other defendants was far too light for Tova Keblish of New York, whose son died after buying from the dark-web storefront called Pharma-Master. Her son Gavin was 23 and bought counterfeit oxycodone after having surgery.

“It makes me sick. It’s unfair,” she said. The defendants are “young enough they can get out and have a life.”

Crandall has testified that the operation started small, when he needed cash for student loans, so he let his roommate Aaron Shamo sell his prescription Adderall. Crandall said he scaled back his role before Shamo began selling fentanyl.

Authorities say the 2016 bust at Shamo’s suburban Salt Lake City home ranked among the largest in the country at the time. More than \$1 million was found in his dresser, according to court documents.

Crandall agreed to a plea deal and testified against Shamo, who was convicted of 12 counts and sen-

tenced to life in prison.

Also sentenced this week were two women who packaged the drugs and at one point put together shipments so large they vacuumed pills off their floor. They each got three years in prison, while a "runner" hired to pick up dozens of packages a day and drop them in the mail was sentenced to two years. A gym friend of Shamo's who helped press pills got five years.

Prosecutor Vernon Stejskal said the sentences handed down by U.S. District Judge Dale Kimball sent the message that anyone involved in a drug ring could face "severe consequences."

Still, the outcome is tough to accept for mothers like Shaela Knighton of Salt Lake City, whose son was a grocery store dairy manager helping raise a 2-year-old when he died after buying Pharma-Master pills. "He had a good future," she said. "A family who loved him."

'He was our eye': Reuters photographer killed in Afghanistan

By DANICA KIRKA and KATHY GANNON Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer for the Reuters news service was killed Friday as he chronicled fighting between Afghan forces and the Taliban near a strategic border crossing amid the continuing withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops.

Danish Siddiqui, 38, had been embedded with Afghan special forces for the past few days and was killed as the commando unit battled for control of the Spin Boldak crossing on the border between southern Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Siddiqui was part of a team that won the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for feature photography for their coverage of Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar. More recently, he had captured searing images of India's struggle against COVID-19 and protests against new farming laws.

Farhat Basir Khan, a professor of mass communications at Jamia Millia Islamia University in New Delhi, lauded his former student's sense of empathy and his determination to go after difficult and complex stories.

"He was our eye. He gave voice and agency to thousands whose suffering might have been lost," Khan said in a statement. "If a picture is worth a thousand words, his were worth millions."

Siddiqui and a senior Afghan officer were killed as the special forces unit fought to retake the main market area in Spin Boldak, Reuters reported, citing the army.

The Taliban have turned over Siddiqui's body to the International Committee of the Red Cross, Indian authorities said.

Reuters said it was seeking more information about how Siddiqui was killed, describing him as a "devoted husband and father, and a much-loved colleague."

"It is so devastating for me to imagine that I won't be talking to Danish anymore," said Ahmad Masood, Asia Editor for Reuters Pictures. "A kind-hearted human being. ... He was the best of the best, as a person and a professional. His work speaks volumes of his bravery and his passion in photojournalism. He cared."

Deputy State Department spokesperson Jalina Porter expressed U.S. condolences, saying Siddiqui was "celebrated for his work often in the world's most urgent and challenging news stories and for creating striking images that conveyed a wealth of emotion and the human face behind the headlines."

"Siddiqui's death is a tremendous loss, not only for Reuters and for his media colleagues but also for the rest of the world," she said.

The fighting around Spin Boldak comes as the U.S. and NATO forces complete the final phase of their withdrawal from Afghanistan, opening the door for the Taliban to take control of large swaths of territory. District after district has fallen to the Taliban and the insurgents have in past weeks seized several key border crossings, putting more pressure on the Afghan government and cutting off strategic trade routes.

A native of New Delhi, Siddiqui was a self-taught photographer who had been a defense correspondent for one of India's leading television networks before he decided to change careers.

Siddiqui said he became frustrated because television news focused only on the big stories, not the small features from the interior of India that he wanted to explore, according to a 2018 interview with Forbes India. He left his well-paid TV job in 2010 to become an intern at Reuters.

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A montage of his best work compiled by Reuters includes photos of traditional Indian wrestlers covered in mud, Hindu priests praying in a cave above the River Ganges and a man covered in lint feeding cotton into aging machinery by hand.

"While I enjoy covering news stories – from business to politics to sports – what I enjoy most is capturing the human face of a breaking story," he wrote in a profile on the Reuters website. "I really like covering issues that affect people as the result of different kind of conflicts."

Siddiqui and his colleagues were honored with 2018 Pulitzer Prize for what the judges called "shocking photographs that exposed the world to the violence Rohingya refugees faced in fleeing Myanmar."

One of his prize-winning images shows an exhausted woman crumpled on the sand, while in the background men behind her unload the boat that carried them to safety in Bangladesh.

Capturing the images was difficult, as the photographers had to walk barefoot for up to four hours through rice fields to reach the border area, Siddiqui told Forbes.

"It's an emotional thing too," he said. "I am the father of a two-year-old and to see kids drowning is terrible. But, as a journalist, you've got to do your job. I'm happy I was able to ... balance profession and emotion and know when to drop my camera to save kids left in water by fishermen."

Siddiqui covered the conflict Iraq, earthquakes in Nepal and demonstrations in Hong Kong. But in recent months he turned his lens on the COVID-19 pandemic in India, offering searing images of those who suffered and died without adequate medical care and oxygen.

"I shoot for the common man who wants to see and feel a story from a place where he can't be present himself," he wrote.

Included among the social media tributes to Siddiqui was one of his posts from the Pulitzer Prize ceremony in New York. It showed a closeup of the name tag that identified him as the "2018 Pulitzer Prize Winner Feature Photography."

"For Sarah and Yunus," he wrote above the image, remembering his children as he received the prestigious award.

'A blaring siren' for Democrats after ruling halts DACA

By ASTRID GALVAN Associated Press

Immigrants and advocates are urging Democrats and President Joe Biden to quickly act on legislation to protect young immigrants after a federal judge in Texas on Friday ruled illegal an Obama-era program that prevents the deportation of thousands of them brought into the U.S. as children.

Plaintiffs have vowed to appeal the decision by U.S. District Judge Andrew Hanen, who declared the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program illegal, barring the government from approving any new applications, but leaving the program intact for existing recipients.

Calling the ruling a "blaring siren" for Democrats, United We Dream Executive Director Greisa Martinez Rosas said they would be solely to blame if legislative reform doesn't happen.

"Until the president and Democrats in Congress deliver on citizenship, the lives of millions will remain on the line," Martinez Rosas said.

Hanen ruled in favor of Texas and eight other conservative states that sued to halt DACA, which provides limited protections to about 650,000 people.

The program has faced a roller coaster of court challenges since former President Barack Obama instituted it in June 2012. The Trump administration announced it was ending the program in September 2017, but the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2020 that the administration hadn't ended the program properly, keeping it alive once more.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, in a statement Friday evening, vowed that Democrats will continue to push for passage of the DREAM Act, and called on Republicans "to join us in respecting the will of the American people and the law, to ensure that Dreamers have a permanent path to citizenship."

In Friday's ruling, Hanen wrote that the states proved "the hardship that the continued operation of DACA has inflicted on them."

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He continued: "Furthermore, the government has no legitimate interest in the continuation of an illegally implemented program."

Biden has already proposed legislation that would provide a pathway to citizenship for the estimated 11 million people living in the U.S. without authorization. He also ordered agencies to make efforts to preserve the program.

Supporters of DACA, including those who argued before Hanen to save it, have said a law passed by Congress is necessary to provide permanent relief. Hanen has said Congress must act if the U.S. wants to provide the protections in DACA to recipients commonly known as "Dreamers," based on never-passed proposals in Congress called the DREAM Act.

The House approved legislation in March creating a pathway toward citizenship for "Dreamers," but the measure has stalled in the Senate. Immigration advocates hope to include a provision opening that citizenship doorway in sweeping budget legislation Democrats want to approve this year, but it's unclear whether that language will survive.

Suing alongside Texas were Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, South Carolina, and West Virginia — states that all had Republican governors or state attorneys general.

They argued that Obama didn't have the authority to create DACA because it circumvented Congress. The states also argued that the program drains their educational and healthcare resources.

The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and the New Jersey Attorney General's Office, which defended the program on behalf of some DACA recipients, argued Obama did have the authority and that the states lacked the standing to sue because they had not suffered any harm due to the program.

Thomas Saenz, president of MALDEF, said Friday that plaintiffs will file an appeal.

"Today's decision then once more emphasizes how critically important it is that the Congress step up to reflect the will of a supermajority of citizens and voters in this country. That will is to see DACA recipients and other young immigrants similarly situated receive legislative action that will grant them a pathway to permanence and citizenship in our country," Saenz said.

Hanen rejected Texas' request in 2018 to stop the program through a preliminary injunction. But in a foreshadowing of his latest ruling, he said he believed DACA as enacted was likely unconstitutional without congressional approval.

Hanen ruled in 2015 that Obama could not expand DACA protections or institute a program shielding their parents.

While DACA is often described as a program for young immigrants, many recipients have lived in the U.S. for a decade or longer after being brought into the country without permission or overstaying visas. The liberal Center for American Progress says roughly 254,000 children have at least one parent relying on DACA. Some recipients are grandparents.

Todd Schulte, president of FWD.us, a progressive organization, expressed disappointment at Friday's ruling, saying in a statement that DACA has been a big success that has transformed many lives.

"Today makes absolutely clear: only a permanent legislative solution passed by Congress will eliminate the fear and uncertainty that DACA recipients have been forced to live with for years. We call on each and every elected office to do everything within their power so that DACA recipients and their families and communities can live free from fear, and continue to build their lives here," Schulte said.

Biden to meet with Iraqi prime minister at White House

President Joe Biden will meet with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi later this month in Washington, the White House said Friday.

The meeting set for July 26 comes at a pivotal point in the U.S.-Iraq relationship, and amid growing concerns about more frequent attacks against U.S. troops in Iraq and Syria.

There have been at least eight drone attacks targeting the U.S. presence since Biden took office in January, as well as 17 rocket attacks.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Biden "also looks forward to strengthening bilateral coop-

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eration with Iraq on political, economic and security issues to include joint efforts to ensure the enduring defeat" of the Islamic State militant group.

The attacks on U.S. forces have been blamed on the Iranian-backed militias that make up the bulk of Iraq's state-supported Popular Mobilization Forces.

The Biden administration has responded by twice targeting Iraqi militia groups operating inside Syria, including one close to the Iraq border.

The relationship has been complicated since last year's U.S. drone strike killing of Iran's expeditionary Quds Force commander Qassim Soleimani and senior Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis at Baghdad International Airport. That strike was ordered by then-President Donald Trump.

But with the Biden administration seeking to revive an Obama-era nuclear accord with Iran, there have been signs that Iran is looking to curb, at least for now, militia attacks on the U.S.

Soleimani's successor Esmail Ghaani last month called on Iranian-backed militias to remain calm until after nuclear talks between Iran and the United States, The Associated Press reported last week.

Colorado father convicted of killing his 13-year-old son

By PATTY NIEBERG Associated Press/Report for America

DENVER (AP) — A Colorado father was convicted Friday of second-degree murder and child abuse resulting in death in the 2012 disappearance of his 13-year-old son.

Mark Redwine, 59, was indicted in 2017 in connection with the disappearance of Dylan Redwine, who was reported missing on Nov. 19, 2012, while on a court-ordered Thanksgiving visit to his father's home outside the city of Durango.

Redwine did not show any reaction when the verdicts were read as he stood with his hands clasped in front of him.

Dylan Redwine's remains were found a few miles from his father's home in 2013, and hikers found his skull in 2015.

Prosecutors argued that Redwine killed Dylan in a fit of rage after they argued over embarrassing photos of Redwine wearing women's lingerie and eating feces from a diaper. Dylan's older brother testified that Dylan discovered the photos before he went missing.

Redwine, who didn't testify at trial, told investigators he left Dylan alone at home to run errands and returned to find him missing. Defense attorneys suggested the photos have no connection to Dylan Redwine's death and that the boy ran away and may have been killed by a wild animal.

The case drew national attention when Redwine and the boy's mother, Elaine Hall, leveled accusations at each other during appearances on the syndicated "Dr. Phil" television show in 2013.

"This has been an extremely difficult case for everybody involved," Judge Jeffrey Wilson said before the verdict was read. "It's been difficult for the parties, for the attorneys, for their staff. It's been difficult for the families, the entire community.

Jurors delivered their verdict after less than a day of deliberations.

Hall testified at trial that she sent Dylan to his father's house on Nov. 18, 2012, learned he was missing the next day and immediately drove six hours to southwestern Colorado's La Plata County to search for her son. Hall said she had no knowledge of her son confronting his father about the photos.

Hall almost immediately suspected her ex-husband wasn't telling the full truth about their son's disappearance, text messages introduced as evidence suggested. Two hours after learning Dylan was missing, Hall texted Mark Redwine.

"He wouldn't just leave," she wrote. "He would have called me. I am so suspect of you right now. How could he just disappear?"

Public defender Justin Bogan suggested that her account was tainted by a contentious divorce and custody battle with Redwine. Bogan also suggested that Hall's appearance on national TV turned public opinion against her ex-husband and influenced the direction of the police investigation.

Hall insisted she spoke with media and attended a protest at Mark Redwine's house in an effort to bring Dylan home.

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"I figured he was safe because he was with his dad, and I was devastated that no one knew where my son was," she said.

Throughout the trial, prosecutors doubled down on the compromising photos of Redwine, arguing the father-son relationship was in decline long before Dylan's disappearance. Prosecutors also focused on comments Dylan made to family and friends about dreading the court-ordered visit.

Public defender John Moran said during his opening statements that Dylan ran away from home and suggested he could have been attacked by a bear or a mountain lion. He referred to an injury on Dylan's skull as a tooth mark.

A forensic anthropologist, Diane France, testified that Dylan suffered a fracture above his left eye. Two marks on the boy's skull were likely caused by a knife or sharp tool at or near the time of death, France said.

