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

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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.

605-397-7579

HELP

WANTED!

(0711.0808)

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Groton U-12 Boys team at the SD State VFW U-12 Tournament

Back row coaches..Pat Kroll, Ryan Schelle, Matt Groelinghoff, Pat Krause. (Joe Schwan not pictured)
Middle row players...Ethan Kroll, Nicholas Groebelinghoff, Jayden Schwan, Tristin McGannon, Gavin Kroll, Braeden Flihs, Ryder Schelle
Front row players...Easton Weber, Lincoln Krause, Kason Oswald, Karson Zak, Shaydon Wood (Jonah Theisen not pictured)

Friday's game	Groton vs Selby, Groton won 1-0
Saturday's games	Groton vs Mobridge, Groton won 16-7 Groton vs Parkston, Groton loss 0-10
Tournament final	Parkston vs Mt. Vernon/Plankinton (Parkston won 4-3)

Science or Magic?

Examples of accelerating scientific progress abound in human history. Mendel's experiments with plants demonstrated inheritance in the mid-1800s. Over the next 100 years, researchers across the world built upon each other's discoveries, until Watson, Crick, and Franklin finally identified the structure of DNA. The human genome project



By Debra Johnston, M.D ~ Prairie Doc® Perspectives

was launched nearly 40 years later, and within 15 years, the entire human genome had been mapped.

Da Vinci famously conceptualized human flight during the Renaissance, but it took 400 years of research and experimentation before the Wright brothers flew at Kitty Hawk. Only 54 years later, the Russians launched Sputnik 1, and 12 years after that, Armstrong and Aldrin walked on the moon.

In 1846, ether was used for surgery for the first time. Surgeons could operate on patients without inflicting excruciating pain from the knife. Advances in the understanding of antisepsis taught surgeons to wash their hands and their instruments, and survival rates after surgery steadily rose. The first appendectomy happened in 1880. The first kidney transplant was in 1953. Today, surgeons can repair heart valves without opening the chest, and address spina bifida while an infant is still in the womb. Death as a result of surgery is uncommon in all but the direst of circumstances.

Hundreds of years ago, the Chinese blew pulverized smallpox scabs into the noses of susceptible individuals, and eventually variolation, the deliberate, controlled exposure of an individual to smallpox was practiced throughout the world. Smallpox contracted naturally carried a death rate of about 30 percent. Variolation improved the odds significantly: only one to two percent of people died. In 1796, Jenner started inoculating children with cow pox, thus conferring immunity to smallpox, and the modern vaccine era began.

Since the late 1800s, vaccines against many once terrible diseases have been developed. As technology has advanced, it has been easier to identify the organism that causes a disease. It took almost 15 years to determine that polio was caused by a virus rather than bacteria, and another 40 years to learn that there were in fact three different strains of the polio virus. It took only two years to identify HIV.

Science accelerates, and science rises to new challenges. Basic science advancements are translated into new or improved technologies faster than ever before. Researchers across the world can collaborate, replicate, build upon, or as importantly refute, each other's findings.

We have tools today that even da Vinci could not have imagined, and they enable us to do things that would have seemed like magic to previous generations. Science fiction author Arthur C. Clark once wrote, "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Thankfully, understanding how these technologies developed helps us appreciate the difference.

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

Groton Jr Legion Claims Blow Out Win Over Belle Fourche Thanks To Sixth Inning Boost

Seven runs in the sixth inning led Groton Jr Legion past Belle Fourche 12-2 on Sunday. The offensive firepower by Groton Jr Legion was led by Kaleb H, Colby D, Tate L, Ryan G, Cade L, and Dillon A, all knocking in runs in the inning.

Belle Fourche fired up the offense in the first inning. Wahlfeldt singled on a 2-2 count, scoring one run.

Groton Jr Legion pulled away for good with two runs in the second inning. In the second Ryan laid down a sacrifice bunt, scoring one run and Dillon singled on a 1-0 count, scoring one run.

Groton Jr Legion scored seven runs in the sixth inning. Kaleb, Colby, Tate, Ryan, Cade, and Dillon all moved runners across the plate with RBIs in the inning.

Kaleb pitched Groton Jr Legion to victory. Kaleb lasted five and a third innings, allowing five hits and two runs while striking out five. Dillon threw two-thirds of an inning in relief out of the bullpen.

Pesicka took the loss for Belle Fourche. The pitcher went two innings, allowing five runs on one hit and striking out one.

Davis started the game for Belle Fourche. The bulldog went three innings, allowing three runs on five hits, striking out one and walking one

Groton Jr Legion tallied ten hits. Tate, Dillon, Jordan B, and Ryan each had multiple hits for Groton Jr Legion. Tate went 3-for-4 at the plate to lead Groton Jr Legion in hits. Groton Jr Legion was sure-handed and didn't commit a single error. Cade made the most plays with six.

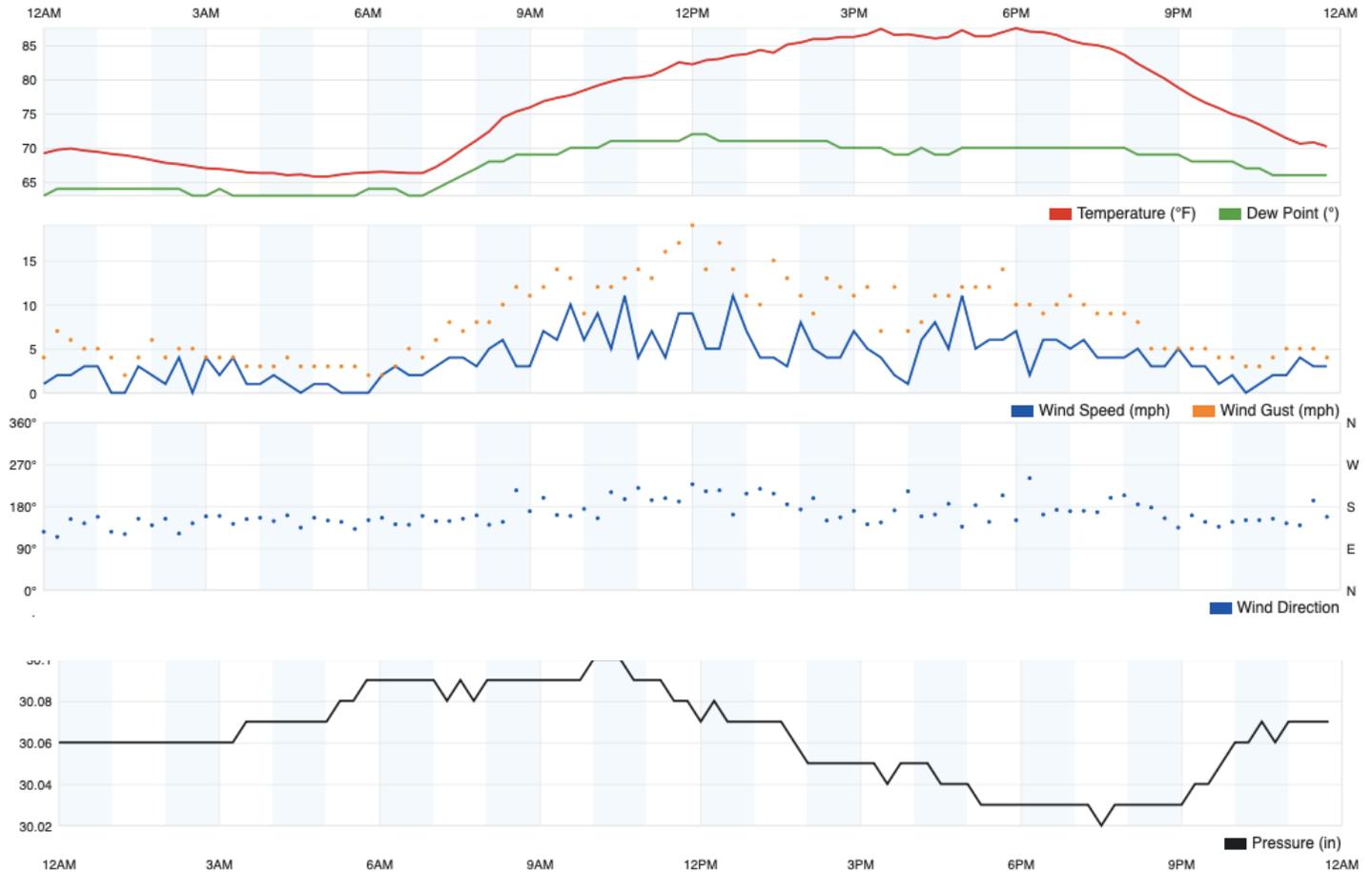
S Waldfeldt led Belle Fourche with two hits in three at bats.