Meanwhile Redwine's defense said in closing arguments that expert testimony had showed Dylan's skull was still in a peri-mortem state in 2015. He said that means it retained elasticity and wetness, making it susceptible to environmental factors like animal scavenging for three years before it was discovered.

Bogan called the investigation "biased" and "sloppy" because of evidence destruction by an expert who broke off a piece of Dylan's skull during their examination and a scientist who revealed in court that the prosecution gave police reports to them before their testimony.

Fred Johnson, special deputy district attorney, told jurors that investigators found traces of Dylan's blood in Redwine's living room and that a cadaver-sniffing dog alerted them to the smell of human remains in the back of Redwine's truck and on his clothing.

But Moran said the "infinitely small" amount of blood found in the living room is likely to be found in anyone's house. He also referred to the use of the dog as "junk science."

Redwine was arrested in Bellingham, Washington following a grand jury indictment in 2017. At the time, prosecutors said "compromising photographs" were a point of contention between Redwine and Dylan. They didn't elaborate.

Redwine's sentencing hearing is scheduled for October.

Oregon wildfire forms 'fire clouds' that pose danger below

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Smoke and heat from a massive wildfire in southeastern Oregon are creating giant "fire clouds" over the blaze — dangerous columns of smoke and ash that can reach up to 6 miles (10 kilometers) in the sky and are visible from more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) away.

Authorities have put these clouds at the top of the list of the extreme fire behavior they are seeing on the Bootleg Fire, the largest wildfire burning in the U.S. The inferno grew Friday to about 75 square miles (194 square kilometers) larger than the size of New York City and was raging through a part of the U.S. West that is enduring a historic drought.

The fire was so dangerous late Thursday and into Friday that authorities pulled out crews. Meteorologists this week also spotted a bigger, more extreme form of fire clouds — ones that can create their own weather, including "fire tornadoes."

Extreme fire behavior, including the formation of more fire clouds, was expected to persist Friday and worsen into the weekend.

WHAT ARE 'FIRE CLOUDS?'

Pyrocumulus clouds — literally translated as "fire clouds" — look like giant, dirty-colored thunderheads that sit atop a massive column of smoke coming up from a wildfire. Often the top of the smoke column flattens out to take the shape of an anvil.

In Oregon, fire authorities say the clouds are forming between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. each day as the sun penetrates the smoke layer and heats the ground below, creating an updraft of hot air. On this fire, crews are seeing the biggest and most dangerous clouds over a section of wilderness that's made up mostly of dead trees, which burn instantly and with a lot of heat.

For four days in a row, the Bootleg Fire has generated multiple fire clouds that rise nearly 6 miles (10 kilometers) into the atmosphere and are "easily visible from 100 to 120 air miles away" (160 to 193 kilo-

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meters), authorities said Friday.

The conditions that create the clouds were expected to worsen over the weekend.

WHAT'S THE SCIENCE BEHIND THESE CLOUDS?

When air over the fire becomes super-heated, it rises in a large column. As the air with more moisture rises, it rushes up the smoke column into the atmosphere, and the moisture condenses into droplets. That's what creates the "fire clouds" that look much like the thunderheads seen before a big thunderstorm.

These clouds, however, hold more than just water. Ash and particles from the fire also get swept into them, giving them a dark gray, ominous look.

IS THERE SOMETHING EVEN MORE DANGEROUS THAN A 'FIRE CLOUD'?

Yes. When a pyrocumulus cloud forms over a fire, meteorologists begin to watch carefully for its big brother, the pyrocumulonimbus cloud.

NASA has called the latter the "fire-breathing dragon of clouds" because they are so hot and big that they create their own weather.

In a worst-case scenario, fire crews on the ground could see one of the monster clouds spawn a "fire tornado," generate its own dry lightning and hail — but no rain — and create dangerous hot winds below. They can also send particulate matter from the smoke column up to 10 miles (16 kilometers) above Earth's surface.

So far, most of the clouds on the Bootleg Fire have been the less-intense fire clouds, but the National Weather Service on Wednesday spotted a pyrocumulonimbus cloud forming on what it called "terrifying" satellite imagery.

"Please send positive thoughts and well wishes to the firefighters. ... It's a tough time for them right now," the weather service said in a tweet.

HOW DANGEROUS ARE THESE CLOUDS?

Both types of fire clouds pose serious risks for firefighters.

Multiple pyrocumulus clouds have been spotted for four consecutive days, and one of them on the southern flank of the fire partially collapsed Thursday, causing dangerous winds and embers to fall on crews.

That prompted the emergency evacuation of all firefighters and dirt-moving equipment from that part of the fire line. Authorities say there have been no reported injuries.

"We're expecting those exact same conditions to develop today and even worsen into the weekend," fire spokeswoman Holly Krake said Friday.

WHERE ELSE HAVE THESE CLOUDS FORMED?

These types of fire-induced clouds are becoming more common as climate change lengthens and intensifies the wildfire season across the U.S. West and in other places, including Australia.

Experts with the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory said in a news release Friday that they are seeing a "record number" of these fire-induced clouds in North America this summer, including in Oregon, Montana and British Columbia.

For example, a wildfire in British Columbia last month that leveled an entire town also generated a pyrocumulonimbus cloud.

Blazes in California in 2020 and in the years before have created multiple pyrocumulus clouds, with the Creek Fire in the Fresno area generating a mighty pyrocumulonimbus cloud last fall.

Australia's bush fire siege in January 2020 also produced pyrocumulonimbus clouds that threatened to produce a fire tornado.

Biden grappling with 'pandemic of the unvaccinated'

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two weeks after celebrating America's near "independence" from the coronavirus, President Joe Biden is confronting the worrying reality of rising cases and deaths — and the limitations of his ability to combat the persistent vaccine hesitance responsible for the summer backslide.

Cases of COVID-19 have tripled over the past three weeks, and hospitalizations and deaths are rising

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among unvaccinated people. While the rates are still sharply down from their January highs, officials are concerned by the reversing trendlines and what they consider needless illness and death. And cases are expected to continue to rise in coming weeks.

While the national emergency may have faded, officials say the outbreak is now a more localized crisis in communities where not enough people have rolled up their sleeves.

"Look, the only pandemic we have is among the unvaccinated," Biden said Friday, echoing comments made earlier in the day by Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The rising numbers are being driven by large pockets of infection among the more than 90 million eligible Americans who have yet to get shots. Just four states with low vaccination rates made up 40% of new cases last week, and nearly half of them came from Florida alone.

However, there is little appetite in the White House for a return to broad mandates for masks or other measures, as 161 million Americans are already fully vaccinated.

Reflecting that mindset, Walensky said Friday that in low-vaccination areas with rising cases, "local policymakers might consider whether masking at that point would be something that would be helpful for their community."

Some communities are acting. Los Angeles County on Thursday reinstated its requirement that masks be worn in most indoor settings regardless of vaccination status, and health officials in Las Vegas recommended on Friday that workers and patrons in the tourism hotspot wear face coverings while inside.

With three highly effective vaccines authorized for use in the U.S., the Biden administration believes the most effective way to attack the virus is not trying to slow the spread with mass masking and such — something the U.S. showed it was not very good at last year — but to continue to press the importance of vaccinations.

It's no easy fix. Many Americans remain resistant or unmotivated to get shots, despite months of often-creative efforts by federal and state officials and the private sector to spread information about vaccine safety and accessibility.

Surgeon General Vivek Murthy added that while government can play an important role, "this has got to be an 'all of the above' strategy with everybody in," including schools, employers, technology companies and individuals.

In recent days, the administration has turned its focus to younger Americans. It enlisted pop star Olivia Rodrigo for a day-long White House visit Wednesday with Biden and top infectious disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci that was heavily documented for social media. Younger people are at lowest risk of adverse outcomes from the virus and have proven to be among the least likely to get vaccinated.

But another huge group has proven to be an even more vexing challenge: Republicans. The White House has long acknowledged that, given rampant disinformation about the vaccines and the nation's partisan divides, it would have little success convincing the GOP to get on board. Instead, administration officials have amped up criticism in recent days of public officials and social media companies for spreading or not condemning vaccine misinformation spreading among the GOP.

"They're killing people," Biden said Friday of social media companies, speaking a day after Murthy, the surgeon general, warned that false information about vaccines spreading on platforms like Facebook posed a public health risk to the nation.

Efforts for comment from major platforms were not immediately successful.

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

More than 99% of COVID-19 deaths and 97% of hospitalizations are among people who have not been vaccinated, according to the CDC.

The pandemic is now "one that predominantly threatens unvaccinated people," White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients said Friday.

He said the Biden administration expects cases to increase in the weeks ahead because of spreading

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in communities with low vaccination rates But Zients added that there is a sign that the increased cases are driving more people in those communities to seek vaccination, reporting that "states with the highest case rates are seeing their vaccination rates go up" faster than the national average.

Plenty at stake for NBC as COVID Olympics opening looms

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — If all goes well for NBC Universal over the next several weeks, Americans will be buzzing about the Olympic performances of Simone Biles, Gabby Thomas, Kevin Durant or some unexpected star.

The year-delayed Tokyo Olympics officially opens with NBC's telecast of the opening ceremony on July 23 — live in the morning and with an edited version in prime time.

The Olympics arrive dripping in bad vibes, amid a COVID-19 state of emergency in Japan. The majority of Japanese citizens are unvaccinated against the virus and most wish the Olympics weren't taking place this summer. Most events will occur in near-empty venues. Star sprinter Sha'Carri Richardson was kicked off the U.S. team after a positive marijuana test, and the U.S. men's basketball team suffered embarrassing exhibition losses to Nigeria and Australia.

Yet once the competition begins, NBC is banking on a COVID-weary United States to embrace the Games.

"I really believe that people are craving a shared experience after all we've been through," said Molly Solomon, executive producer of NBC's Olympics coverage.

If you miss anything, it won't be NBC's fault. More than 7,000 hours of Olympics coverage will be offered, on NBC, cable outlets like USA and NBCSN, on NBCOlympics.com and the Peacock streaming service, on Twitch, Twitter and Snap.

The length of COVID's shadow is difficult to predict.

While the International Olympic Committee gave the go-ahead for the Games, it's hard to fathom that NBC Universal, which is paying \$7.75 billion to broadcast the Olympics between 2022 and 2032, didn't make its voice heard. Mike Wise didn't exempt NBC when he called it "one of the most brazen, hubris-over-humanity cash grabs in modern history" in a Washington Post column this week.

Asked about the issue, Solomon said, "if there's an Olympic Games that's happening, as the American broadcaster, we're going to be here to chronicle the stories of the games."

NBC News anchor Lester Holt will report during the opening ceremonies about the COVID-19 concerns and restrictions placed on participants.

"You would hope that (NBC) would be willing to, as much as it is feasible, step out of the Olympics bubble and talk to everyday people in Japan to hear their thoughts," said Jules Boykoff, a Pacific University professor and author of "Power Games: A Political History of the Olympics," who has been critical of the decision to proceed with the games.

How much Holt will be needed after opening night is anybody's guess. Only a determined optimist would believe that no athlete will catch the virus or be exposed. The question is whether it will happen often enough to wreak havoc on the schedule.

NBC tends to handle news at the Olympics in perfunctory fashion and keep the focus on sports. There's also a history of pre-games concerns melting away once competition begins. Remember the Zika virus? Worries about terrorism in London?

A recent survey suggested there's not a great deal of public interest leading into the games. COVID restrictions will also mean fewer reporters will be there to cover the events, eliminating some avenues of attention, said John Affleck, professor of sports journalism and society at Penn State University.

NBC considers anticipation levels relatively meaningless before Olympians get into the starting blocks. Andy Billings, director of the sports communications program at the University of Alabama, said he sees positive signs for NBC in the attention paid to televised Olympic team trials.

The lack of a live audience is one issue NBC is working hard to counteract.

The company said it would not pipe in fake crowd noise. That's a technicality, since the Olympic Broadcasting Service, which provides the video and audio feeds of events that NBC will use, is working to "cre-

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ate ... an atmosphere for the athletes so they're not competing without any crowd murmur or presence," Solomon said.

NBC is looking to amplify the sounds of competition — the splash of the pool, the interplay between coach and athlete — to give viewers the feel of being there, she said.

Without the broadcast staple of a cutaway to nervous parents in the stands, NBC will try to recreate that by showing viewing parties back in the United States.

NBC's prime-time coverage will almost exclusively be devoted to swimming and diving, track and field, gymnastics and beach volleyball, as it has in the past. There will be some exceptions, like gold medal games in men's and women's basketball.

That lack of variety is less a point of contention than it used to be, since there are other outlets for competition. The time difference — Tokyo is 13 hours ahead of the Eastern United States, 16 hours ahead of the West — means limited opportunity for live coverage in the evening.

All of the consumer options give NBC Universal other ways to make money; NBC prime-time ratings will be the biggest factor, but no longer the sole determinant, of financial success or failure.

NBC Universal announced just before the pandemic shutdown in March 2020 that it had sold a record \$1.25 billion in advertising time for the games, then scheduled for four months later. With the games rescheduled, NBC Universal has not publicly updated that figure. The company has said that it expects to exceed advertising sales from the last Summer Games, in 2016, with more advertisers than any previous Olympics.

"If they break even, that is a great success," Alabama's Billings said. "If you can simply not lose money and have a massive number of new subscriptions for Peacock, from people checking that out, that's an incredible promotion for what they probably see as the future of television."

Peacock is the new wrinkle this year. The service, looking to compete in a streaming world dominated by Netflix and Disney, claims 42 million subscribers. Customers can get it for free, or there are \$5 and \$10 options with fewer ads and more content.

It is experimenting with Olympics content, much of it highlight-based, although it will offer some events streamed live or later on demand. The \$5 option opens access to live U.S. basketball games. The NBCOlympics.com website remains the place for customers to access the most content.

The first U.S. competition predates the opening ceremony: a softball game against Italy that will be broadcast on NBCSN on Tuesday night.

As he prepared to head for Japan this weekend, NBC commentator Ato Boldon, a former track and field Olympian, said he felt no anxiety despite the COVID-19 state of emergency.

"I know this is not going to be a typical Olympic Games," he said. "But I still feel it has its purpose in not just the sporting landscape this year, but in the human landscape."

UK govt plan to end virus orders queried as cases top 50,000

By PAN PYLAS Associated

LONDON (AP) — The U.K. recorded more than 50,000 new coronavirus cases for the first time in six months Friday amid a warning from the British government's top medical adviser that the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 could hit "quite scary" levels within weeks.

Government figures showed another 51,870 confirmed lab cases, the highest daily number since mid-January. Infections have surged in recent weeks, mainly among unvaccinated younger people, as a result of the far more contagious delta variant and the continued easing of lockdown restrictions.

Despite the increase, the British government plans Monday to lift all remaining legal restrictions on social contact in England and to ditch social distancing guidelines as well as the legal requirement for people to wear masks in most indoor settings, including shops, trains, buses and subways.

The government is hoping that the rapid rollout of vaccines will keep a lid on the number of people becoming seriously ill — a stance that some leading international scientists at an "emergency international summit" critiqued as "reckless."

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The group, which includes advisers to the governments of Italy, New Zealand and Taiwan, said they joined forces through a "sense of urgency" to warn of the global consequences of allowing the delta variant to spread rapidly through the British population.

The scientists warned that the combination of high infection prevalence and high levels of vaccination "create the conditions in which an immune escape variant is most likely to emerge."

One of the co-signatories to Friday's statement, Dr. William A. Haseltine of the New York-based think tank Access Health International, went further, describing the seeming strategy of herd immunity as "murderous" and "unconscionable."

Families representing many of those who have died from COVID-19 in the U.K. also joined in the criticism of the Conservative government's plan.

"The overwhelming scientific consensus is that lifting restrictions on Monday will be disastrous, and bereaved families know firsthand how tragic the consequences of unlocking too early can be," said Jo Goodman, co-founder of Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice. "There is a real fear that once again the government's thinking is being driven by what's popular rather than the interests of the country."

Other parts of the U.K. — Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland — are taking more cautious steps out of lockdown.

So far, the number of people in hospitals with virus-related illnesses and subsequently dying remains relatively low, certainly when compared with the peak of the second wave of the pandemic earlier this year.

But with the government putting the country on notice that daily case numbers could rise to over 100,000 sometime this summer, concerns are clearly growing. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has sought to rein in any euphoria around Monday's lifting of restrictions, an occasion tagged "Freedom Day" on social media.

Johnson is urging people to remain vigilant when meeting with others and to carry on wearing masks in enclosed and crowded places.

His chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, told a webinar hosted by London's Science Museum late Thursday that the U.K. is "not out of the woods yet."

"I don't think we should underestimate the fact that we could get into trouble again surprisingly fast," Whitty said.

More cases will inevitably lead to more people requiring hospital attention even though the vaccine rollout has helped build a wall of immunity around those deemed to be the most vulnerable to disease. More than two-thirds of British adults have received both doses of a vaccine, and almost 88% have had one dose.

Friday's government data showed 3,964 people hospitalized with COVID-19, the most since late March. Though the number has gone up steadily in recent weeks, it remains far lower than at the height of the second wave in January, when hospitals had around 40,000 COVID-19 patients admitted.

Alongside the increase in hospitalizations, daily virus-related deaths have risen to levels not seen since March. Another 49 virus-related deaths were recorded Friday, taking the U.K.'s total to 128,642, the seventh-highest in the world.

Government medical adviser Whitty warned that the number of people in hospitals with COVID-19 is doubling about every three weeks and could reach "quite scary numbers" if the current trend continues.

"We are not by any means out of the woods yet on this. We are in much better shape due to the vaccine program, and drugs and a variety of other things," he said.

"But this has got a long way to run in the U.K., and it's got even further to run globally," he added.

One potential implication of the big spike in cases — for much of the spring, cases in the U.K. hovered around the 2,000 mark — is that it may overwhelm England's efforts to track contacts of those infected with the virus, including the app that is widely used and which has come under criticism in recent days.

"I don't imagine track and trace will function for much longer," said James Naismith, director of the Rosalind Franklin Institute at the University of Oxford "Neither it or the app were designed for 100,000 cases in a highly vaccinated population."

Rescuers race to prevent more deaths from European floods

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By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — In one flooded German town, the ground collapsed under family homes. In another, floodwaters swept through an assisted living center, killing 12.

Rescue workers across Germany and Belgium rushed Friday to prevent more deaths from some of the Continent's worst flooding in years as the number of dead surpassed 125 and the search went on for hundreds of missing people.

Fueled by days of heavy rain, the floodwaters also left thousands of Germans homeless after their dwellings were destroyed or deemed to be at risk, and elected officials began to worry about the lingering economic effects from lost homes and businesses.

Elsewhere in Europe, dikes on swollen rivers were at risk of collapsing, and crews raced to reinforce flood barriers.

Sixty-three people perished in the German state of Rhineland-Palatinate, including 12 residents of an assisted living facility for disabled people in the town of Sinzig who were surprised by a sudden rush of water from the nearby Ahr River, authorities said.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said he was "stunned" by the devastation and pledged support to the families of those killed and to cities and towns facing significant damage.

"In the hour of need, our country stands together," Steinmeier said in a televised statement. "It's important that we show solidarity for those from whom the flood has taken everything."

By Friday evening, waters were receding across much of the affected regions, but officials feared that more bodies might be found in cars and trucks that were swept away.

A harrowing rescue effort unfolded in the German town of Erftstadt, southwest of Cologne, where people were trapped when the ground gave way and their homes collapsed.

Fifty people were rescued from their houses, county administrator Frank Rock told German broadcaster n-tv. Aerial photos showed what appeared to be a massive landslide at a gravel pit on the town's edge.

"One has to assume that under the circumstances some people didn't manage to escape," Rock said.

Authorities cautioned that the large number of missing could stem from duplicated reports and difficulties reaching people because of closed roads and disrupted phone service.

After Germany, where the death toll stood at 106, Belgium was the hardest hit. The country confirmed the deaths of 20 people, with another 20 still missing, Belgian Interior Minister Annelies Verlinden told the VRT network Friday.

Several dikes on the Meuse River that runs from Belgium into the Netherlands were at risk of collapsing, Verlinden said. Authorities in the southern Dutch town of Venlo evacuated 200 hospital patients due to the river's looming threat.

Utility companies reported widespread disruption of electricity and gas service that they said could last for days or weeks.

The governor of North Rhine-Westphalia, who hopes to succeed Chancellor Angela Merkel as the nation's leader after Germany's election on Sept. 26, said the disaster had caused immense economic damage to the country's most populous state. The number of dead in North Rhine-Westphalia stood at 43.

"The floods have literally pulled the ground from beneath many people's feet," Gov. Armin Laschet said at a news conference. "They lost their houses, farms or businesses."

Manfred Pesch, a hotel owner in the small village of Gemuend, recounted how the floods came suddenly and rose to 2 meters (over 6 feet).

"Our hotel needs to be rebuilt," he said. "We need a lot of help."

Wolfgang Meyer, owner of a painting business in Gemuend, said his family escaped the rising water, but his business was swamped.

"The machinery, equipment, the entire office, files, records ... everything is gone actually," he said. "We're going to have some work to do there."

Malu Dreyer, the governor of Rhineland-Palatinate state, said the disaster showed the need to speed up efforts to curb global warming, which experts say could make such disasters more frequent.

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She accused Laschet and Merkel's center-right Union bloc of hindering efforts to achieve greater greenhouse gas reductions in Germany, Europe's biggest economy and a major emitter of planet-warming gases. "Climate change isn't abstract anymore. We are experiencing it up close and painfully," she told the Funke media group.

Steinmeier, the German president, echoed her calls for greater efforts to combat global warming.

"Only if we decisively take up the fight against climate change will we be able to limit the extreme weather conditions we are now experiencing," he said.

The World Meteorological Organization said some parts of Western Europe have received up to two months of rainfall in the space of two days.

"What made it worse is that the soils were already saturated by previous rainfall," WMO spokesperson Clare Nullis said.

She said it was too soon to blame the floods and preceding heat wave on rising global temperatures but added: "Climate change is already increasing the frequency of extreme events. And many single events have been shown to be made worse by global warming."

The German military deployed over 850 troops to help with flood efforts, and the need for help was growing, Defense Ministry spokesman Arne Collatz said. He said the ministry had triggered a "military disaster alarm."

Italy sent civil protection officials, firefighters and rescue dinghies to Belgium to help in the search for missing people.

In the southern Dutch province of Limburg, which also has been hit hard by flooding, troops piled sandbags to strengthen a 1.1-kilometer (0.7 mile) stretch of dike along the Maas River, and police helped evacuate low-lying neighborhoods.

Caretaker Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said the government was officially declaring flooded regions disaster areas, making businesses and residents eligible for compensation. Dutch King Willem-Alexander visited the region Thursday night and called the scenes "heartbreaking."

Meanwhile, heavy rain in Switzerland caused several rivers and lakes to burst their banks. Public broadcaster SRF reported that a flash flood swept away cars, flooded basements and destroyed small bridges late Thursday in the northern villages of Schleithem und Beggingen.

Erik Schulz, the mayor of the hard-hit German city of Hagen, 50 kilometers (31 miles) northeast of Cologne, said a wave of other regions and ordinary citizens were offering to help.

"We have many, many citizens saying 'I can offer a place to stay. Where can I go to help? ... Where can I bring my shovel and bucket?'" he told n-tv. "The city is standing together, and you can feel that."

Leader backs order in South Africa, vows to catch plotters

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Standing before a looted mall and surrounded by soldiers, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa vowed Friday to restore order to the country after a week of violence set off by the imprisonment of former President Jacob Zuma.

Visiting the port city of Durban in hard-hit KwaZulu-Natal province, Zuma's home area, Ramaphosa said the chaos and violence in which more than 200 people died had been "planned and coordinated" and that the instigators will be prosecuted.

"We have identified a good number of them and we will not allow anarchy and mayhem to just unfold in our country," he said. One person has been arrested for instigating the violence and 11 others are under surveillance, officials said.

As army tanks rolled by the trashed Bridge City mall, Ramaphosa said the deployment of 25,000 troops would end the violence and rampant theft that have hit KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces.

South Africa's unrest erupted after Zuma began serving a 15-month sentence for contempt of court for refusing to comply with a court order to testify at a state-backed inquiry investigating allegations of corruption while he was president from 2009 to 2018.

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Protests quickly escalated into theft in township areas. In Durban, rioters attacked retail areas and industrial centers where they emptied warehouses and set them alight. The burned-out shells still smoldered Friday.

More than 2,500 people have been arrested for theft and vandalism and 212 people have died, Ramaphosa told the nation later Friday. Many who died were trampled to death when shops were looted, said police.

"The events of the past week were nothing less than a deliberate, coordinated and well-planned attack on our democracy," said a solemn Ramaphosa. "These actions are intended to cripple the economy, cause social instability and severely weaken – or even dislodge – the democratic state. Using the pretext of a political grievance, those behind these acts have sought to provoke a popular insurrection."

Ramaphosa reiterated that those who instigated the unrest will be arrested and prosecuted.

"Those responsible for organizing this campaign of violence and destruction have not yet been apprehended and their networks have not yet been dismantled," said Ramaphosa. "(But) we know who they are and they will be brought to justice."

He assured South Africans that the country has adequate food and it will be distributed to areas where supplies have been disrupted. He said disruptions to the COVID-19 vaccination drive will be quickly addressed.

Ramaphosa said that the cost of the rioting to South Africa's economy will be "billions and billions of rands (dollars)." Extensive damage has been caused to 161 malls and shopping centers, 11 warehouses, 8 factories and 161 liquor stores and distributors, he said.

The army rollout in KwaZulu-Natal is expected to restore order in the coastal province within a few days. An uneasy calm has been secured in Gauteng province, which includes Johannesburg, South Africa's largest city and industrial hub.

Two strategic highways linking Durban port to Johannesburg and Cape Town reopened Friday after being closed for a week. The military will patrol the highways but drivers were warned to use the roads with care.

"It is vitally important to proceed with extreme caution and to stay alert at all times," the highway authority said in a tweet Friday.

The highways are vital transport routes carrying fuel, food and other goods. Authorities were working to reopen the rail line to the strategic Indian Ocean ports of Durban and Richard's Bay.

One of the country's biggest food manufacturers, Tiger Brands, said it has stopped food production operations at its most affected sites in KwaZulu-Natal. The company said it had lost stock worth close to 150 million rand (about \$10 million) in the violence.

With order restored in Gauteng, authorities have begun holding residents accountable. Police in Johannesburg have started recovering stolen property and arresting suspects.

There has been an increase in people trying to spend cash stained with green dye, evidence that the money was stolen from the hundreds of ATM machines broken into during the riots, according to the South African Banking Risk Information Center, which warned that the notes won't be honored.

To restore respect for law, the South African Council of Churches has proposed that the government declare a limited amnesty of two weeks when people can return stolen property to the police and will not be charged.

"We need leaders of all faiths everywhere, civic and community leaders, traditional leaders in rural communities, and business and trade unions in the workplace, all of us to pull together and chart a path of restoration," Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, general secretary of the ecumenical group, wrote in an open letter.

Swift action must be taken against those who plotted the strategic attacks, said Ronnie Kasrils, veteran anti-apartheid leader and former Cabinet intelligence minister.

"This unrest is coming to be seen by government and intelligence services and the president as an actual plot by a group in support of Jacob Zuma ... to unleash civil disorder and really to bring the country to its knees," said Kasrils. "There is the need to root out the plotters and bring forward the allegations, the evidence."

'Pandemic of the unvaccinated' burdens busy US hospitals

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and JOSH FUNK Associated Press

The COVID-19 comeback across the U.S. is putting pressure on hospitals at a time when some of them are busy just trying to catch up on surgeries and other procedures that were put on hold during the pandemic.

With the highly contagious delta variant spreading rapidly, cases in the U.S. are up around 70% over the last week, hospital admissions have climbed about 36% and deaths rose by 26%, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Friday.