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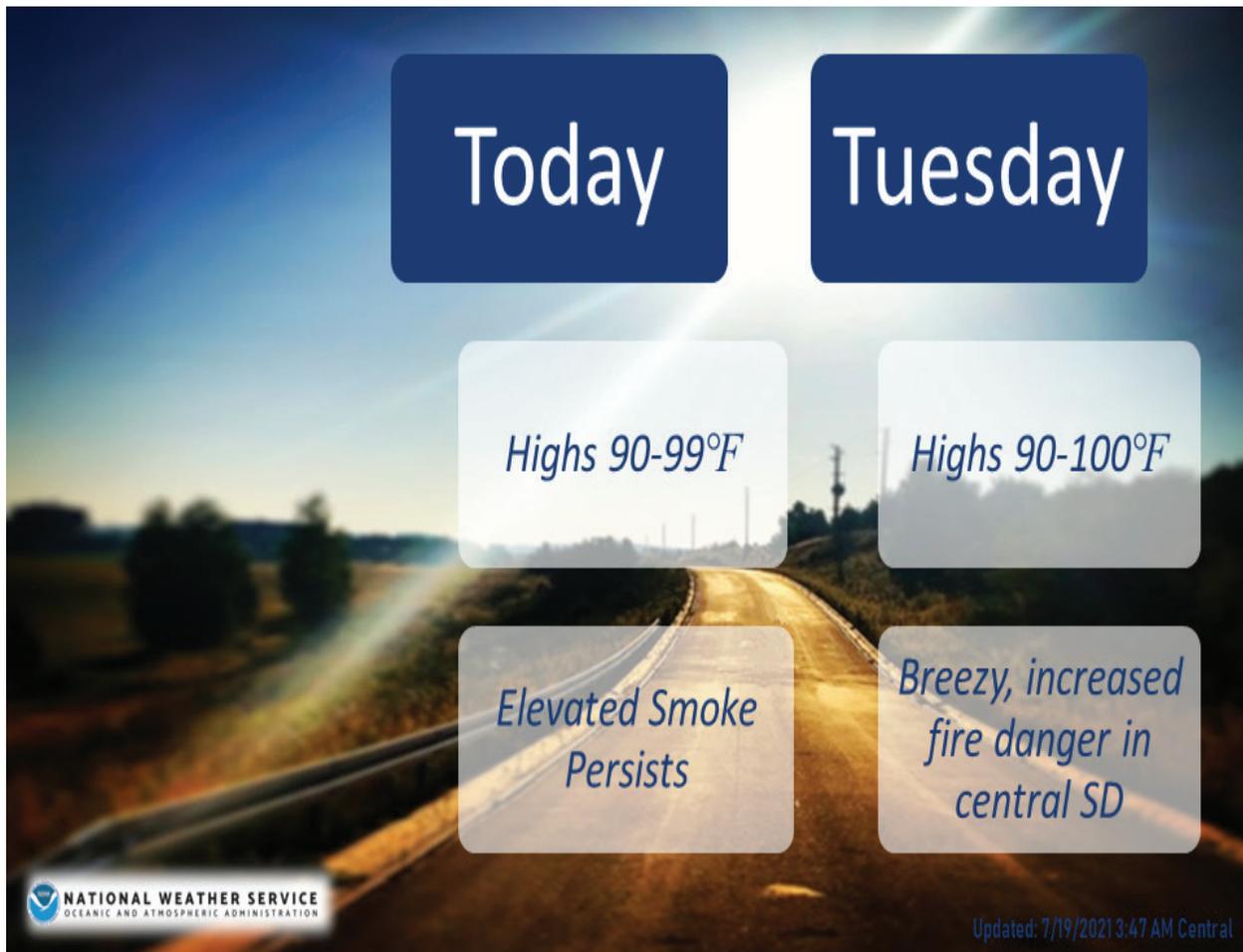
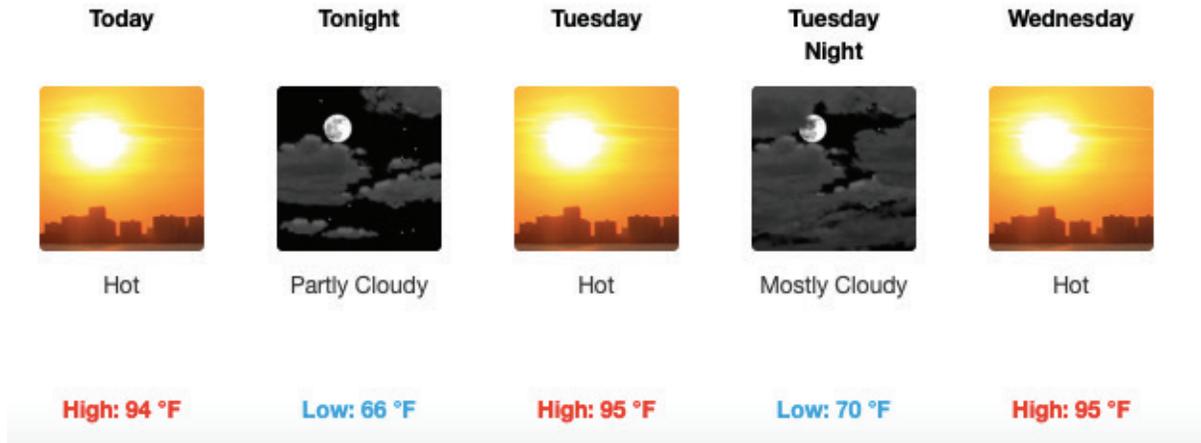
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Temperatures will climb into the 90s today and Tuesday as an upper ridge builds over the region. Elevated smoke from fires in the western U.S. will persist making for a hazy day today. South to southeast breezes are expected on Tuesday.

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Today in Weather History

July 19, 1933: An F2 tornado moved ESE from west of Tulare to 3 miles ENE of Hitchcock. About ten farms had damage, and several barns were destroyed.

July 19, 2010: Severe storms produced a wide swath of hail and high winds from northern Butte County, through southern Meade, eastern Pennington, Jackson, and Bennett Counties. Millions of dollars in crop damage was reported, along with some damage to homes and automobiles.

1886: The 1886 Atlanta Hurricane season was a very active year with ten hurricanes, seven of which struck the United States. During the evening hours of July 18th, a category 1 storm made landfall near Homosassa Springs, Florida. Damage was slight as the area was thinly inhabited. The hurricane weakened to tropical storm status south of Gainesville and emerged on the eastern side of Florida, south of Jacksonville during the morning hours of the 19th. This was the fourth hurricane to make landfall in the United States.

1960 - Cow Creek and Greenland Ranch in Death Valley, CA, reported morning lows of 102 degrees. The afternoon high at Greenland Ranch was 124 degrees, and the high at Cow Creek that afternoon was 126 degrees. The coolest low for the entire month for both locations was 82 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1974 - A severe thunderstorm with winds to 80 mph and up to two inches of rain washed out four to five foot deep sections of roadway in Lake Havasu City, AZ. Three persons in a station wagon died as it was carried 3000 feet down a wash by a ten foot wall of water. (The Weather Channel)

1977 - Thunderstorms produced torrential rains over parts of southwestern Pennsylvania. Some places receive more than twelve inches in a seven hour period. The heavy rains cause flash flooding along streams resulting in widespread severe damage. The cloudburst floods Johnstown with up to ten feet of water resulting in 76 deaths, countless injuries, and 424 million dollars damage. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Fifteen cities in the western and the southeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Winnemucca, NV, with a reading of 33 degrees. Flagstaff AZ reported a record low of 34 degrees. Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in New York State and New Jersey. High winds and hail two inches in diameter injured two persons and caused considerable damage to crops in the Pine Island area of central New York State. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms in Nebraska produced more than five inches of rain at Red Cloud, including two inches in fifteen minutes. Torrid temperatures continued over California, with record highs of 115 degrees at Red Bluff and 116 degrees at Redding. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Early morning thunderstorms in the Lower Mississippi Valley produced 5.50 inches of rain south of Alexander, AR, in just ninety minutes, and flash flooding which resulted claimed the life of one woman. Thunderstorms in Indiana produced 4.95 inches of rain in twelve hours east of Muncie. Eight cities in the southwestern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Las Vegas, NV, with a reading of 115 degrees, and Phoenix, AZ, with a high of 116 degrees. The low that night at Phoenix of 93 degrees was the warmest of record for that location. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 - A severe heat wave gripped the region during early to mid-July. Las Vegas, NV tied their all-time record high temperature of 117 degrees, equalling the old record set on July 24, 1942.

2006: A derecho impacted a sellout crowd of almost 44,000 St. Louis Cardinals fans, packed into the new Busch Stadium. Winds of about 80 mph whirled around the St. Louis area, sending the fans running for shelter. The winds knocked out power and broke windows out of the press box. Nearly two minutes after the winds began at 100 mph, they stopped, and it started to rain. In all, about 30 people were injured at the stadium.