Some hospitals are reporting record or near-record patient volumes. But even for those that aren't, this round of the pandemic is proving tougher in some ways, hospital and health officials said. Staff members are worn out, and finding traveling nurses to boost their ranks can be tough.

"I really think of it as a war and how long can you stay on the front line," said Dr. Mark Rosenberg, president of the American College of Emergency Physicians. "And how many times do you want to go back for another tour of duty. Eventually you just don't want to do it."

Also, many hospitals were busy even before the surge began, dealing with a backlog of cancer screenings, operations and other procedures that were put off during the winter surge to free up space and staff members, according to health care leaders.

"Eventually you have to pay the piper, and those things have now built up," said Dr. James Lawler of the Global Center for Health Security at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha.

The fear now at some hospitals is that they will have to postpone non-COVID-19 care again — and risk the potential health consequences for patients.

Dr. Laura Makaroff, senior vice president for prevention and early detection for the American Cancer Society, said cancer screenings dropped during the outbreak and have yet to return to normal levels in many communities. She warned that delays in screenings can result in cancers being detected at more advanced stages of the disease.

COVID-19 deaths and newly confirmed infections across the U.S. are still dramatically lower than they were over the winter. But for the first time since then, cases are rising in all 50 states. And the nation's vaccination drive has slowed to a crawl, with only about 48% of the population fully protected.

CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky warned that the outbreak in the U.S. is becoming "a pandemic of the unvaccinated" because nearly all hospital admissions and deaths are among those who hadn't been immunized.

One of the most overwhelmed areas of the country is Springfield, Missouri, where public health officials begged the state this week to convert a dormitory, hotel or another large space for the care of less seriously ill COVID-19 patients so that the city's two hospitals can focus on the sickest.

Mercy Springfield and Cox South have seen a sevenfold increase in coronavirus patients since late May, with Mercy treating pandemic-high numbers and Cox expected to break its own record next week.

In Florida, UF Health Jacksonville is talking about setting up tents in the parking lot to help with the overflow after the number of COVID-19 in-patients doubled to 77 over the past couple of weeks. Chad Neilsen, director of infection prevention, said the hospital expects to surpass its January high of 125 COVID-19 in-patients in the next few weeks.

Before the rise, the hospital had begun a push to bring back patients who had delayed care amid the pandemic. Now it is discussing canceling procedures, Neilsen said.

"To be telling someone, 'Sorry, we have to delay your hip surgery or your procedure because we have too many COVID patients who are largely unvaccinated,' it is just not what we signed up to do in health care," he said.

In Georgia, Augusta University Medical Center is "busting at the seams" as it handles medical procedures postponed because of the pandemic and deals with a spike in respiratory illnesses that usually hit in the wintertime, said Dr. Phillip Coule, chief medical officer.

COVID-19 hospitalizations also have started inching up to around eight or 10 patients, from lows of one or two a day. While the numbers still remain far below the peak of 145 in January, Coule said he is

watching the situation closely.

"In some ways I feel like we are a lot better off than we were before," he said, noting that the staff is safer because of vaccinations. "In other ways, it worries we if we have to defer routine care again what the outcome will be."

In California, Los Angeles County will again require masks indoors, even in people who have been vaccinated. Over the past three weeks, COVID-19 cases have doubled across Kaiser Permanente's 36 California hospitals, to more than 400.

Dr. Stephen Parodi, who helped develop the surge plans for Kaiser Permanente's hospitals, said he is confident they can handle the influx, noting that the total is still less than 20% of the January peak.

But he said the hospitals already were busy with people showing up at emergency rooms with more severe illnesses than they would have had if the problems had been detected sooner.

"At some point, illness doesn't wait for us," he said. "The ability to defer additional care when you have already deferred for a year, year and a half, is just simply not an acceptable option."

3 men charged in deadly 2018 Missouri duck boat accident

By JOHN HANNA Associated Press

A local prosecutor charged a boat captain and two other employees Friday over 17 deaths in July 2018 when a tourist duck boat sank on a Missouri lake during a severe thunderstorm, reviving the threat of long prison sentences seven months after federal charges against them were dismissed.

The total of 63 felony charges were filed in Stone County against the captain, the general manager and the manager on duty the day of the accident for the Ride the Ducks attraction on Table Rock Lake near the tourist mecca of Branson, in southwestern Missouri.

Captain Kenneth Scott McKee, of Verona, general manager Curtis Lanham, of Galena, and manager on duty Charles Baltzell, of Kirbyville, were charged after a federal judge dismissed earlier charges filed by federal prosecutors, concluding they did not have jurisdiction.

Among the dead were nine members of a family from Indianapolis and victims from Missouri, Illinois and Arkansas. Tia Coleman, a member of that Indianapolis family who lost her husband and three children, said in a statement that her "prayers had been answered" with the charges.

"I'm so hopeful that we are one major step closer to justice for all those that perished, and to preventing that what happened to them from ever happening again," Coleman said.

Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt, whose office will assist with the prosecution, and County Prosecuting Attorney Matt Selby announced the charges.

"The victims deserve justice," Schmitt said in a statement.

McKee, 54, faces 29 charges, including 17 charges of first-degree involuntary manslaughter. The 12 additional charges allege that he endangered child passengers on the boat, five of whom died.

The child-endangerment charges filed over deaths are the most serious, punishable by between 10 years and 30 years in prison. The endangerment charges involving children who survived the accident carry a sentence of up to seven years.

An affidavit from a Missouri Highway Patrol sergeant accuses McKee of failing to exercise his duties as a licensed captain by taking his amphibious vehicle onto the lake during a thunderstorm.

"We are reviewing the charges, expect not-guilty pleas will be entered and will continue to vigorously represent Mr. McKee," J.R. Hobbs and Marilyn B. Keller, who represent the captain, said in a statement.

Baltzell, 79, and Lanham, 39, face 17 charges each of first-degree involuntary manslaughter. They are accused of failing to communicate weather conditions and to cease operations during a severe thunderstorm warning.

Attorneys for Baltzell and Lanham did not immediately respond to a telephone message seeking comment.

Each manslaughter charge alleges that the men "recklessly caused" the death of a passenger. Missouri law calls for a prison sentence of between three years and 10 years for a conviction on that charge.

Thirty-one people were aboard when the duck boat entered the lake. A storm came up suddenly and

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the waves swamped the boat before it could make it back to shore. Fourteen people survived.

Rides on the lake in modified former World War II vehicles once were a popular draw in the Branson area. Ripley Entertainment, which owned the former World War II vehicle, settled 31 lawsuits related to the accident.

Video and audio from the boat, recovered by divers, showed that the lake was calm when the boat entered the water. But the weather suddenly turned violent. Within minutes, the boat sank.

Highway Patrol Sgt. Mark Green said in his affidavit that McKee failed to exercise his duties and responsibilities by going onto the lake with the boat, Stretch Boat 7, with a severe thunderstorm warning in effect. He said McKee failed to follow policies or training guidelines and failed to have the boat's passengers put on life vests as it took on water.

Andrew Duffy, an attorney representing Coleman and others who sued over the accident, said McKee "did just about everything wrong" and evidence shows the duck boat's operators were trying to beat the storm to avoid having to give refunds.

The wind speed at the time of the accident was more than 70 mph (113 kph), just short of hurricane force, according to the National Transportation Safety Board. Weather forecasts had warned of an impending storm with winds possibly exceeding 60 mph (97 kph).

A U.S. Coast Guard certificate of inspection for the boat issued in February 2017 stated that it "shall not be operated waterborne" when winds exceed 35 mph (56 kph) and/or wave heights exceed 2 feet (0.6 meters).

"There is no question that this duck boat tour should have been canceled and the little over \$900 refund should have been made," Duffy said in an interview. "The fact that, that wasn't done is just outrageous."

Just 7% of our DNA is unique to modern humans, study shows

CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — What makes humans unique? Scientists have taken another step toward solving an enduring mystery with a new tool that may allow for more precise comparisons between the DNA of modern humans and that of our extinct ancestors.

Just 7% of our genome is uniquely shared with other humans, and not shared by other early ancestors, according to a study published Friday in the journal *Science Advances*.

"That's a pretty small percentage," said Nathan Schaefer, a University of California computational biologist and co-author of the new paper. "This kind of finding is why scientists are turning away from thinking that we humans are so vastly different from Neanderthals."

The research draws upon DNA extracted from fossil remains of now-extinct Neanderthals and Denisovans dating back to around 40,000 or 50,000 years ago, as well as from 279 modern people from around the world.

Scientists already know that modern people share some DNA with Neanderthals, but different people share different parts of the genome. One goal of the new research was to identify the genes that are exclusive to modern humans.

It's a difficult statistical problem, and the researchers "developed a valuable tool that takes account of missing data in the ancient genomes," said John Hawks, a paleoanthropologist at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, who was not involved in the research.

The researchers also found that an even smaller fraction of our genome — just 1.5% — is both unique to our species and shared among all people alive today. Those slivers of DNA may hold the most significant clues as to what truly distinguishes modern human beings.

"We can tell those regions of the genome are highly enriched for genes that have to do with neural development and brain function," said University of California, Santa Cruz computational biologist Richard Green, a co-author of the paper.

In 2010, Green helped produce the first draft sequence of a Neanderthal genome. Four years later, geneticist Joshua Akey co-authored a paper showing that modern humans carry some remnants of Ne-

anderthal DNA. Since then, scientists have continued to refine techniques to extract and analyze genetic material from fossils.

"Better tools allow us to ask increasingly more detailed questions about human history and evolution," said Akey, who is now at Princeton and was not involved in the new research. He praised the methodology of the new study.

However, Alan Templeton, a population geneticist at Washington University in St Louis, questioned the authors' assumption that changes in the human genome are randomly distributed, rather than clustered around certain hotspots within the genome.

The findings underscore "that we're actually a very young species," said Akey. "Not that long ago, we shared the planet with other human lineages."

Trump showerhead rule on more water flow goes down the drain

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — So much for Donald Trump's quest for "perfect" hair.

The Biden administration is reversing a Trump-era rule approved after the former president complained he wasn't getting wet enough because of limits on water flow from showerheads.

Now, with a new president in office, the Energy Department is going back to a standard adopted in 2013, saying it provides plenty of water for a good soak and a thorough clean.

The rule change will have little practical effect, since nearly all commercially made showerheads comply with the 2013 rule — the pet peeve of the former president notwithstanding.

The Energy Department said the action clarifies what's been happening in the marketplace. Showers that provide the extra supply of water desired by Trump are not easily found, officials said.

Since 1992, federal law has dictated that new showerheads should not pour more than 2.5 gallons (9.5 liters) of water per minute. As newer shower fixtures came out with multiple nozzles, the Obama administration defined the showerhead restrictions to apply to what comes out in total. So if there are four nozzles, no more than 2.5 gallons total should come out among all four.

The Trump-era rule, finalized in December, allows each nozzle to spray as much as 2.5 gallons, not just the overall showerhead.

A proposed rule change, set to be published in the Federal Register next week, reverts to the Obama-era standard. The public will have 60 days to comment before a final rule is developed.

The change will ensure that consumers continue to save money while reducing water use and paying lower energy bills, the Energy Department said. Officials estimated that the Obama-era rule saved households about \$38 a year, and the Energy Department expects similar savings by reverting to the 2013 standard.

"As many parts of America experience historic droughts, this commonsense proposal means consumers can purchase showerheads that conserve water and save them money on their utility bills," Kelly Speakes-Backman, acting assistant secretary for the department's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, said Friday.

While publicly talking about the need to keep his hair "perfect," Trump made increasing water flow and dialing back longstanding appliance conservation standards — including for light bulbs, toilets and dishwashers — a personal issue.

"So showerheads — you take a shower, the water doesn't come out. You want to wash your hands, the water doesn't come out," Trump said at the White House last year. "So what do you do? You just stand there longer or you take a shower longer? Because my hair — I don't know about you, but it has to be perfect. Perfect."

But consumer and conservation groups said the 2020 rule change was silly, unnecessary and wasteful, especially as the West bakes through a historic two-decade-long megadrought.

With four or five or more nozzles, "you could have 10, 15 gallons per minute powering out of the showerhead, literally probably washing you out of the bathroom," said Andrew deLaski, executive director of the energy conservation group Appliance Standards Awareness Project. "At a time when a good portion of the country is experiencing serious drought exacerbated by climate change, there's no place for show-

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erheads that use needless amounts of water.”

DeLaski and officials at Consumer Reports said there’s been no public outcry or need for change. The Energy Department’s database of 12,499 showerheads showed 74% of them use 2 gallons (7.5 liters) or less water per minute, which is 20% less than the federal standard.

A 2016 test of showerheads by Consumer Reports found that the best-rated showerheads, including a \$20 model, provided a pleasing amount of water flow and met federal standards.

The Energy Department also is proposing to remove the definition of “body spray” adopted in the 2020 final rule. The rule allows “body sprays” to circumvent congressional intent to promote water conservation simply based on orientation of the water flow — a side spray rather than overhead.

Events expanding to mark 100 years since John Glenn’s birth

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A three-day celebration of what would have been history-making astronaut John Glenn’s 100th birthday began Friday in his birthplace and childhood hometown in Ohio, even as additional events were announced to mark the occasion.

Glenn, who died in 2016, was the first American to orbit Earth, making him a national hero in 1962. In addition to his military and space accomplishments, he spent 24 years as a Democrat in the U.S. Senate.

The John Glenn Centennial Celebration in both Cambridge, where Glenn was born on July 18, 1921, and nearby New Concord, where he grew up and met his late wife, Annie, runs through Sunday. It includes a parade, the Friendship 7-Miler road race named for his famous aircraft, lectures, museum tours, space movies, biplane and rocket car rides, music and children’s science activities.

At Ohio State University, the John Glenn College of Public Affairs has updated seven display cases in Page Hall in honor of Glenn’s life, legacy of public service and relationship to the university, which houses Glenn’s archives. Items displayed include speeches, letters, diaries and news clippings. The college plans additional events throughout the year.

A pending Ohio House resolution would urge Congress to award both Glens a Congressional Gold Medal.