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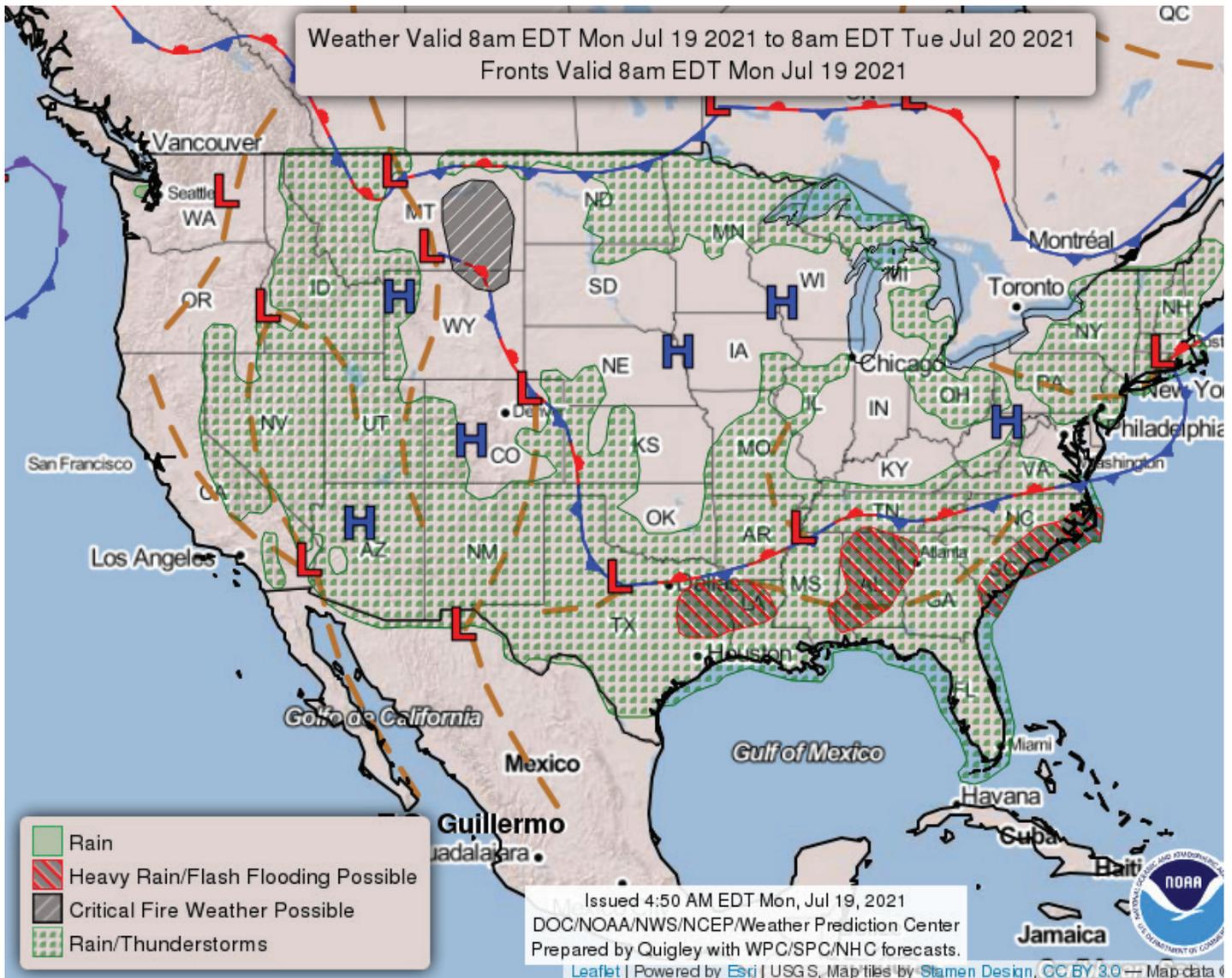
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 88 °F at 6:04 PM
Low Temp: 66 °F at 5:05 AM
Wind: 19 mph at 11:59 AM
Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 106° in 1932
Record Low: 42° in 1900
Average High: 85°F
Average Low: 60°F
Average Precip in July.: 1.99
Precip to date in July.: 1.73
Average Precip to date: 13.00
Precip Year to Date: 6.48
Sunset Tonight: 9:16 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:05 a.m.



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DIVINE DIRECTIONS

It is always wise to think before we talk and ask God to guide our words. And it is important to look to the Lord for His insight and wisdom before we leap into the unknown. It is certainly critical to pray before we proceed with any plan. If we ever fear we are failing it's time to fall on our knees and ask God to come to our rescue. Looking to the Lord for His directions will give us confidence that we are following His will for our lives and can then count on His presence. To make the right choice we must listen for God's voice.

Not only is God interested in who we are but what we do. He is no more interested in the foreign missionary than he is the shop mechanic. He is no more concerned for a preacher than He is a politician. We read in His Word that "God so loved the world" – and that means everyone on it! That assures us that He has a plan for every life and will reveal His plan to those who willingly search for it and carefully follow it.

But one plan does not fit all any more than one size fits all. He has a different plan for each of us and various methods to speak to us. For some it may be a sermon, for others a passage of Scripture, and many hear a still, soft voice. He may speak quietly during a moment of worship or boldly during a time of sickness.

We must always be alert for His voice. He is constantly speaking to each of us and wanting, willing, and able to lead us on the path He has designed especially for us. As He was with the Israelites then, so He is with us now: "He guided with a cloud by day and light from a fire all night." His presence is constant, but we must seek it until we find it.

Whether a cloud by day or a light in the darkness, He waits to be our guide.

Prayer: We thank You, Father, that You will guide and guard us, equip and enable us to do what You call us to do. Bur first we must seek You in earnest. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night. Psalm 78:14

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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 native biking across America for 3 charities

By ELISA SAND Aberdeen American News

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — A Bristol native who has completed two hefty hiking adventures in recent years is now biking across the country.

Jeff Peterson passed through Aberdeen earlier this month on his way from Anacortes, Washington to Key West, Florida. He started the day in Ipswich, headed east on U.S. Highway 12, the same road that passes his hometown.

In all, the 63-year-old's journey will take him 4,800 miles.

Peterson now lives in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, with his wife, Kris. Both are from Bristol and are Northern State University graduates.

As he bikes, Peterson is also raising money for three groups — Sun Dial Manor in Bristol, K9s for Warriors and the Down Syndrome Program at Boston Children's Hospital. Each group has a special meaning to him.

Peterson is a veteran, and the headquarters for K9s for Warriors is near his home in Florida.

He picked the Down syndrome program because, he said, it's an underfunded area of medicine and he has a friend with a daughter who has Down syndrome.

And Sun Dial Manor, of course, is in his hometown, a Day County community that's home to about 350 people.

"That's a very important part of Bristol," he said. "They employ a lot of people there."

Some 1,200 miles into the trip, Peterson said earlier this month it had been brutal with steep mountain terrain at first followed by temperatures in the 90s or hotter. But, he said, he'd met some interesting people along the way, and he tries not to think about how much farther he has to go.

"I try to take it day by day and do what I can do," he said.

One day he pedaled 101 miles from Mandan, North Dakota to Herreid, just south of the border of the Dakotas. the Aberdeen American News reported.

He doesn't have a set schedule and is averaging 80 to 90 miles a day, with shorter distances on the hotter days. He stays in a combination of places that include both motels and his tent, which he carries with him.

"I made a resolution not to go more than 70 miles a day when it's (overly) hot," he said.

He's hoping to reach Key West by Sept. 1, which would put him back home in time to play in a golf tournament on Sept. 16. He started his trip June 13.

An avid walker who completed a 2,000-mile hike from Georgia to Maine along the Appalachian Trail in 2017 and a 900-mile hike through coastal Spain and Portugal in 2019, Peterson doesn't have much experience with long-distance biking.

"I had this hair-brained idea that I could bicycle a long distance without really knowing if I could," he said. "So I bought a bike, did a little training and took off."

He packed his bike, flew west to Washington and started his journey, which will end about 500 miles from his home. He quickly realized the difference between the muscles used for biking and hiking.

Peterson raised \$94,728 in pledges from his hikes and has added roughly \$13,000 more on his current journey.

"We raised enough on the Appalachian Trail where we could sponsor a K9 and the warrior," he said, recalling the meeting he had with the veteran and his service dog.

Information about each of Peterson's adventures and a daily blog can be found only at at-pete.com.

Paralyzed former North Dakota athlete spreads story of hope

By RYAN LADIKA Minot Daily News

MINOT, N.D. (AP) — Hunter Pinke was a former University of North Dakota tight end who began his sporting career doing everything in his power to follow in the Division I footsteps of his grandfather. A

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skiing accident a couple of years ago set him on a new course, though, one he would not give up even if given the chance.

As he was growing up, Pinke, a native of Wishek, North Dakota, wanted nothing more than to be just like his grandfather, Fred Lukens. Lukens played basketball for the Fighting Hawks from 1972 to 1977, the Grand Forks Herald's Ann Bailey reported, and Pinke would stop at nothing to ensure he did the same.

The first of two life-changing events occurred June 23, 2015. Pinke, the second-ranked high school basketball player in North Dakota at the time, was weeks away from realizing his dream of playing with UND. As he was scrolling through Twitter, he saw a Tweet that said "R.I.P Zach. You will be missed." Pinke would soon learn that best friend, Zach Kvalvog, was killed in a car accident along with Kvalvog's brother.

"I didn't touch a basketball for the next three months," Pinke said. "I think my dream might have died along with Zach that day."

A week later, he received the call he had been dreaming of his whole life. It was the University of North Dakota, but not the basketball team. Head football coach Bubba Schweigert was on the other end, offering Pinke a scholarship to play tight end for his dream school.

He leapt at the chance, describing it as "the best five years of my life."