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn’t happen this week

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

DNC anti-misinformation push doesn’t involve reading private texts

CLAIM: The Democratic National Committee is working with the Biden administration to monitor private citizens’ SMS communications in a move to crack down on anti-vaccine text messages.

THE FACTS: The DNC has “no ability to access or read people’s private text messages” and is “not working with any government agency (including the White House) to try to see personal text messages,” according to Lucas Acosta, a senior spokesperson for the committee. Conservative lawmakers and social media users this week advanced the false claim that the DNC and other Biden allies were planning to spy on personal text messages in order to identify and dispel vaccine misinformation. “So now the Biden Administration wants to get into people’s text messages ... to force vaccine compliance and who knows what else,” Missouri Republican Sen. Josh Hawley tweeted. Arizona Republican Rep. Paul Gosar also picked up the false claim, tweeting, “The Biden Administration in partnership with the DNC, plans to monitor the private text messages of American citizens who question experimental, mRNA, emergency authorized, non-FDA approved vaccines.” The false claim evolved online after Politico reported on Monday that the DNC and other Biden allies were “planning to engage fact-checkers more aggressively and work with SMS carriers to dispel misinformation about vaccines.” Social media users and conservative websites interpreted Politico’s report to mean the DNC would monitor private text messages in order to crack down on mis-

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information, but one of the reporters of the piece, Politico White House Correspondent Natasha Korecki, clarified on Twitter that this wasn't true. "No," Korecki tweeted Monday in response to a question about whether the government would be reading personal texts. "Outside groups are attempting to flag to SMS carriers false information campaigns that are driving misinformation on vaccines." Acosta explained to The Associated Press that the DNC isn't infiltrating personal texts, nor is it working with mobile phone carriers like Verizon or T-Mobile to dispel misinformation. Instead, Acosta said, the DNC is simply notifying SMS aggregator companies, like Twilio and Bandwidth, when it believes a political mass text is fraudulent or violates the company's messaging policies. "The only texts reviewed are those distributed en masse to American citizens through broadcast text platforms and reported to the DNC." The White House declined to comment on the record.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in Seattle contributed this report.

Online reports mislead on vaccination door-knocking efforts

CLAIM: President Joe Biden's administration introduced a door-to-door campaign to offer COVID-19 vaccines as a way to confiscate guns or Bibles.

THE FACTS: False information is circulating on social media around the Biden administration's plan to drive up COVID-19 vaccination rates with a door-to-door campaign. Despite the delta variant of the coronavirus surging, only 48% of the U.S. population is fully vaccinated and many parts of the country are lagging behind. "Now we need to go to community-by-community, neighborhood-by-neighborhood, and oftentimes, door-to-door — literally knocking on doors — to get help to the remaining people" who need to be vaccinated, Biden said on July 6. Some posts online falsely claim the campaign would force vaccines on people while others suggest the Biden administration's initiative has a hidden agenda that will lead to guns or Bibles being confiscated. "The Biden Administration wants to knock on your door to see if you're vaccinated," Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan tweeted. "What's next? Knocking on your door to see if you own a gun?" North Carolina Rep. Madison Cawthorn echoed such claims during the Conservative Political Action Conference last week. "Think about the mechanisms they would have to build to be able to actually execute that massive of a thing," Cawthorn said. "They could then go door to door and take your guns. They could go door to door and take your Bibles." But the vaccine campaign does not involve federal workers, it relies on local officials, private sector workers and volunteers to go into areas where there are lower vaccination rates and provide information on where to access the vaccine. Furthermore, federal law prohibits creating a national gun registry. White House press secretary Jen Psaki countered some of the false claims in a press conference on July 9. "This is grassroots volunteers, this is members of the clergy, these are volunteers who believe that people across the country, especially in low-vaccinated areas, should have accurate information, should have information about where they can get vaccinated, where they can save their own lives and their neighbors' lives and their family members' lives," Psaki said. An example of this approach is playing out in North Carolina. "We are employing numerous outreach strategies — including door knocking — across the state to ensure that people have the information that they need about vaccinations and can easily and conveniently get vaccinated," Bailey Pennington, a spokesperson with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, told The Associated Press in an email. The grassroots component of the U.S. vaccination campaign has been in operation since April and was funded by Congress in the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill passed in March, the AP reported.

Knocking on doors to promote vaccines doesn't violate health privacy law

CLAIM: President Joe Biden's initiative for a door-to-door campaign to encourage vaccination for COVID-19 is a violation of the federal law that restricts the release of medical information.

THE FACTS: Biden pitched a door-knocking campaign as a way to get vaccine information and assistance to more people, not probe Americans about whether they have been vaccinated. But even if officials or volunteers did ask people that question, it wouldn't be a violation of federal health privacy laws, according to experts. Nevertheless, social media users and political candidates have spread false claims that the

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campaign infringes on the federal health privacy law known as HIPAA. "How about the government stay the heck out of our business!?" Texas Republican congressional candidate Monica De La Cruz-Hernandez wrote in a Facebook post. "What ever happened to PRIVATE health decisions? Seems like giving these door knockers our vaccination status would a HIPPA violation." Another Facebook user wrote, "Coming to my door to seek personal medical info is a violation of HIPAA laws & my constitutional rights." In fact, HIPAA doesn't block anyone from asking another person about their health status, according to Alan Meisel, law professor and bioethics expert at the University of Pittsburgh. "What it does is prohibit certain health care entities from revealing certain health information about patients," Meisel told the AP in an email. If someone does come to your door to encourage you to get the COVID-19 vaccine, you have no obligation to tell them whether you have been vaccinated, said Kayte Spector-Bagdady, lawyer and associate director for the Center for Bioethics and Social Science in Medicine at the University of Michigan Medical School. "HIPAA does not apply to public health outreach volunteers, and it doesn't apply to information you offer to tell," Spector-Bagdady said in an email to the AP. "If you are uncomfortable, just don't open the door - or do and just get some information without giving any in return!"

— Ali Swenson

Pennsylvania did not initiate an election audit

CLAIM: Pennsylvania initiated a full audit of the rigged November 2020 election.

THE FACTS: The state of Pennsylvania did not initiate an election audit. Last Wednesday, Pennsylvania state Sen. Doug Mastriano said he was launching a "forensic investigation" and issued letters to officials in three counties, requesting sweeping elections-related information. The letters threatened counties with subpoenas if they don't respond affirmatively by July's end, according to reporting by The Associated Press. In the wake of Mastriano's request, social media users took to Facebook and spread misinformation about the source and nature of the request, and about the integrity of Pennsylvania's 2020 presidential elections. One popular social media post said, "Pennsylvania initiated a FULL audit of the RIGGED election." But the state did not initiate an audit. "The state has not initiated anything," said Wanda Murren, communications director at the Pennsylvania Department of State, which oversees the state's election process. There is also no evidence that the election was improperly administered or poorly managed. Critics say an election audit is duplicative, given the legal requirements for each county and the state to review election results for accuracy and investigate any discrepancies. "Pennsylvania counties, despite a convergence of difficult circumstances, ran a free, fair and accurate election in 2020," Murren said in a prepared statement last Wednesday. "The majority of Pennsylvanians – and Americans – are satisfied with that truth."

— Associated Press writer Terrence Fraser in New York contributed this report.

Posts understate infrastructure funding in American Jobs Plan

CLAIM: Less than 5 cents of every dollar of the \$4 trillion "infrastructure" bill actually goes to infrastructure.

THE FACTS: While "infrastructure" can be defined in numerous ways, the claim that Biden's initial plan is made up of less than 5% true infrastructure funding is decidedly false. The amount of "real" infrastructure funding in Biden's \$2.3 trillion American Jobs Plan has been a topic of political debate for months, with Republicans criticizing the president's pitch as a Trojan horse for Democratic policies and tax hikes. A conservative-backed nonprofit resurrected the criticism on Facebook this week, falsely claiming in a widely shared video that "less than 5 cents of every dollar of the \$4 trillion 'infrastructure' bill actually goes to infrastructure." First, it should be noted that Biden's \$4 trillion plan is actually made up of two distinct bill proposals: the American Jobs Plan and the American Families Plan. The former is a \$2.3 trillion package for hard infrastructure items, while the latter is a companion bill of roughly equal size for soft infrastructure items like investments in child care, family tax credits and other domestic programs. Whether or not you count the companion bill as part of Biden's so-called infrastructure plan, items widely agreed upon to count as infrastructure make up more than 5% of the total, according to Marc Goldwein, senior vice president of the nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. Goldwein said looking at just the American Jobs Plan, "somewhere between a third and two-thirds" of the proposal consists of projects squarely in

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the infrastructure category, such as repairing roads and bridges, replacing water pipes, enhancing the electrical grid, investing in airports and improving coastal ports. Looking at the entire \$4 trillion proposal, Goldwein said, infrastructure items would still make up at least one-fifth of the total. "It's not just roads and waterways," Goldwein said. "But these are things that we think are pretty indisputably infrastructure." Critics of the proposal may have come up with a 5% figure by only including improvements on roads and bridges in their definition of infrastructure, according to Garrett Watson, a senior policy analyst at the Tax Foundation. Only about \$154 billion in the American Jobs Plan went to those items, he said. Indeed, a caption on the video shared widely on Facebook this week accurately stated that "less than a nickel on every dollar" in Biden's set of proposals totaling \$4 trillion "would go towards filling potholes or repairing bridges." However, Goldwein said, items like broadband, water systems and other transportation infrastructure are widely considered infrastructure by both Democrats and Republicans, and those items together with repairing roads and bridges make up a larger portion of the plan. Biden's American Jobs Plan is no longer the prevalent infrastructure proposal in Congress. In June, the president endorsed a scaled-back nearly \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure proposal that supporters hoped would have enough Republican support to pass in the Senate. That bipartisan proposal, which would involve about \$579 billion in new spending, allocates about \$109 billion — nearly 19% of the total — to roads, bridges and major projects, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. Add in other types of transportation infrastructure, such as airports, public transit and ports and waterways, and infrastructure makes up more than half of the bipartisan proposal.

— Ali Swenson

False claims tie patents to COVID-19 vaccines

CLAIM: People who received COVID-19 vaccines are now legally patented and no longer have human rights. This is because a 2013 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the case of Association for Molecular Pathology v. Myriad Genetics, Inc. said that if a human genome is modified by mRNA vaccines then the genome can be patented.

THE FACTS: An Instagram post circulating online falsely claims that mRNA vaccines against COVID-19 alter DNA, allowing humans to be patented and have their rights taken away. But COVID-19 vaccines, including those made by Pfizer and Moderna that rely on mRNA technology, do not change a person's genetic makeup. The false post cites the 2013 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Association for Molecular Pathology v. Myriad Genetics, Inc. to back up its claim, but the ruling makes no mention of mRNA vaccines. Nor does the ruling say vaccinated humans can be patented. In fact, it has been a longstanding rule that anything found in nature, including people, cannot be patented, said Lara Cartwright-Smith, associate professor in the department of health policy and management at George Washington University. The case before the Supreme Court looked at whether Myriad Genetics, Inc. could patent the sequences of gene mutations that can lead to breast cancer. The company's test created cDNA, which is a clone or copy of the DNA, to test for the mutations. The Supreme Court ruled that the company could patent synthetically created cDNA because it was not natural, but could not patent the isolated human genes. "Natural DNA is not patentable," said Cartwright-Smith. "The copy that they made is patentable." Cartwright-Smith said the post online that cites the court ruling is nonsensical. "The conclusion that it would somehow affect the status of the person is also completely false," she said.

— Associated Press writer Beatrice Dupuy in New York contributed this report.

Solar storm is not heading toward Earth

CLAIM: A solar storm is heading toward Earth and could impact cell phone signals and cause blackouts.

THE FACTS: False claims are swirling about a possible solar storm that could hit this week, but experts are not seeing a storm in sight. Posts online began claiming Tuesday that the storm would cause massive disruption on Earth that would extend into the week. Some posts sharing the false claim referred to the supposed event as "solar storm 2021" and shared pictures of a fiery sun. But Bill Murtagh, program

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coordinator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Space Weather Prediction Center, told The Associated Press that there is no solar storm predicted for this week. A solar flare, which is a kind of solar storm, did take place on July 3. Solar flares occur when magnetic fields build up on the sun in the form of sunspots. When the magnetic fields get twisted and build up energy, they may violently release that energy in a flash of light, said Alex Young, solar physicist at NASA. The July 3 event was the first big flare of this solar cycle and the brightest in four years. "We typically get 150 of them over an 11 year cycle," Murtaugh said about solar flares. "Fortunately, we are 93 million miles away from the sun so we have Earth's magnetic field and atmosphere which protects us from the harmful emissions from these eruptions." The July 3 solar flare did interfere with some high frequency communication, but Young said the impact was less than it could have been. "This was really very slow and it was not fully directed at Earth," Young said. "We don't have any expectation of seeing any impact on Earth."

— Beatrice Dupuy

Rare stone discovered outlining ancient Rome's city limits

ROME (AP) — Archaeologists have discovered a rare stone delineating the city limits of ancient Rome that dates from the age of Emperor Claudius in 49 A.D. and was found during excavations for a new sewage system.

Rome Mayor Virginia Raggi was on hand for the unveiling Friday of the pomerium stone, a huge slab of travertine that was used as a sacred, military and political perimeter marking the edge of the city proper with Rome's outer territory.

It was found June 17 during excavations for a rerouted sewer under the recently restored mausoleum of Emperor Augustus, right off the central Via del Corso in Rome's historic center.

In ancient Rome, the area of the pomerium was a consecrated piece of land along the city walls, where it was forbidden to farm, live or build and through which it was forbidden to enter with weapons.

At a press conference in the Ara Pacis museum near the mausoleum, Claudio Parisi Presicce, director of the Archaeological Museums of Rome, said the stone had both civic and symbolic meaning.

"The founding act of the city of Rome starts from the realization of this 'pomerium,'" he said of the consecrated area. The stone features an inscription that allowed archaeologists to date it to Claudius and the expansion of the pomerium in 49 A.D., which established Rome's new city limits.

Raggi noted that only 10 other stones of this kind had been discovered in Rome, the last one 100 years ago.