Pinke's life was transformed once more 566 days ago. He took a trip to Keystone, Colorado for a skiing trip with a handful of friends in December of 2019. An avid and experienced skier, Pinke loved to ski between the trees. On December 27, he took a route that followed a carved-out chute in a wooded area, and another skier collided with him, sending Pinke headfirst into a tree, the Minot Daily News reported.

"My helmet saved my life, I wouldn't be here if I wasn't wearing my helmet," he said. "The pressure from the injury went through the top of my head, through my neck, and shattered my T4 through T9 of my spine."

The nature of his injury left him paralyzed from the chest down. He was given a two percent chance of regaining any bit of feeling in the lower half of his body, and spent nine days in St. Anthony's hospital recovering from surgery before being transferred to Craig Hospital in Englewood, Colorado for two and a half months of inpatient and outpatient care.

"One question that I always get asked though is 'Hunter if you could go back to the day when it happened, would you change it?'" he said. "My answer a lot of times surprises them. No I wouldn't. I wouldn't be talking to you. Maybe, just maybe, one person in here needs to hear what I have to say. Who am I to mess with God's plan?"

Pinke, now studying online at the University of Arizona in the school's master of architecture program while training for the school's adaptive track and field team, began traveling throughout North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota to share his story.

"The feedback on my story, and ever since I really got injured, I feel like this state and people in our region have really gravitated toward it," he said. "Especially going through COVID, I think it was a story of hope."

Everywhere he goes, his goal to help at least one person remains the same, and his message is unchanging: there are no bad days, only tough days. Right around the corner from tough days, he says, there is a good day coming.

"It's really gratifying to see the impact that my story can have on somebody who might be struggling with something not exactly the same as me," he added. "But I always say everybody's got struggle. Pain is pain. Struggle is struggle. You don't struggle with what I struggle with, but I don't struggle with what you struggle with either. If I can help people, give them some hope, inspire them to make a change, and go after something and chase after their dreams, why wouldn't I take that opportunity?"

Police search for man accused in South Dakota kidnapping

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — A 23-year-old Sioux Falls man accused of abducting a woman at a South Dakota state park early Sunday morning and leading police on an extended chase remains at large, authorities said.

The victim was sitting in a vehicle at Oakwood State Park near the town of Bruce when the suspect al-

legedly started striking the vehicle with a machete. The man forcefully removed the woman and left the scene with her in another vehicle, according to the Brookings County Sheriff's Office.

The suspect was able to elude police while heading toward Sioux Falls before his vehicle ran out of gas. The victim was able to escape and call authorities, while the suspect fled on foot, authorities said.

The man is facing charges of kidnapping, aggravated assault and aggravated domestic assault. A woman who was in the suspect's vehicle at the time of the abduction was interviewed and released.

Microsoft Exchange email hack was caused by China, US says

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration on Monday blamed China for a hack of Microsoft Exchange email server software that compromised tens of thousands of computers around the world earlier this year.

The administration and allied nations also disclosed a broad range of other cyberthreats from Beijing, including ransomware attacks from government-affiliated hackers that have targeted companies with demands for millions of dollars. China's Ministry of State Security has been using criminal contract hackers, who have engaged in cyber extortion schemes and theft for their own profit, according to a senior administration official. That official briefed reporters about the investigation on the condition of anonymity.

Meanwhile, the Justice Department on Monday announced charges against four Chinese nationals who prosecutors said were working with the Ministry of State Security in a hacking campaign that targeted dozens of computer systems, including companies, universities and government entities.

The announcements highlighted the ongoing cyberthreat posed by Chinese government hackers even as the administration has been consumed with trying to curb ransomware attacks from Russia-based syndicates that have targeted critical infrastructure, including a massive fuel pipeline. Even though the finger-pointing was not accompanied by any sanctions of Beijing, a senior administration official who disclosed the actions to reporters said that the U.S. has confronted senior Chinese officials and that the White House regards the multinational public shaming as sending an importance message.

That hackers affiliated with the Ministry of State Security carried out a ransomware attack was surprising and concerning to the U.S. government, the senior administration official said. But the attack, in which an unidentified American company received a high-dollar ransom demand, also gave U.S. officials new insight into what the official said was "the kind of aggressive behavior that we're seeing coming out of China."

The European Union and Britain also pointed the finger at China. The EU said malicious cyber activities with "significant effects" that targeted government institutions, political organizations and key industries in the bloc's 27 member states could be linked to Chinese hacking groups. The U.K.'s National Cyber Security Centre said the groups targeted maritime industries and naval defense contractors in the U.S. and Europe and the Finnish parliament.

In a statement, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the hacking was "conducted from the territory of China for the purpose of intellectual property theft and espionage."

The Microsoft Exchange cyberattack "by Chinese state-backed groups was a reckless but familiar pattern of behaviour," U.K. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said.

The majority of the most damaging and high-profile recent ransomware attacks have involved Russian criminal gangs. Though the U.S. has sometimes seen connections between Russian intelligence agencies and individual hackers, the use of criminal contract hackers by the Chinese government "to conduct un-sanctioned cyber operations globally is distinct," the official said.

The Microsoft Exchange hack was first identified in January and was rapidly attributed to Chinese cyber spies by private sector groups. An administration official said the government's attribution to hackers affiliated with China's Ministry of State Security took until now in part because of the discovery of the ransomware and for-profit hacking operations and because the administration wanted to pair the announcement with guidance for businesses about tactics that the Chinese have been using.

An advisory Monday from the FBI, the National Security Agency and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency laid out specific techniques and ways that government agencies and businesses can

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protect themselves.

The White House also wanted to line up an international coalition of allies to call out China, according to the official, who said it was the first time NATO had condemned Beijing's hacking operations.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, asked about the Microsoft Exchange hack, has previously said that China "firmly opposes and combats cyber attacks and cyber theft in all forms" and cautioned that attribution of cyberattacks should be based on evidence and not "groundless accusations."

Virus surge fears, UK leader's quarantine, mar 'Freedom Day'

By UROOBA JAMAL and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Corks popped, beats boomed out and giddy revelers rushed onto dancefloors when England's nightclubs reopened Monday as the country lifted most remaining coronavirus restrictions after more than a year of lockdowns, mask mandates and other pandemic-related curbs on freedom.

For clubbers and nightclub owners, the moment lived up to its media-given moniker, "Freedom Day." But the big step out of lockdown was met with nervousness by many Britons and concern from scientists, who say the U.K. is entering uncharted waters by opening up when confirmed cases are not falling but soaring.

As of Monday, face masks were no longer legally required in England, work-from-home guidance ended and, with social distancing rules shelved, no limits existed on the number of people attending theater performances or big events.

For nightclubs, it is the first time they have been allowed to open in almost 18 months, and from London to Liverpool, thousands of people danced the night away at "Freedom Day" parties starting at midnight.

"I'm absolutely ecstatic," clubgoer Lorna Feeney said at Bar Fibre in the northern England city of Leeds. "That's my life, my soul -- I love dancing. It bonds me,. It's amazing. It makes me feel so good."

At The Piano Works in London, patrons packed the area around the cordoned-off dance floor on Sunday night as a host led a countdown to midnight.

Once a ceremonial ribbon was cut, the crowd ran toward the dance floor as confetti canons went off and a disco ball spun above. Soon, unmasked clubgoers dancing to a live band's rendition of Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody" filled the floor.

One of the people attending The Piano Works party, Mark Troy, called the return of nightclubs "a most joyous occasion."

But while entertainment businesses and ravers are jubilant, many others are deeply worried about the British government's decision to scrap restrictions at a time when COVID-19 cases are on a rapid upswing due to the highly infectious delta variant first identified in India. Cases topped 50,000 per day last week for the first time since January, although virus deaths remain comparatively low so far.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who has dialed down talk of freedom in recent weeks, urged the public to exercise "prudence and respect for other people and the risks that the disease continues to present."

In a reminder of how volatile the situation is, the prime minister was spending "Freedom Day" in quarantine. Johnson and Treasury chief Rishi Sunak are both self-isolating for 10 days after contact with Health Secretary Sajid Javid, who tested positive for COVID-19 on Saturday.

Johnson initially said he would take daily tests instead of self-isolating -- an option not offered to most people -- but U-turned amid widespread public outrage.

The prime minister is among hundreds of thousands of Britons who have been told to quarantine because they have been near someone who tested positive. The situation is causing staff shortages for businesses including restaurants, car manufacturers and public transport.

Globally, the World Health Organization says cases and deaths are climbing after a period of decline, spurred by the delta variant. Like the U.K., Israel and the Netherlands both opened up widely after vaccinating most of their people, but had to reimpose some restrictions after new infection surges. The Dutch prime minister admitted that lifting restrictions too early "was a mistake."

In the U.S., many areas abandoned face coverings when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said fully vaccinated people didn't need to wear them in most settings. Some states and cities are now

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trying to decide what to do as cases rise again.

British officials have repeatedly expressed confidence that the U.K.'s country's vaccine rollout — 68.3% of adults, or just over half of the total population, has received two doses — will keep the threat to public health at bay. But leading international scientists described England's "Freedom Day" as a threat to the whole world, and 1,200 scientists backed a letter to British medical journal *The Lancet* that criticized the Conservative government's decision.

"I can't think of any realistic good scenario to come out of this strategy, I'm afraid," said Julian Tang, a clinical virologist at the University of Leicester. "I think it's really a degree of how bad it's going to be."

Tang said nightclubs in particular are potent spreading grounds, because they increase close physical contact among a core customer base — people 18 to 25 — that has not yet been fully vaccinated.

"That's the perfect mixing vessel for the virus to spread and to even generate new variants," he said.

The government wants nightclubs and other crowded venues to check whether customers have been vaccinated, have a negative test result or have recovered from the disease.

There is no legal requirement for them to do so, however, and most say they won't. Michael Kill, chief executive of the Night Time Industries Association, said many owners see the passes as a huge turn-off for customers and accuse the government of "passing the buck" to businesses.

"Either mandate it or don't mandate it," Kill said. "This is putting an inordinate amount of pressure on us."

Johnson's decision to scrap the legal requirement for face masks in indoor public spaces — while recommending people keep them on — has also sowed confusion.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan has said they will remain mandatory on the capital's subways and buses, and some retailers said they would encourage customers to keep their masks on. But many believe implementing such policies will be tricky without the backing of the law.

Psychologist Robert West, who sits on a science panel that advises the government, said telling people to be careful without giving them thorough knowledge of risks was "like putting someone out on the road without having taught them to drive."

The end of restrictions in England is a critical moment in Britain's handling of the pandemic, which has killed more than 128,000 people nationwide, the highest death toll in Europe after Russia. Other parts of the U.K. — Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland — are taking slightly more cautious steps out of lockdown and keeping mask requirements for now.

At the Egg nightclub in London, clubber Alex Clark acknowledged feeling "a bit of apprehension and uncertainty."

Fellow clubgoer Kevin Ally felt no such qualms.

"There's zero concern," he said. "The only concern is why we haven't been here for a year and a half. It's been a very long time since we've been out."

"It's good to be back, and we're here to dance."

Biden transfers 1st Guantanamo detainee to home country

By DINO HAZELL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration on Monday transferred a detainee out of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility for the first time, sending a Moroccan man back home years after he was recommended for discharge.

The Moroccan prisoner, Abdullatif Nasser, who's in his mid-50s, was cleared for repatriation by a review board in July 2016 but remained at Guantanamo for the duration of the Trump presidency.

The Periodic Review Board process determined that Nasser's detention no longer remained necessary to protect U.S. national security, the Pentagon said Monday in a statement. The board recommended authorization for Nasser's repatriation, but that couldn't be completed before the end of the Obama administration, it said.

The transfer of Nasser could suggest President Joe Biden is making efforts to reduce the Guantanamo population, which now stands at 39. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama supported the prisoner

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transfer process, but it stalled under President Donald Trump.

Trump said even before he took office that there should be no further releases from "Gitmo," as Guantanamo Bay is often called. "These are extremely dangerous people and should not be allowed back onto the battlefield," he said then.

The possibility that former Guantanamo prisoners would resume hostile activities has long been a concern that has played into the debate over releases. The office of the Director of National Intelligence said in a 2016 report that about 17% of the 728 detainees who had been released were "confirmed" and 12% were "suspected" of re-engaging in such activities.

But the vast majority of those re-engagements occurred with former prisoners who did not go through the security review that was set up under Obama. A task force that included agencies such as the Defense Department and the CIA analyzed who was held at Guantanamo and determined who could be released and who should continue in detention.

The U.S. thanked Morocco for facilitating Nasser's transfer back home.

"The United States commends the Kingdom of Morocco for its long-time partnership in securing both countries' national security interests," the Pentagon statement said. "The United States is also extremely grateful for the Kingdom's willingness to support ongoing U.S. efforts to close the Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility."

Nasser initially got news he was going to be released in the summer of 2016, when one of his lawyers called him at the detention center and told him the U.S. had decided he no longer posed a threat and could go home. He thought he'd returned to Morocco soon: "I've been here 14 years," he said at the time. "A few months more is nothing."

Nasser's journey to the Cuban prison was a long one. He was a member of a nonviolent but illegal Moroccan Sufi Islam group in the 1980s, according to his Pentagon file. In 1996, he was recruited to fight in Chechnya but ended up in Afghanistan, where he trained at an al-Qaida camp. He was captured after fighting U.S. forces there and sent to Guantanamo in May 2002.

An unidentified military official appointed to represent him before the review board said he studied math, computer science and English at Guantanamo, creating a 2,000-word Arabic-English dictionary. The official told the board that Nasser "deeply regrets his actions of the past" and expressed confidence he would reintegrate in society.

Dangerous conditions complicate wildfire fight in western US

Associated Press undefined

BLY, Ore. (AP) — Erratic winds and dry lightning added to the dangers for crews battling the nation's largest wildfire on Monday in parched Oregon forests, just one of dozens burning across several Western states.

The destructive Bootleg Fire, one of the largest in modern Oregon history, has already burned more than 476 square miles (1,210 square kilometers), an area about the size of Los Angeles. The blaze just north of the California state line was 25% contained.

Meteorologists predicted critically dangerous fire weather through at least Monday with lightning possible in both California and southern Oregon.

"With the very dry fuels, any thunderstorm has the potential to ignite new fire starts," the National Weather Service in Sacramento, California, said on Twitter.

Thousands have been ordered to evacuate, including some 2,000 people who live in rugged terrain among lakes and wildlife refuges near the fire, which has burned at least 67 homes and 100 outbuildings while threatening many more.

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. Firefighters said these conditions in July are more typical of late summer or fall.

Pyrocumulus clouds — literally translated as "fire clouds" — complicated containment efforts Sunday for

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the Dixie Fire in northern California, where flames spread in remote areas with steep terrain crews can't easily reach, officials said. New evacuation orders were issued in rural communities near the Feather River Canyon.

The Dixie Fire remained 15% contained and covered 29 square miles (74 square kilometers). The fire is northeast of the town of Paradise, California, and survivors of that horrific fire that killed 85 people watched warily as the blaze burned.

A growing wildfire south of Lake Tahoe jumped a highway, prompting more evacuation orders, the closure of the Pacific Crest Trail and the cancellation of an extreme bike ride through the Sierra Nevada.

The Tamarack Fire, which was sparked by lightning on July 4, had charred about 28.5 square miles (74 square kilometers) of dry brush and timber as of Sunday night. The blaze was threatening Markleeville, a small town close to the California-Nevada state line. It has destroyed at least two structures, authorities said.

A notice posted Saturday on the 103-mile (165-kilometer) Death Ride's website said several communities in the area had been evacuated and ordered all bike riders to clear the area. The fire left thousands of bikers and spectators stranded in the small town and racing to get out.

Kelli Pennington and her family were camping near the town Friday so her husband could participate in his ninth ride when they were told to leave. They had been watching smoke develop over the course of the day, but were caught off guard by the fire's quick spread.

"It happened so fast," Pennington said. "We left our tents, hammock and some foods, but we got most of our things, shoved our two kids in the car and left."

About 800 fire personnel were assigned to battle the flames by Sunday night, "focusing on preserving life and property with point protection of structures and putting in containment lines where possible," the U.S. Forest Service said.

A fire in the mountains of northeast Oregon grew to more than 18 square miles (48 square kilometers) by Sunday. The Elbow Creek Fire that started Thursday has prompted evacuations in several small, remote communities around the Grande Ronde River about 30 miles (50 kilometers) southeast of Walla Walla, Washington. It was 10% contained.

Natural features of the area act like a funnel for wind, feeding the flames and making them unpredictable, officials said.

Overall, about 70 active large fires and complexes of multiple blazes have burned nearly 1,659 square miles (4,297 square kilometers) in the U.S., the National Interagency Fire Center said. The U.S. Forest Service said at least 16 major fires were burning in the Pacific Northwest alone.

Germany defends preparation for floods, considers lessons

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German officials are defending their preparations for flooding in the face of the raging torrents that caught many people by surprise and left over 190 people dead in Western Europe, but concede that they will need to learn lessons from the disaster.

Efforts to find any more victims and clean up the mess across a swath of western Germany, eastern Belgium and the Netherlands continued Monday as floodwaters receded. So far, 117 people have been confirmed dead in the worst-affected German region, Rhineland-Palatinate; 46 in the neighboring state of North Rhine-Westphalia; and at least one in Bavaria, parts of which saw heavy rain and flooding over the weekend. At least 31 people died in Belgium.

The downpours that led to usually small rivers swelling at vast speed in the middle of last week were forecast, but warnings of potentially catastrophic damage didn't appear to have found their way to many people on the ground — often in the middle of the night.

"As soon as we have provided the immediate aid that stands at the forefront now, we will have to look at whether there were things that didn't go well, whether there were things that went wrong, and then they have to be corrected," Economy Minister Peter Altmaier told the Bild newspaper. "That isn't about finger-pointing — it's about improvements for the future."

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Federal and state authorities faced criticism from opposition politicians for allegedly failing to warn citizens of the impending disaster, which came ahead of a national election in September. But Interior Minister Horst Seehofer dismissed claims that federal officials had made mistakes, and said warnings were passed to local authorities "who make decisions on disaster protection."