"Rome never ceases to amaze and always shows off its new treasures," she said.

The stone will be on display at the Ara Pacis museum, the Richard Meier-designed home of a 1st century altar until the Augustus museum opens.

Chaos reigned in wake of Haitian president's assassination

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — The attackers raided the private compound of Haiti's president before dawn, yelling "DEA operation!" and wielding high-caliber weapons. They tied up a maid and houseboy and ransacked Jovenel Moïse's office and bedroom.

When it was over, Moïse lay sprawled on his bedroom floor. He had been shot in the forehead, chest, hip and stomach, and his left eye was gouged.

By the time the sun rose, the suspects had scattered by car and foot, leaving this country of more than 11 million in shock. People tuned into radio stations, some still in disbelief until gruesome photos began to circulate on social media.

"I'm not saying he was a good person, but he didn't deserve death," said a woman named Sandra, who lived across the street from the president's mansion. She and her son and husband squeezed into a shower in the back of their home when they heard gunshots echoing through the Pelerin neighborhood.

Sandra, who declined to give her last name for fear of being killed, thought it was Haitian gang members

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who had been threatening to take over the area until she heard someone yell in English: "Go! Go! Go!"

Interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph said the July 7 attack was carried out by a highly trained and heavily armed group. Details have been scarce, but Associated Press interviews with investigators and witnesses give a sense of the terror and chaos of that night.

So far, police have detained more than 20 suspects they say were directly involved in the killing, including a contingent of former Colombian special forces soldiers. Other suspects were killed by authorities as they closed in.

None of the president's security guards were hurt. The president's daughter hid in her brother's bedroom and survived, Carl Henry Destin, a deputy peace justice, told the AP as he confirmed details of that night.

Shortly after the slaying, several of the Colombians hid in a two-story business that once sold furniture on a narrow, hilly road just a few minutes' drive from Moïse's house.

One of the Colombians texted his sister from the business around 6:30 a.m. "Things had gotten complicated," Duberney Capador wrote to Yenny Capador.

Half an hour later, her phone beeped with another message: "We are under attack."

She said Capador told her police were firing at them and that they were trying to talk to authorities and turn themselves in. Then he went silent for several hours and later turned up dead, his body badly bruised.

At least three soldiers were killed in the shootout that blew out all the store's windows.

Among those killed was Mauricio Javier Romero. His wife, Giovanna Romero, told the AP that she last spoke to him at 9:30 p.m. on July 6, just hours before the attack on the president. She told him that she and their son were putting on their pajamas and getting ready for bed. He responded that they didn't have power or internet and that they had turned on a generator. So he took advantage of the electricity and called her.

"He then told me, 'Say hi to the boy. I love you very much. A kiss. We'll talk as soon as I can,'" she said. "That was it."

The suspects who survived the gunfire are believed to have fled through the back part of the building. They climbed more than 40 stairs, stepped through a small garbage dump and scaled a towering wall of concrete blocks. On the other side, just a short distance down a road in an high-end community, they found another potential hideout: the Taiwanese Embassy.

Taiwanese diplomats were working from home at the time, and embassy security guards alerted Haitian police that a group of armed suspects were breaking through some doors and windows. Eleven suspects were arrested, officials said.

The remaining suspects fled to nearby areas, some hiding in bushes and other places until a group of Haitians found them and roughed them up, in some cases slapping them. In one neighborhood, civilians bound the suspects' arms with rope and forced them to walk while someone yelled "Move! Move!" until they reached a spot where police arrived and arrested them.

In another nearby community, a crowd chased after two suspects and detained them. The AP observed police taking the pair away in the back of a pickup truck, and how some in the crowd followed to the police station and demanded that the attackers be given back to them.

"They killed the president!" they chanted. "Give them to us. We're going to burn them!"

The crowd later set fire to a couple of cars riddled with bullet holes that they believed the suspects had abandoned at the business where the shootout occurred. The government decried their actions, saying they were destroying valuable evidence. The cars did not have license plates and inside one of them was some water and an empty box of bullets.

Watching the scene unfold from above was Giovanni, who declined to give his full name out of fear for his life. He sleeps and works in an abandoned building where he makes furniture.

At around 7 a.m., he said he saw a group of white foreigners wielding large weapons and stopping cars along the road that leads to the president's house and the business where the shootout occurred. He said they were speaking Spanish, but he could not understand what they were saying.

"They had control of the area," he said, adding that some later fled in different directions in the hills

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above the store. He said he also saw Haitian police arrest the suspects after embassy officials gave them access to the yard.

Joanne Massillon, a 45-year-old mother of three who lives nearby, said she heard police shouting: "There's the white guy! The white guy! The white guy!" She said she didn't dare venture out at that moment.

"If you hear 'Boom! Boom!' you stay inside," she said.

Other men are also accused of helping plot the assassination, including a former rebel leader who rose to prominence following a 2004 coup and a Haitian man who is a physician and church pastor. Associates told the AP they believe he was duped.

Haiti's government is holding high-ranking officials in isolation, including the head of the president's security detail. In addition, police have said that a Venezuelan businessman who owns a Florida-based security company that paid airfares for some of the Colombian soldiers is a person of interest because he flew to Haiti several times and signed a contract during a trip before the assassination.

Colombian authorities have said that at least 26 former soldiers were involved. Other suspects include a former Haitian senator, a fired government official and an informant for the U.S. government.

Back at the president's home, debris including shattered glass, a broken side mirror and a barrier arm snapped in two cluttered one side of the entrance for about a week until it was removed. A wall near the entrance where an avocado tree grows is pockmarked with several bullet holes. Guards continue to stand near a massive bright blue iron gate topped with spikes and pocked with bullet holes circled in red as evidence.

Moise's wife, who was critically wounded in the attack, is recovering at a Miami hospital.

On Twitter, she said she still cannot believe that her husband was killed before her eyes "without saying a last word."

"This pain," she wrote, "will never pass."

Reuters photographer killed as Afghan forces fight Taliban

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Afghan government forces battled Friday to retake a border crossing with Pakistan from Taliban insurgents, and the Reuters news agency said one of its photographers was killed in the area.

The Taliban had overrun the Spin Boldak crossing earlier in the week. On Friday, witnesses on the Pakistan side of the border said they saw intense fighting and reported seeing bodies.

Afghan Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian later tweeted that the government had retaken control of Spin Boldak.

Reuters said Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Danish Siddiqui, who was embedded with the Afghan special forces, was killed as the commando unit sought to recapture Spin Boldak.

The agency said Siddiqui and a senior Afghan officer were killed in what they described as Taliban cross-fire. "We are urgently seeking more information, working with authorities in the region," Reuters President Michael Friedenber and Editor-in-Chief Alessandra Galloni said in a statement.

Siddiqui was an Indian national. Afghanistan's ambassador to India, Farid Mamundzay, tweeted his condolences.

The Taliban have overrun dozens of districts in Afghanistan since the start of the final phase of the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops, after a 20-year military presence. The U.S. says its withdrawal is 95% complete.

The fighting at Spin Boldak was confirmed by Fawad Aman, Afghanistan's deputy defense ministry spokesman. The Associated Press also obtained footage of fighters, apparently Taliban, receiving treatment in a hospital in the Pakistani border town of Chaman.

In an interview with The Associated Press, U.S. peace envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad expressed surprise at the Taliban's rapid sweep through swaths of Afghanistan, and said that a long-term "comprehensive" cease-fire may have to wait for the two sides to reach a political deal.

Still, he said he will press for a reduction in violence on the ground.

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"I did expect some increased Taliban hold on territories that they were surrounding but had not yet captured, but the speed with which and the amount of territory that they have acquired is unexpected," Khalilzad said, speaking to the AP on the sidelines of an international conference Friday in neighboring Uzbekistan. The gathering focused on the situation in Afghanistan.

"But I believe that there is no military solution despite the progress that the Taliban have made," Khalilzad added. "For the war to end there has to be a political agreement."

"The United States will not recognize a government imposed by force. The Taliban will not be treated as a normal, legitimate player if there isn't a political settlement," the U.S. envoy also said. "And the likely scenario of an attempt to impose by force a government will be Taliban isolation and a long war for Afghanistan."

The three countries that had recognized the Taliban government during their rule — Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — have all said they would not recognize another Taliban government that comes to power by force.

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are fraught with suspicion. Afghanistan routinely accuses Pakistan of giving safe haven to the Afghan Taliban, whose leadership is headquartered in Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan provincial capital of Quetta. The Chaman border crossing opposite Spin Boldak is also in Baluchistan province.

Afghanistan and the United States have criticized Pakistan in the past for allowing Taliban fighters to cross into Pakistan to receive medical treatment. Nearly 2 million Afghan refugees also live in Pakistan, having fled decades of war in their homeland.

Pakistan has used its influence over the Taliban to press the insurgents into talks with the U.S. and the Afghan government.

In the latest round of accusations, Afghanistan's vice-president, Amrullah Saleh, tweeted that Pakistan's air force warned the Afghan army and air force against trying to dislodge Taliban from Spin Boldak, an accusation Pakistan dismissed.

In response, Pakistan issued a statement saying 40 Afghan soldiers slipped across the border to Pakistan during the Taliban takeover of the crossing earlier this week.

The soldiers were returned to Afghanistan "with respect and dignity," said the statement, which added that Pakistan also offered Afghanistan's security force any logistical support it needed.

As stock prices peak, markets begin to fear looming threats

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — With the U.S. economy humming, corporate profits flowing and stock prices peaking, investors on Wall Street are beginning to pose an anxious question: Is it all downhill from here?

Financial markets are always trying to set prices now for where the economy and corporate profits are likely to be in the future. And even though readings across the economy are still at eye-popping levels, investors see some areas of concern.

New variants of the coronavirus are threatening to weaken economies around the world. Many of the U.S. government's pandemic relief efforts are fading. Inflation is raging as supplies of goods and components fall short of surging demand. And the beginning of the end of the Federal Reserve's assistance for markets is coming into sight.

So far, investors have largely put aside nervousness — broad measures like the S&P 500 and Nasdaq composite are hitting record highs. Major stock market averages, in fact, have nearly doubled since bottoming in March 2020.

The U.S. recovery from the recession is proceeding so quickly that many forecasters estimate that the economy will expand this year by roughly 7%. That would be the most robust calendar-year growth since 1984.

Outside the U.S., too, economies are showing sustained growth. The Chinese economy, the world's second-largest, has slowed sharply from last year, though Beijing said it grew nearly 8% in the April-June

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period. And among the European countries that use the euro currency, growth for 2021 is expected to reach a brisk pace of nearly 5%.

Still, some sharp moves underneath the stock market's surface and across other markets show newfound hesitance and anxiety about the potential economic threats. Yields on longer-term U.S. government bonds have sunk, for example, while stocks of companies most closely tied to the strength of the economy have slumped.

For now, many voices on Wall Street see the nervousness as merely a blip: They are forecasting stocks and bond yields to rise through the year as the economy and corporate profits continue to grow. Many factors are behind the recent shifts in markets, particularly the sharp drop in bond yields, including some technical ones that likely worsened the swings and may be short-lived.

But some of those same analysts also acknowledge that the shifting signals in markets may be an inflection point following months of gangbusters performance and raging optimism. The fear isn't that economic growth may slow. It's that any one of threats to the economy will weaken growth too much, too quickly and perhaps even derail the recovery from the pandemic recession and puncture corporate profits.

"We don't see it stalling out or reversing, but it's clearly aging," Rich Weiss, senior vice president at American Century Investments, said of the economy's recovery. "We have this whole deceleration theme going on that 'The Best Is Yet To Come' is not the case anymore. We've definitely peaked."

Asked why investors would worry about a slowdown when growth rates look so high as to be unsustainable, Weiss suggested that uncertainty can often lead investors to consider a worst-case scenario.

"The unknown of what you're going to do looms large," he said. "We've been riding this humongous reopening economy and reflation trade. Yes, it's going to slow down, but what is it going to slow down to? If the job market is still weak, do we slow down to something on the order of 4% to 5%" economic growth, "or does it slow down to 2%? That would be a negative surprise that could roil the bond markets and the stock markets."

Concerns first emerged earlier this year in the bond market, which has the reputation of being more rational and sober than the stock market.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury, which moves with expectations for economic growth and for inflation, had shot above 1.75% in March after more than doubling in four months. Optimism was rising that life would return to normal as the economy reopened and COVID-19 vaccinations rolled out. But that also fueled worries about sharply higher inflation.

The 10-year yield, though, dropped below 1.25% last week. The months-long drop came as investors fell more in line with the Fed's insistence that high inflation looks to be only temporary. The slide accelerated after a couple of reports that showed economic growth remained strong but not quite as powerful as Wall Street expected.

The stock market, which had been gliding to record highs, dropped nearly 1% one day last week. The decline was modest but enough to cause some analysts to suggest that stocks were finally paying attention to the signal from the bond market.

Instead, the S&P 500 quickly resumed setting records, the latest on Monday. That's one of the confounding things for David Joy, chief market strategist at Ameriprise.

If the bond market is signaling worries about upcoming economic growth, Joy said, it's surprising stocks have performed this well. The same goes for "junk" bonds, which are those issued by companies with weak credit ratings. And corporate bonds should be offering more in yields over Treasuries than they are now.

"The bond market historically has often provided a good early warning signal," Joy said. "I don't know if that's the case this time, necessarily, because we don't really know what's driving rates down."

Besides the worries about peak growth and virus variants, analysts point to other possible reasons for declining yields. They include buying of Treasuries by investors from countries where rates are even lower, pension funds shifting some of their investments from stocks into bonds and a rush of traders simultaneously getting out of bets for rates to keep rising.

Though the S&P 500 is close to its all-time high, some market watchers say movements within the stock market have also shown signs of concern. In the past two months, the synchronized moves higher for

many areas of the market on flourishing optimism have broken down, say strategists at Deutsche Bank. While big U.S. stocks continue to inch higher, smaller stocks in the Russell 2000 index have stalled since peaking in March — and those companies' prospects are more closely tied to the economy.

Freedom or folly? UK's end to mandatory masks sows confusion

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — For many, it's common courtesy or a sensible precaution. For others, it's an imposition, a daily irritation.

The face mask — a highly charged source of debate, confusion and anger around the world during the coronavirus pandemic — is now dividing people as the crisis eases.

Britain is bracing for acrimony on Monday, when the government lifts a legal requirement to wear face coverings in most indoor settings, including shops, trains, buses and subways. Donning a mask in many places will stop being an order and become a request.

Already, people are split over how to respond.

"I'm glad," said London café owner Hatice Kucuk. "I don't think they really help much."

But Lucy Heath, a filmmaker, said she would prefer to see masks remain mandatory on the subway and in supermarkets.

"I just think vulnerable people will feel that they don't want to venture out," she said.

The end of many pandemic restrictions next week — once touted in British newspapers as "freedom day" — comes as the U.K. faces soaring coronavirus cases and rising deaths, despite an inoculation program that has given two-thirds of adults both doses of vaccine.

On Friday Britain reported more than 51,000 new coronavirus cases, the highest daily total since January. Globally, the World Health Organization says cases and deaths are climbing after a period of decline, spurred by the more contagious delta variant. Last week there were nearly 3 million new infections and more than 55,000 lives lost around the world.

Against that backdrop, British politicians' talk of freedom has been replaced with words of caution.

"This pandemic is not over," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said this week. "We cannot simply revert instantly from Monday the 19th of July to life as it was before COVID."

So while people no longer have to wear masks, they're being told that they should.

The government says it "expects and recommends" masks to be worn by workers and customers in crowded, enclosed spaces such as shops. London's mayor says masks will continue to be required on the city's public transit system, and the National Health Service will insist on them in hospitals. And while the rules are changing in England, masks will still be mandatory in Scotland and Wales, which make their own health regulations.

Opposition politicians and some doctors have urged the government not to remove the mask mandate, while businesses and unions worry the change from mandatory to optional is a recipe for chaos.

"It is a real mess," said Paddy Lillis, general secretary of retail workers union USDAW. "Protection for retail workers through wearing face coverings and maintaining social distancing in busy public areas like shops should be backed up by the law."

The prime minister has appealed to Britons' common sense. "I generally urge everyone to keep thinking of others and to consider the risks," Johnson said.

It's not always obvious, though, what the risks are. Most scientists say masks can help curb the spread of COVID-19 by preventing people who may be unknowingly carrying the virus from passing it on to others. But studies suggest masks may be useful only if a high percentage of people wear them.

"There is evidence to suggest it does good, but only if everybody does it," said Graham Medley, a professor of infectious disease modelling who is on a panel of scientists advising the British government. "I understand the government's reluctance to actually mandate it. On the other hand, if it's not mandated, it probably won't do any good."

But Robert Dingwall, a professor of sociology at Nottingham Trent University who is also a government science adviser, said letting people "find their own comfort level" is a sensible move.

"We need to tolerate each other's different risk appetites," he said. "We've had all this behavioral science in the background, trying to encourage compliance through amplifying fear and anxiety. And that really needs to reverse tack. We should stop talking about the dangerous situations and start talking much more about the safe ones."

Britain is not alone in grappling with masks. In recent months, Israel has reopened businesses, schools and event venues, lifting nearly all restrictions after it inoculated some 85% of its adults. Now cases are rising again, and authorities have reimposed a rule requiring people to wear masks indoors, as the country scrambles to contain the delta variant.

In the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says fully vaccinated people don't need to wear masks in most settings, in contrast to the WHO, which advises them to cover up. Some U.S. states and cities are trying to decide what to do as cases rise again. Los Angeles County, the most populous county in the U.S., announced Thursday it is again requiring people to wear masks indoors, even if they are vaccinated.

In many East Asian countries, it was common even before the pandemic for people to wear masks when sick or on high-pollution days. There is little in the way of an anti-mask movement.

In the United States, however, they have become an often partisan issue, epitomized during the 2020 presidential election by the contrast between often maskless Republican Donald Trump and mask-wearing Democrat Joe Biden.

European nations are less divided, but recent research by King's College London and pollster Ipsos MORI identified masks as a "culture war" fault line, dividing people in Britain in a similar way to Brexit and the Black Lives Matter movement.

The large majority who supported masks and other coronavirus restrictions tended to regard the minority who opposed them as selfish, hypocritical and closed-minded. A lower proportion of lockdown opponents said the same about the other side.

"The face mask is such a minimal object — this small piece of fabric, it's a very low-tech device. But it's become imbued with so much symbolic power," said Deborah Lupton, professor at the Center for Social Research in Health at Australia's University of New South Wales and co-author of the book "The Face Mask in COVID Times."

A mask against COVID-19 "is an object which can offer some degree of certainty and protection in this very, very chaotic and uncertain and constantly changing risk environment," she said. "I think for that reason alone, it has incredible power and significance."

Moscow lifts dining restrictions; Russia hits record deaths

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Authorities in Moscow on Friday canceled their order that restaurants only admit customers who have been vaccinated against COVID-19, recovered from the virus or have had a recent negative test.

The softening of restrictions in the Russian capital reflects their devastating impact on restaurant owners, who pleaded with city officials for weeks to rescind them. The decision comes even as Moscow is still experiencing a surge in infections and Russia overall registered a new daily record of coronavirus deaths Friday.

The move announced by Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin takes effect Monday. It retracts the measure that has been in place since late June. Customers have been required to visit a Russian government website and get a QR code — a digital pattern designed to be read by a scanner — as proof of their health status.

The restrictions were loudly criticized by restaurant owners, who were still struggling to recover from the damage caused by the pandemic. Some desperate owners started closing their restaurants and cafes as the number of customers dropped sharply. Outdoor terraces were allowed to operate without restrictions, but many restaurants and cafes didn't have room to set them up on Moscow's narrow sidewalks.

Sobyenin said the city reversed the decision because the pace of contagion has slowed. Starting Monday,

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Moscow restaurants and clubs will be able to open at night and hold parties and concerts.

He noted, however, that "we must understand that we are still in the risk zone, the contagion is continuing and we need to observe sanitary demands and conduct mass vaccination."

Some Russian media speculated the decision to abruptly lift the restrictions in Moscow reflected authorities' concerns that the tough measures could fuel discontent and further erode support for the main Kremlin party, United Russia, in September's parliamentary election.

Sobyanin's statement came as Russia registered a fourth straight day of record-high daily COVID-19 deaths, with the authorities reporting 799 fatalities, including 105 in Moscow. Daily new infections in Russia have soared from around 9,000 in early June to more than 25,000 now and daily fatalities have been topping 700 since last week.

On Friday, officials reported 25,704 new coronavirus cases, including 5,382 in Moscow.

Officials blamed the surge on Russians' lax attitudes toward taking precautions, the growing prevalence of the more contagious delta variant and widespread vaccination hesitancy. The pace of vaccination has remained lower than in many Western countries. Only 28.6 million Russians — or just 19.5% of the country's 146 million people — have received at least one shot of a vaccine.

To speed vaccine uptake, authorities in nearly 30 Russian regions have made vaccinations mandatory for certain groups of people, including those employed in health care, education, retail, public transport, government offices and the services sector.

Sobyanin said 3.8 million of Moscow's 12.6 million residents have received at least one vaccine shot.

Russia's state coronavirus task force has reported 146,868 confirmed deaths in the pandemic, the highest toll in Europe. However, reports by Russia's state statistical service Rosstat, which tallies coronavirus-linked deaths retroactively, reveal much higher numbers.

Eiffel Tower reopens; COVID passes required as of next week

By DEBORAH GOUFFRAN Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — With "Welcome" messages in multiple languages, the Eiffel Tower greeted tourists Friday for the first time in nearly nine months, reopening to the public even as France introduces new virus rules aimed at taming the fast-spreading delta variant.

Smiles were broad and emotions palpable as the first masked visitors mounted the elevators heading to the top of the Paris monument.

"It's such a lovely place and wonderful people...and now the wonderful Tour Eiffel," German tourist Ila Mires said, using the French name for the tower. She came with her 19-year-old daughter before the young woman leaves for studies in Amsterdam. Seeing the tower on their last day together in Paris "is such a gift to mother and daughter," Mires said.

The "Iron Lady" of Paris was ordered shut in October as France battled its second virus surge of the pandemic, and remained shut for renovations even after other French tourist draws reopened last month.

The tower's reopening came four days after President Emmanuel Macron announced new measures aimed at warding off a fourth surge, including mandatory vaccinations for health workers and mandatory COVID-19 passes to enter restaurants and tourist and other venues.

Starting Wednesday, all visitors to the Eiffel Tower over age 18 will need to show a pass proving they've been fully vaccinated, had a negative virus test or recently recovered from COVID-19.

Masks are required, and the number of daily visitors to the tower will be limited to about half the pre-pandemic norm of 25,000.

The rules didn't seem to scare crowds away on Friday.

"Bienvenue - Welcome - Willkommen - Bienvenido" flashed on a screen as families, couples and groups lined up or posed for photos beneath the tower.

"We worked, we worked, we worked (for this day). And when I saw my first visitor, I was very, very happy. Emotion and happiness," Eiffel Tower director Patrick Branco Ruivo told reporters.

"Before COVID, it was 80% foreigners, 20% French. Last year, it was 80% French, 20% foreigners. And

this year, it's amazing because it's fifty-fifty. And for us, it's the time that foreigners are coming back to the Eiffel Tower," he said.

France has opened to international tourists this summer, but the rules vary depending on which country they are coming from. While visitors are trickling back to Paris, their numbers have been far from normal levels, given continued border restrictions and virus risks.

Looking over the elegant French capital, Philippe Duval of Bordeaux and his family admired the view. "It's an event we didn't want to miss," said Duval, who was among the first to make it to the tower's top-floor viewing deck. "To be on top of the world's most beautiful city, what else can you ask for."

The Latest: Belgium govt raises flood death toll to 20

By The Associated Press undefined

The Latest on deadly flooding in Europe:

BRUSSELS — Belgium's government says the death toll from unprecedented flooding in parts of the country has risen to 20.

Interior Minister Annelies Verlinden said Friday that emergency workers were trying to locate another 20 people who remained missing.

Prime Minister Alexander De Croo says Belgium will mark a day of national mourning Tuesday to reflect on "the great human loss. It will also be a moment to show solidarity, closeness and unity."

De Croo says festivities marking the country's national holiday on July 21 also will be toned down, saying it comes at a time "when so many people will still be in an exceptionally difficult position."

German officials so far have reported 106 deaths in the floods that also ripped through some parts of Germany.

BRUSSELS — Just as the European Union was preparing drastic plans costing billions of euros to contain climate change, massive clouds were gathering over Germany and other EU nations to unleash an unprecedented storm that left death and destruction in its wake.

Despite ample warnings, politicians and weather forecasters were shocked at the ferocity of the precipitation that caused flash flooding that killed at least 120 people in the lush wooded hills of Western Europe.

Many climate scientists said the link to global warming was unmistakable and the urgency to do something about it undeniable. To say that climate change caused the flooding may be a step too far, but scientists insist that it exacerbates the extreme weather that has been on show from the western U.S. and Canada to Siberia to Europe's Rhine region.

"There is a clear link between extreme precipitation occurring and climate change," Prof. Wim Thiery of Brussels University said Friday.

For the heat records, added Prof. Stefan Rahmstorf of the University of Potsdam, "some are so extreme that they would be virtually impossible without global warming, as recently in western North America."

Taking them all together, said Sir David King, Chair of the Climate Crisis Advisory Group, "these are casualties of the climate crisis: we will only see these extreme weather events become more frequent."

BRUSSELS — Belgium's interior minister says the official death toll of flash flooding in the country's east has gone up to 18, with more people missing.

After Germany, Belgium was the hardest hit by the rains earlier this week that caused homes to be ripped away and roads to be turned into wild rivers running through the center of several towns.

"The official confirmed death toll now stands at 18 and there are a great many missing," Interior Minister Annelies Verlinden told VRT network Friday. The number of people missing is estimated to be at 19.

She said water levels on the Meuse river running into the Netherlands remains critical.

"There are a number of dikes on the Meuse whether it is really touch and go whether they will collapse," she said.

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THE HAGUE, Netherlands — Flooding is affecting other parts of Western Europe after killing at least 110 people and causing destruction in Germany and Belgium.

Emergency officials in the Netherlands are urging residents of homes close to a canal in the southern Dutch province of Limburg to evacuate swiftly after a canal dike burst.

The South Limburg emergency services said Friday that a large hole has opened in the dike alongside the Juliana Canal, which runs near the swollen Maas river.

Residents are being warned that four small settlements close to the canal "will very soon be underwater."

Heavy rainfall in Romania on Thursday night caused "unprecedented" flooding in a small western commune that required dozens of emergency workers to rescue people from damaged homes and cars.

Alba County's Inspectorate for Emergency Situations said in a statement Friday that no one died in Romania.

BERLIN — Germany's defense ministry said Friday that it is deploying a battalion to the hard-hit region of Ahrweiler.

The 371st Armored Infantry Battalion is being sent to relieve emergency crews who have been working for days to reach people trapped in the county.

Many villages in the mountainous region were heavily damaged and dozens of people died in the flash floods overnight Thursday.

BERLIN — German officials said Friday that the economic damage from the flooding in country's west will be immense.

More than half of the 53 counties in North Rhine-Westphalia state were affected by the floods, which damaged hundreds of buildings. At least 43 people died in the state.

North Rhine-Westphalia Gov. Armin Laschet said the floods had "literally pulled the ground from beneath many people's feet. They lost their houses, farms or businesses."

Federal and state officials have pledged financial aid to the affected areas of Germany, which also include the state of Rhineland-Palatinate, where at least 60 people died and entire villages were destroyed.

Several religious organizations have called for donations to help residents who lost everything in the floods.

The damage to Germany's economy is also expected to be severe. Several factories were flooded and key infrastructure, including parts of the A1 highway from Cologne to Bonn, were swept away.

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — Authorities in the southern Dutch town of Venlo are evacuating a hospital due to the looming threat of flooding.