"I have to say that some of the things I'm hearing now are cheap election rhetoric," Seehofer said during a visit to the Steinbach Reservoir in western Germany, where authorities said Monday they no longer fear a dam breach. "Now really isn't the hour for this."

The head of Germany's civil protection agency said that the country's weather service had "forecast relatively well" and that the country was well-prepared for flooding on its major rivers.

But, Armin Schuster told ZDF television late Sunday, "half an hour before, it is often not possible to say what place will be hit with what quantity" of water. He said that 150 warning notices had been sent out via apps and media.

He said "we will have to investigate" where sirens sounded and where they didn't.

Officials in Germany's Rhineland-Palatinate state said they were well-prepared for flooding, and municipalities were alerted and acted.

But the state's interior minister, Roger Lewentz, said after visiting the hard-hit village of Schuld with Chancellor Angela Merkel on Sunday that "we of course had the problem that the technical infrastructure — electricity and so on — was destroyed in one go."

Local authorities "tried very quickly to react," he said. "But this was an explosion of the water in moments. ... You can have the very best preparations and warning situations (but) if warning equipment is destroyed and carried away with buildings, then that is a very difficult situation." Cellphone networks also were knocked out by the flooding.

There were already broader questions about Germany's emergency warning system after a nationwide test last September, the first in 30 years, largely failed. Sirens didn't sound in many places, or had been removed after the end of the Cold War, and push alerts from the national warning app arrived late or not at all.

Schuster, the head of the civil protection agency, noted that a program to reform civil protection was launched earlier this year, including a drive to encourage local authorities to install more sirens. Germany doesn't have a text messaging system for disaster warnings, but Schuster told Deutschlandfunk radio it is exploring the possibility.

As local communities contemplate the huge task of rebuilding smashed homes and infrastructure such as the water system, Chancellor Angela Merkel's Cabinet is set to draw up a package of immediate and medium-term financial aid on Wednesday.

At the Steinbach Reservoir, North Rhine-Westphalia state governor Armin Laschet said the dam was designed for a risk that might occur once in 10,000 years.

"This was exceeded in the last few days," he told reporters. "It was a likelihood nobody had foreseen."

Anger as French protesters compare vaccines to Nazi horrors

PARIS (AP) — A French Holocaust survivor has denounced anti-vaccination protesters comparing themselves to Jews who were persecuted by Nazi Germany during World War II. French officials and anti-racism groups joined the 94-year-old in expressing indignation.

As more than 100,000 people marched around France against government vaccine rules on Saturday, some demonstrators wore yellow stars recalling the ones the Nazis forced Jews to wear. Other demonstrators carried signs evoking the Auschwitz death camp or South Africa's apartheid regime, claiming the French government was unfairly mistreating them with its anti-pandemic measures.

"You can't imagine how much that upset me. This comparison is hateful. We must all rise up against this ignominy," Holocaust survivor Joseph Szwarc said Sunday during a ceremony commemorating victims of antisemitic and racist acts by the French state, which collaborated with Adolf Hitler's regime.

"I wore the star, I know what that is, I still have it in my flesh," Szwarc, who was deported from France by the Nazis, said with tears in his eyes. "It is everyone's duty to not allow this outrageous, antisemitic,

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racist wave to pass over us.”

France’s secretary of state for military affairs, who also attended the ceremony, called the protesters’ actions “intolerable and a disgrace for our republic.”

The International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism said the protesters were “mocking victims of the Holocaust” and minimizing crimes against humanity committed during World War II.

Saturday’s protests involved a mix of people angry at the government for various reasons, and notably supporters of the far right. Prominent French far-right figures have been convicted in the past of antisemitism, racism and denying the Holocaust.

The government is introducing a bill Monday requiring all health care workers to get vaccinated against the coronavirus and requiring COVID passes to enter restaurants and other venues.

At a large protest in Paris on Saturday against vaccine rules, one demonstrator pasted a star on his back reading “not vaccinated.” Bruno Auquier, a 53-year-old town councilor who lives on the outskirts of Paris, drew a yellow star on his T-shirt and handed out arm bands with the star.

“I will never get vaccinated,” Auquier said. “People need to wake up,” he said, questioning the safety of COVID-19 vaccines.

Auquier expressed concern that the new measures would restrict his two children’s freedom and pledged to take them out of school if vaccination becomes mandatory.

Polls suggest most French people support the measures, but they have prompted anger in some quarters. Vandals targeted two vaccination centers in southwest France over the weekend. One was set on fire, and another covered in graffiti, including a reference to the Nazi occupation of France.

France has reported more than 111,000 deaths in the pandemic, and new confirmed cases are increasing again, raising worries about renewed pressure on hospitals and further restrictions that would damage jobs and businesses.

Breivik survivors keep fighting for their vision of Norway

By MARK LEWIS Associated Press

STAVANGER, Norway (AP) — On the 10th anniversary of Norway’s worst peacetime slaughter, survivors of Anders Behring Breivik’s assault worry that the racism which nurtured the anti-Islamic mass murderer is re-emerging in a nation known for its progressive politics.

Most of Breivik’s 77 victims on July 22, 2011, were teen members of the Labor Party — idealists enjoying their annual camping trip on the tranquil, wooded island of Utoya, in a lake northwest of Oslo, the capital. Today many survivors are battling to keep their vision for their country alive.

“I thought that Norway would positively change forever after the attacks. Ten years later, that hasn’t happened. And in many ways, the hate we see online and the threats against people in the Labor movement have increased,” said Aasmund Aukrust, then-deputy leader of the Labor Youth Wing who helped organize the camp.

Today he’s a national lawmaker campaigning for a nationwide inquiry into the right-wing ideology that inspired the killer.

Aukrust ran from the bullets flying through the forest then lay hidden for three terrifying hours while he saw friends murdered nearby. A vocal proponent of properly reckoning with the racism and xenophobia in Norway, Aukrust has been the target of online abuse, including receiving the message that “we wish Breivik had done his job.”

The victims of the Utoya massacre came from towns and villages throughout Norway, turning a personal tragedy into a collective trauma for many of the country’s 5.3 million inhabitants. Survivors were joined by a shaken population who were determined to show that Norway would become more — not less — tolerant and reject the worldview that motivated the killer.

A decade later, some survivors believe that collective determination is waning.

“What was very positive after the terror attacks was that people saw this as an attack on the whole of

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Norway. It was a way of showing solidarity," said Aukrust. "But that has disappeared. It was an attack on a multicultural society. And though it was the act of one person, we know that his views are shared by more people today than they were 10 years ago."

Breivik struck at Labor Party institutions he believed were aiding what he called the "Islamization" of Norway. Dressed as a policeman, he landed on Utoya, shooting dead 69 members of the youth wing and injuring scores more. He had earlier murdered eight people in a bomb attack at government buildings in Oslo.

"It wasn't random that it was our summer camp that was attacked. The hatred was against us because of our values of openness and inclusiveness," said Sindre Lysoe, a survivor from Utoya who is now the general secretary of the Labor Party's Youth Wing.

"After Utoya, it was too hard for many people to go back to politics. For me and for society, it was very important to raise up again and fight back through more of the good work we knew we could do," he said. "Before 22 July, politics was important, afterwards it became about life and death."

After hearing about the Oslo bombing on the "darkest day of all of our lives," he remembers his friends telling each other they were in the safest place on earth. Within minutes, the gunfire and screaming began on the island. Today Lysoe spends a lot of his time warning young people about the dangers of right-wing extremism.

In the years following the attack, Norway's security police, the PST, continued to rank Islamists as more likely to carry out domestic terrorism than right-wing extremists.

But after the New Zealand mosque attacks in 2019 killed 51 people, and a copycat attempt by Norwegian shooter Philip Manshaus just outside Oslo later that year in which the killer's sister died, Norway's security police changed its annual assessments. It now ranks the two forms of extremism at the same danger level.

"As we progressed into 2013 and 2014, European migration and IS became the prisms that we saw terror through. Norway went back to a narrative of extremism being largely foreign," said Bjoern Ihler, who escaped the bullets by swimming in frigid waters around the island to safety.

"There is a failure in self-reflection. We are missing the fact that Anders Breivik and Manshaus were Norwegian, but also so were a lot of the extremists throughout the last decade that should have been caught by our social system," he said.

Since the July 22 attacks, Ihler has become an expert in countering radicalization, founding the Khalifa-Ihler Institute for Peace Building and Counter Extremism, advising European Union and chairing a panel at the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism.

Planning the attack from his mother's home in Oslo, Breivik tapped into an online ecosystem that demonized Islam and cast in doubt Europe's Christian future. Ihler, who has spoken with scores of reformed extremists, says these internet echo chambers need to be exposed to different voices.

"Regardless of ideology, the reasons they went into radical environments are all somewhat similar. It's about finding identity and a space where you find belonging. Whether it is Islamists or far-right extremists, the fundamental problem they have is living in environments with diversity," he said. "The tricky part is helping them build comfort with that diversity."

Ihler still believes in the power of traditional Norwegian values such as democracy and rehabilitation in solving societal problems.

Breivik struck at all of these, testing not only the country's commitment to tolerance and inclusiveness but also to nonviolence and merciful justice. Yet he still benefits from a justice system that favors rehabilitation over vengeance.