Emergency coordinators said some 200 patients will be transported from the VieCuri hospital to other hospitals Friday afternoon as a precaution "to get ahead of any possible flooding."

The hospital is close to the banks of the swollen Maas river that flows into the Netherlands from Belgium, where flooding has caused widespread damage in and near the city of Liege. The river is called the Meuse in Belgium.

The hospital will remain closed until Monday.

Flooding in the Netherlands' southern Limburg province has caused damage to homes and businesses in several towns and villages and sparked evacuations but has not caused any major injuries or deaths.

BERLIN — Operators of an assisted living facility for people with disabilities in western Germany said Friday that the number of residents who died in flooding has increased to 12.

German news agency dpa quoted the chief executive of the Lebenshilfe association in Rhineland-Palatinate state saying only one of the 13 people missing from the facility had been found alive.

Matthias Mandos said a staff member managed to move several residents of the home in the town of Sinzig to the first floor as waters from the nearby Ahr river rushed into the building.

By the time the staff member tried to get others to safety, it was too late, Mandos said.

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Psychologists were on hand to help traumatized employees and residents, he added.

BERLIN — German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said he is “stunned” by the “devastating effects” of the flooding across parts of western Germany that has killed more than 100 people and left hundreds missing.

Steinmeier pledged the German government’s support to the families of those killed and to cities and towns facing significant damage.

“In the hour of need, our country stands together,” Steinmeier said in a statement Friday afternoon. “It’s important that we show solidarity for those from whom the flood has taken everything.”

Calling the events a “tragedy,” Steinmeier said he had been in touch with state and local officials in the affected areas and that they used “shocking words” to describe the situations on the ground.

The crisis, he said, underscores the impact of climate change and the need for forceful action to combat it.

“Only if we decisively take up the fight against climate change will we be able to limit the extreme weather conditions we are now experiencing,” Steinmeier said.

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Denmark’s foreign minister called the devastating floods across parts of Germany and Belgium that have killed at least 100 people “utterly heartbreaking.”

Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod wrote on Twitter that “Europe must and will stand together in this tragedy.” He said Friday that his thoughts were with the victims and their families.

BERLIN — At least 100 people have died in devastating floods across parts of western Germany and Belgium as search and rescue operations continue for hundreds more still unaccounted for.

Authorities in the German state of Rhineland-Palatinate said 50 people had died there, including at least nine residents of an assisted living facility for people with disabilities. In neighboring North Rhine-Westphalia state officials put the death toll at 43, but warned that the figure could increase.

Rescuers rushed Friday to help people trapped in their homes in the town of Ertstadt, southwest of Cologne. Regional authorities said several people had died after their houses collapsed due to the ground sinking.

Speaking to German broadcaster n-tv, county administrator Frank Rock said that authorities had no precise number yet for how many had died.

“One has to assume that under the circumstances some people didn’t manage to escape,” he said.

Authorities said late Thursday that about 1,300 people in Germany were still listed missing, but cautioned that the high figure could be due to duplication of data and difficulties reaching people because of disrupted roads and phone connections.

In a provisional tally, the Belgian death toll rose to 12, with 5 people still missing, local authorities and media reported early Friday.

Riots in Lebanon as West calls for quick Cabinet formation

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEURUT (AP) — Tension intensified in Lebanon on Friday, with riots leaving more than two dozen people injured in the northern city of Tripoli, including five soldiers who were attacked with a hand grenade.

France, the European Union and the United States in the meantime called on Lebanese politicians to urgently form a Cabinet and planned an international conference to help stabilize Lebanon after a series of crises.

“All concerned parties need to work with urgency to put in place a government that’s able to implement reforms immediately,” tweeted U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The announcements came at a moment of great uncertainty for Lebanon after Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri stepped down on Thursday over disagreements with the president on the shape of the Cabinet. Hariri did not endorse anyone else to take the post. Hundreds of his supporters rioted in the streets,

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blocked major roads and hurled stones.

On Friday morning, the Lebanese pound hit a new low, reaching 23,400 to the dollar on the black market. President Michel Aoun was expected to call for consultations with heads of parliamentary blocs; the person who gets the most support will be asked to work on forming a new Cabinet.

In Beirut, protesters briefly closed several main roads Friday, prompting a swift intervention by the troops to clear them. Demonstrators also closed the main highway linking Beirut with southern Lebanon.

In the northern city of Tripoli, Lebanon's second largest and most impoverished, residents angry over rising prices, electricity cuts that last for most of the day and severe shortages in diesel and medicine, rioted in the streets and attacked Lebanese troops.

The Lebanese Red Cross said its paramedics took 19 injured to hospital. The Lebanese army said 10 soldiers were injured by stones hurled by protesters while five others were wounded when attacked with a hand grenade. It was not immediately clear who threw the grenade.

The Biden administration expressed disappointment that Lebanese political leaders have squandered the last nine months since Hariri was named premier-designate.

The EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said Lebanese leaders are responsible for solving "the current domestic, self-made crisis," adding that it is urgent to form a new Cabinet quickly. He said that an agreement with the International Monetary Fund remains essential to rescue Lebanon from financial collapse.

"Lebanon's stability and prosperity are crucial for the whole region and for Europe," Borrell said in a statement.

France, once Lebanon's colonial ruler, has been urging Lebanese political leaders to quickly form a government tasked with implementing badly needed reforms and fighting corruption that has brought Lebanon to near bankruptcy.

France's Foreign Affairs Ministry said the latest development confirms the political deadlock in which "Lebanese leaders have deliberately held the country back for months, even as it sinks into an unprecedented economic and social crisis."

The ministry said that there is now "an absolute urgency to come out of this organized and unacceptable obstruction." France, with the support of the United Nations, was calling an international conference for Aug. 4, it added.

The date marks the first anniversary of a massive explosion at Beirut's port that killed more than 200 people, injured over 6,000 and damaged entire neighborhoods in the city. The blast was caused by the ignition of hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate, a highly explosive fertilizer that had been stored for years at the port with the knowledge of top government officials.

Lebanon has been without a full-functioning government since the Cabinet of Prime Minister Hassan Diab resigned days after the blast.

Since the explosion, French President Emmanuel Macron twice visited Lebanon, urging politicians to quickly form a Cabinet to implement reforms. France is also to soon start imposing sanctions on Lebanese politicians blocking the formation of a government.

France hosted an economic conference for Lebanon in April 2018 that promised investments and loans worth billions in return for reforms. The funds were never released as Lebanon's political class, which has been blamed for decades of corruption and mismanagement, continued with business as usual.

Hubble Space Telescope fixed after month of no science

By MARCIA DUNN Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The Hubble Space Telescope should be back in action soon, following a tricky, remote repair job by NASA.

The orbiting observatory went dark in mid-June, with all astronomical viewing halted.

NASA initially suspected a 1980s-era computer as the source of the problem. But after the backup payload computer also failed, flight controllers at Maryland's Goddard Space Flight Center focused on the science instruments' bigger and more encompassing command and data unit, installed by spacewalking

astronauts in 2009.

Engineers successfully switched to the backup equipment Thursday, and the crucial payload computer kicked in. NASA said Friday that science observations should resume quickly, if everything goes well.

A similar switch took place in 2008 after part of the older system failed.

"Congrats to the team!" NASA's science mission chief Thomas Zurbuchen tweeted.

Launched in 1990, Hubble has made more than 1.5 million observations of the universe. NASA launched five repair missions to the telescope during the space shuttle program. The final tuneup was in 2009.

NASA plans to launch Hubble's successor, the James Webb Space Telescope, by year's end.

Hawaii teenager recycles to help students reach college

By JESSIE WARDARSKI and LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

In the beginning, Genshu Price recycled for his own sake — his father said it would be a good way to save money for his college tuition.

But then, he came up with grander idea: Why not recycle thousands of bottles and cans to help other students in Hawaii reach their college dream.

"That way, it would be able to help a lot more local families, help a lot more people throughout the generations," Price said.

The 13-year-old from Oahu launched Bottles4College three years ago. The goal is to collect and recycle 2 to 4 million cans and bottles annually to fund college tuition for up to two students. Price said his project "gained traction" during the coronavirus pandemic.

"People saw this as a way to give an opportunity back to local families, especially since the pandemic has hit everyone so hard, especially the kids," he said. At the same time, they would protect the environment and keep their island clean.

His mother, Maria Price, recalled how he began going around to beaches, Little League baseball games and parks, "just asking people if they're done with their drinks," to collect their bottles and cans, which he sorted with his parents' help.

Since then, he has collected more than 100,000 bottles and cans and has received support from businesses and schools, setting up drop-off depots at places like Mililani Uka Elementary School, the Kualoa Ranch nature reserve and S.W. King Intermediate School, which he attends.

"Hawaii already has very high living costs. COVID made that even harder," he said. "I want to give a way for students who may not ... have been able to go to college by themselves."

Bottles4College, he said, is based on four pillars: education, environment, community and lifestyle. "We're helping the environment by recycling," he said. "We're helping education by providing scholarship funds for Hawaii kids and inspiring them to want to get a good education. And then you're bringing communities together."

It's a lifestyle, he said, because the other pillars become a part of your life.

The soon-to-be eighth grader is also an aspiring filmmaker; he created a documentary highlighting his work. He also posts videos on YouTube, including tips on how to sort cans and bottles and encouraging others to recycle.

"We still have a little bit to go to get to the place where we want to be, but it's definitely exciting. Every can counts, it's one can or bottle at a time," he said.

Caring about others, he said, is even more important during challenging times.

"In school they teach you how to treat other people how you want to be treated," he said. "And especially at a time like during the pandemic, that phrase really comes into play."

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined
Today in History

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Today is Saturday, July 17, the 198th day of 2021. There are 167 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 17, 1975, an Apollo spaceship docked with a Soyuz spacecraft in orbit in the first superpower link-up of its kind.

On this date:

In 1821, Spain ceded Florida to the United States.

In 1862, during the Civil War, Congress approved the Second Confiscation Act, which declared that all slaves taking refuge behind Union lines were to be set free.

In 1918, Russia's Czar Nicholas II and his family were executed by the Bolsheviks.

In 1936, the Spanish Civil War began as right-wing army generals launched a coup attempt against the Second Spanish Republic.

In 1944, during World War II, 320 men, two-thirds of them African-Americans, were killed when a pair of ammunition ships exploded at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine in California.

In 1945, following Nazi Germany's surrender, President Harry S. Truman, Soviet leader Josef Stalin and British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill began meeting at Potsdam in the final Allied summit of World War II.

In 1962, the United States conducted its last atmospheric nuclear test to date, detonating a 20-kiloton device, codenamed Little Feller I, at the Nevada Test Site.

In 1967, after seven dates, Jimi Hendrix quit as the opening act for the Monkees following a concert at Forest Hills Stadium in New York. (Although greatly admired by the Monkees, Hendrix had received a less than enthusiastic reception from their fans.)

In 1981, 114 people were killed when a pair of suspended walkways above the lobby of the Kansas City Hyatt Regency Hotel collapsed during a tea dance.

In 1996, TWA Flight 800, a Europe-bound Boeing 747, exploded and crashed off Long Island, New York, shortly after departing John F. Kennedy International Airport, killing all 230 people on board.

In 1997, Woolworth Corp. announced it was closing its 400 remaining five-and-dime stores across the country, ending 117 years in business.

In 2014, Eric Garner, a Black man accused of selling loose, untaxed cigarettes, died shortly after being wrestled to the ground by New York City police officers; a video of the takedown showed Garner repeatedly saying, "I can't breathe." (Garner's family received \$5.9 million from the city in 2015 to settle a wrongful death claim.) All 298 passengers and crew aboard Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 were killed when the Boeing 777 was shot down over rebel-held eastern Ukraine; both Ukraine's government and pro-Russian separatists denied responsibility.

Ten years ago: Japan won the Women's World Cup in Frankfurt, Germany, stunning the United States 3-1 in a penalty shootout after coming from behind twice in a 2-2 tie. Darren Clarke gave Northern Ireland another major championship, winning the British Open by three strokes over Americans Dustin Johnson and Phil Mickelson.

Five years ago: Three Baton Rouge law enforcement officers investigating a report of a man with an assault rifle were killed, less than two weeks after a Black man was shot and killed by police in the city in a confrontation that sparked nightly protests that reverberated nationwide. (The gunman was killed by tactical officers.)

One year ago: Civil rights icon John Lewis, whose bloody beating by Alabama state troopers in 1965 helped galvanize opposition to racial segregation, and who went on to a long and celebrated career in Congress, died at the age of 80. Militarized federal agents deployed by President Donald Trump to Portland, Oregon, again fired tear gas to break up crowds of protesters as the city's mayor demanded that the agents be removed. Oregon's attorney general sued the Department of Homeland Security and the Marshals Service, alleging that unidentified federal agents had grabbed people off the streets of Portland with no warrant or explanation. Teams of military medics were deployed in Texas and California to help hospitals swamped with coronavirus patients. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said she was

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receiving chemotherapy for a recurrence of cancer, but that she had no plans to retire. (Ginsburg died in September 2020; she was succeeded by Amy Coney Barrett.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Donald Sutherland is 86. Sportscaster Verne Lundquist is 81. Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, is 74. Rock musician Terry "Geezer" Butler is 72. Actor Lucie Arnaz is 70. Actor David Hasselhoff is 69. Rock musician Fran Smith Jr. (The Hooters) is 69. German Chancellor Angela Merkel is 67. Television producer Mark Burnett is 61. Actor Nancy Giles is 61. Singer Regina Belle is 58. Country singer Craig Morgan is 57. Rock musician Lou Barlow is 55. Contemporary Christian singer Susan Ashton is 54. Actor Andre Royo is 53. Actor Bitty Schram is 53. Actor Jason Clarke is 52. Movie director F. Gary Gray is 52. Rapper Sole' is 48. Country singer Luke Bryan is 45. Actor Eric Winter is 45. Actor Mike Vogel is 42. Actor Tom Cullen is 36. Actor Brando Eaton is 35. R&B singer Jeremih (jehr-uh-MY') is 34. Actor Summer Bishil is 33. Actor Billie Lourd is 29. Actor Leo Howard is 24.