While his sentence can be extended if he is still considered dangerous, Breivik is serving his 21 years in a three-room cell with access to a gym and computer games, luxuries that would be unthinkable even for minor criminals in other countries.

"It is right that he is treated humanely," said Ihler. "We don't want to go down the same route of violence. We need to keep on showing people that there are better ways of dealing with the issues we have."

Top Olympic sponsor Toyota pulls Games-related TV ads

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Toyota won't be airing any Olympic-themed advertisements on Japanese television during the Tokyo Games despite being one of the IOC's top corporate sponsors.

The extraordinary decision by the country's top automaker underlines how polarizing the Games have become in Japan as COVID-19 infections rise ahead of Friday's opening ceremony.

"There are many issues with these Games that are proving difficult to be understood," Toyota Chief Communications Officer Jun Nagata told reporters Monday.

Chief Executive Akio Toyoda, the company founder's grandson, will be skipping the opening ceremony. That's despite about 200 athletes taking part in the Olympics and Paralympics who are affiliated with Toyota, including swimmer Takeshi Kawamoto and softball player Miu Goto.

Nagata said the company will continue to support its athletes.

Being a corporate sponsor for the Olympics is usually all about using the games as a platform to enhance the brand. But being linked with a pandemic-era Games may be viewed by some as a potential marketing problem.

Masa Takaya, a Tokyo 2020 spokesperson, said sponsors each make its own decisions on their messages.

"There is a mixed public sentiment towards the Games," Takaya said.

"I need to emphasize that those partners and companies have been very supportive to Tokyo 2020. They are passionate about making these Games happen."

Toyota Motor Corp. signed on as a worldwide Olympic sponsor in 2015, in an 8-year deal reportedly worth nearly \$1 billion, becoming the first car company to join the IOC's top-tier marketing program.

The sponsorship, which started globally in 2017, runs through the 2024 Olympics, covering three consecutive Olympics in Asia, including the Tokyo Games.

The Tokyo Olympics, already delayed by a year, are going ahead despite the Japanese capital being under a state of emergency.

It's already virtually a made-for-TV Olympics with most events, including the opening ceremony, going ahead without fans in the venues. Some dignitaries, such as IOC President Thomas Bach and Emperor Naruhito, are likely to attend.

Toyota is one of the most trusted brands in Japan. The maker of the Prius hybrid and Lexus luxury models prides itself on its quality controls, with its "just in time" super-efficient production methods praised and emulated around the world.

Public opinion surveys reflect widespread concern among Japanese people about having tens of thousands of Olympic participants enter the country during a pandemic. Some already have tested positive for COVID.

Motoyuki Niitsuma, a manufacturing plant worker who was banging on a bucket in a recent Tokyo protest against the Olympics, said he didn't like the idea of cheering for the national team, and the pandemic has made that message clear.

"The time to compete is over. Now is the time to cooperate," he said. "We should never have gotten the Games."

American father, son get Japan prison terms for Ghosn escape

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — A Tokyo court handed down prison terms for the American father and son accused of helping Nissan's former chairman, Carlos Ghosn, escape to Lebanon while awaiting trial in Japan.

Michael Taylor was sentenced Monday to two years in prison, while his son Peter was sentenced to one year and eight months.

They were charged with helping a criminal in the December 2019 escape of Ghosn, who hid in a big box that was flown on a private jet via Turkey to Lebanon. Lebanon has no extradition treaty with Japan.

In handing down the sentencing, Chief Judge Hideo Nirei said they had committed a serious violation of

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the law, as now there is next to no chance of putting Ghosn on trial.

"This case enabled Ghosn, a defendant of a serious crime, to escape overseas," he said.

Although the defense argued the two had been merely used by Ghosn, they clearly were involved, regardless of who was making the decisions, he said.

Ghosn was arrested in Japan in November 2018 on charges of underreporting his compensation and of breach of trust in using Nissan Motor Co. money for personal gain. He says he is innocent, and he left because he could not expect a fair trial in Japan.

The Taylors were arrested in Massachusetts in May 2020 and extradited to Japan in March. During their trial they apologized, saying they had been misled by Ghosn about Japan's criminal justice system. Michael Taylor sobbed and said he was "broke," denying they had benefited monetarily because the \$1.3 million prosecutors said Ghosn paid them just covered expenses.

But Nirei, the judge, said the court found that the motive was money. The Taylors can appeal within two weeks, he said.

The father and son, both wearing dark suits and flanked by guards, stood before the court in silence.

The Taylors' defense lawyer Keiji Isaji sought a speedy trial. Many Japanese trials last for months, if not years.

The maximum penalty in Japan for helping a criminal is three years in prison. Prosecutors had demanded a sentence of two years and 10 months for Michael Taylor and two years and six months for his son.

The Taylors' defense had argued for suspended sentences for the two, who spent 10 months in custody in the U.S. before their extradition.

But Nirei said the time they were held before and during trial would not count as time served, saying they were not directly related and should be treated differently. "There is a limit to how much we can consider," he said.

In December 2019, Ghosn left his home in Tokyo and took a bullet train to Osaka. At a hotel there, he hid in a big box supposedly containing audio equipment, that had air holes punched in it so he could breathe, according to prosecutors.

Another man, George-Antoine Zayek, is accused in the escape, but has not been arrested.

Separately, Greg Kelly, a former top Nissan executive, is on trial in Tokyo on charges of falsifying securities reports on Ghosn's compensation. Kelly, arrested at the same time as Ghosn, also says he is innocent.

A verdict in Kelly's trial, which began in September last year, is not expected until next year. More than 99% of Japanese criminal trials result in convictions. Upon conviction, the charges Kelly faces carry the maximum penalty of up to 15 years in prison.

AP Interview: US firms in Hong Kong face risks, says AmCham

By ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — U.S. businesses operating in Hong Kong should reassess their operations and decide if the risks of operating there are worth the reward, the president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong said in an interview Monday with The Associated Press.

Tara Joseph said companies in Hong Kong are caught in the middle of antagonisms between the U.S. and China. Her remarks followed an advisory issued by the U.S. government on Friday warning businesses about risks in the former British colony.

Relations between the U.S. and China have deteriorated amid a trade war and mounting tensions over Chinese moves to curb political dissent in Hong Kong. The Biden administration cited Hong Kong's shifting legal landscape and tightening control by the communist ruled government in Beijing as growing risks.

"The business landscape has certainly become more complex than it used to be, we're definitely in a new normal as far as business goes here," Joseph said.

"What is concerning overall, not just with this advisory, would be a constant tit-for-tat between U.S. and China when it comes to Hong Kong . . . (which) in many ways is caught right in the middle," she said.

The U.S. government advisory said operating in Hong Kong could lead to reputational and legal damage

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and data privacy risks.

Hong Kong authorities slammed it as “unfounded fear-mongering,” accusing the U.S. of hypocrisy and double standards.

Beijing has been walking back freedoms promised for 50 years to Hong Kong when Britain handed the colony over in 1997. The imposition of a sweeping national security law last June has led to the arrests of more than 100 pro-democracy supporters, including Jimmy Lai, whose Apple Daily pro-democracy newspaper was forced to close after authorities arrested at least seven of its staff and froze millions of dollars in assets.

Over the past year, Hong Kong authorities have amended electoral laws, arrested most of the city’s most prominent pro-democracy activists and banned large-scale protests citing public health risks from the pandemic, despite months of few coronavirus infections. Those moves have drawn criticism from the U.S. and other Western governments.

China has hit back, saying Hong Kong matters are part of China’s internal affairs and other governments should not interfere.

The American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong represents U.S. business interests in the city. It has doubled down on that commitment, buying a new office to facilitate its work, the organization said last week.

Joseph said the Biden administration’s advisory might influence the perspectives of U.S. companies not already operating in Hong Kong. But the city remains an important hub for doing business with mainland China.

Hong Kong has a separate customs territory and ostensibly an independent judicial system, though the recent trend to designate many issues as falling under the National Security Law has experts worried that the city’s famed “rule of law” is being undermined.

“Right now, rule of law is what makes businesses really tick here in an international environment. Commercial law at this point seems very sound and that’s very important to the business community,” said Joseph.

“But any signs of that being unwound or any real changes taking place there could cause a lot of concern,” she said.

Joseph said she hoped Hong Kong would manage to maintain those global standards.

“So anything that takes away from that can make it harder for Hong Kong to maintain its role, but we hope that there will be an increased understanding and a recognition that it’s a win-win for people to maintain their businesses here and for Hong Kong to maintain its position as a gateway,” she said.

Bangladesh lifts lockdown to celebrate, exasperating experts

JULHAS ALAM Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Waiting among hundreds of fellow travelers to catch a ferry out of Bangladesh’s capital, unemployed construction worker Mohammed Nijam knew he was risking catching the coronavirus, but he felt it was even riskier to stay in Dhaka with another lockdown looming.

“I have to pay rent every month even though I have no work,” he said, adding that his landlord had been bothering him for money even as he was struggling just to feed himself. “I’d rather go to my village home and lead life as God lets me.”

Nijam is among the tens of millions of Bangladeshis shopping and traveling this week during a controversial eight-day pause in the country’s strict coronavirus lockdown that the government is allowing for the Islamic festival Eid al-Adha. The suspension has been panned by health experts who warn it could exacerbate an ongoing surge fueled by the highly contagious delta variant, which was first detected in neighboring India.

“Already there is a scarcity of beds, ICUs, while our health care providers are exhausted,” said said Be-Nazir Ahmed, a public health expert and former chief of the government’s Health Directorate. “So if the situation worsens and more patients come to hospitals, it will be near impossible to deal with the crisis.”

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With the spread of the virus rampant, most everything in Bangladesh was ordered shut on July 1, from markets to mass transportation. Soldiers and border guards patrolled the streets and thousands were arrested and sent to jail for violating the lockdown.

Yet even with the new restrictions, virus deaths still hovered around 200 each day and daily infections were still around 11,000, both thought to be undercounts. On Sunday, 225 deaths and 11,758 infections were reported.

Despite the warnings from experts — and with just over 4 million of the country's 160 million people fully vaccinated — the government announced that from July 15-23, all restrictions would be lifted and everything would be reopened so people could celebrate the festival, which is normally a boon to the economy.

"But, in all situations people must stay alert, use face masks and strictly follow health instructions," a government policy statement said.

Government officials have not responded to criticism of the move. An official with the Ministry of Public Administration, which issued the order pausing the lockdown, referred The Associated Press to the policy statement when asked for comment. Calls and emails to a spokesperson with the Health Ministry were not returned.

A junior minister from the Ministry of Public Administration, Farhad Hossain, told local media on Saturday that the lockdown needed to be eased as a lot of business revolves around the festival.

The result in the capital has been crowds of people jamming into malls and markets to do their holiday shopping and others thronging ports and bus stations as they try to make their way to their rural hometowns.

During the last major Islamic festival in May, an estimated 10 million of Dhaka's 20 million residents left to celebrate with their families. A similar number could travel this week, especially since many like Nijam, the construction worker, may be looking to wait out the next lockdown in their villages.

Among the huge crowd of people shopping at Dhaka's New Market, was Shah Alam, a dental technician.

"As the government has relaxed the situation for a few days, we are coming to markets to buy necessary goods," Alam said. "We are trying to follow the health safety guidelines."

Ahmed, the health expert, said he sees the main risks of suspending the lockdown as people from the city spreading the virus to their villages and people spreading the virus while they pack into markets for their shopping, especially cattle markets where millions of people will buy animals to sacrifice for Eid al-Adha.

"Maybe hundreds of thousands of cattle markets will be arranged throughout the country starting from remote village up to city, and the cattle sellers and others engaged in the business are mainly coming from rural areas, and possibly they will bring virus with them," he said.

According to his estimates, 30 million to 40 million people will gather for prayers in mosques or open fields across the country for the festival on Wednesday.

"The Eid congregations are going to be a superspreading event," he said.

He said the month after the festival will be a critical time for a country that has already tallied nearly 1.1 million infections and nearly 18,000 deaths from the pandemic.

"We may not actually avoid a catastrophic situation," he said.

Japan girds for a surreal Olympics, and questions are plenty

By FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — After a yearlong delay and months of hand-wringing that rippled across a pandemic-inflicted world, a Summer Games unlike any other is at hand. It's an Olympics, sure, but also, in a very real way, something quite different.

No foreign fans. No local attendance in Tokyo-area venues. A reluctant populace navigating a surge of virus cases amid a still-limited vaccination campaign. Athletes and their entourages confined to a quasi-bubble, under threat of deportation. Government minders and monitoring apps trying — in theory, at least — to track visitors' every move. Alcohol curtailed or banned. Cultural exchanges, the kind that power the on-the-ground energy of most Games, completely absent.

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And running like an electric current through it all: the inescapable knowledge of the suffering and sense of displacement that COVID-19 has ushered in, both here and around the world.

All signs point to an utterly surreal and atomized Games, one that will divide Japan into two worlds during the month of Olympics and Paralympics competition.

On one side, most of Japan's largely unvaccinated, increasingly resentful populace will continue soldiering on through the worst pandemic to hit the globe in a century, almost entirely separated from the spectacle of the Tokyo Games aside from what they see on TV. Illness and recovery, work and play, both curtailed by strict virus restrictions: Life, such as it is, will go on here.

Meanwhile, in massive (and massively expensive) locked-down stadiums, vaccinated super-athletes, and the legions of reporters, IOC officials, volunteers and handlers that make the Games go, will do their best to concentrate on sports served up to a rapt and remote audience of billions.

Since the pandemic canceled the originally scheduled version in 2020, the Japanese media have been obsessed with the Games. Will they really happen? If so, what will they look like? And the endlessly fascinating — shocking, really, to many here — prospect of staging an Olympics during what can seem like a slow-motion national disaster has permeated the society nearly as thoroughly as the virus.

"The mindset that the Olympics can be pushed through by force and that everyone should obey the order has invited this mess," the Asahi newspaper said in a recent editorial. IOC and Japanese officials "should learn that their absurdity has deepened the public distrust in the Olympics."

Of course, it's too early to predict what, exactly, will happen when these cross-currents converge during the Games, as about 15,000 athletes and, by some estimates, nearly 70,000 officials, media and other participants insert themselves into the flow of Tokyo life in sequestered and limited, yet ubiquitous, ways.

Will the normally hospitable Japanese people warm to the visitors or become increasingly infuriated as they watch fully vaccinated guests enjoy freedoms they haven't experienced since early 2020? Will the Olympians and others play by the rules meant to protect the country they're visiting? Will they bring in variants that will spread through Japan? Will the effort to vanquish the coronavirus be impeded?

One thing seems certain: These games will have far less of what the world has come to expect from the Olympics, with its attractive mixture of human competition at the highest level amid celebrations and cultural exchanges on the sidelines by fans, athletes and local people.

Usually, the Olympics are a vibrant time — a two-week party for a host city eager to show the world its charms. They teem with tourists and all the fun that an exotic locale and interesting visitors can bring. This go-round, though, will be strictly choreographed for TV, with the skeptical people of Japan largely isolated as yet another state of emergency places more constraints on their daily lives.

The story that foreign visitors focus on for these Games will also be very different from the reality on the nation's streets.

Barring catastrophe, the IOC, local newspapers (many of which are also sponsors), Japanese TV, and rights holders like NBC will likely be unified in their message: Just getting through will be cast as a triumph.

Not many visiting journalists, however, will linger in ICUs or chase down interviews with angry residents who feel these Games were hoisted onto the nation so that the IOC could collect its billions in TV money.

More likely, there will be plenty of made-for-TV images of a tour-book version of Japan, one that mixes shots of ancient history, tradition and natural beauty with a high-tech, futuristic sensibility: Think of a sleek, silver bullet train, for instance, streaking past a snow-capped Mount Fuji. A reality, in other words, riddled with easy-to-digest clichés and predictable establishing shots.

As Tokyo grapples in coming weeks with the intrinsic oddness of these pandemic Olympics, the disconnect between sports and sickness, rhetoric and reality, visitor and local will be hard to miss for many here.

Just how a reluctant Japan will weather a high-risk experiment that might come to define the coronavirus pandemic in future years, however, must wait until the visitors pack up and go home. Only then will the true price that the host nation must pay for these Surreal Games come into focus.

Multiple people shot in series of attacks in Tucson, Arizona

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TUCSON, Ariz. (AP) — A series of attacks Sunday afternoon in Arizona have ended with five people shot, including one fatality, and two or three children missing, Tucson police said. The suspect in the attacks was critically wounded by an officer.

A 35-year-old man is accused of opening fire on an ambulance crew around 3:45 p.m. Sunday, Tucson police Chief Chris Magnus told news outlets. The driver of the ambulance, a 20-year-old man, was shot in the head, and a paramedic in the passengers seat, a 21-year-old woman, was shot in the chest and arm. The man was in critical condition and the woman was stable.

Then, the suspect is accused of driving up to the scene of a nearby house fire and shooting at firefighters and neighbors trying to douse the flames, the chief said. One neighbor was shot in the head and died. A firefighter was shot in the arm, and another bullet grazed another neighbor's head.

A "badly burned" body was found inside the home that was on fire, and "two or three" children who lived there are missing, Magnus said. Officials were working to determine the location of the children.

A police officer responding to the scene encountered the suspect a couple blocks away, the chief said. Police said the suspect rammed his SUV into the officer's vehicle and opened fire. The officer returned fire and shot the suspect, critically wounding him, the chief said. The officer was not injured.

"This is a highly tragic, really horrific incident, with many unknowns," Magnus said.

The investigation was ongoing. It was unclear what prompted the attacks.

Biden hosts Jordan's king amid tough choices in Mideast

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is set to host King Abdullah II of Jordan during one of the most difficult moments of the Jordanian leader's 22-year rule and at a pivotal time in the Middle East for Biden.

Abdullah arrives Monday afternoon at the White House. Last week a Jordanian state security court sentenced two former officials to serve 15 years in prison over an alleged plot against the king uncovered earlier this year that involved Abdullah's half-brother.

Meanwhile, Biden, who has put much of his foreign policy focus on China and Russia in the early going, faces some difficult issues in the Middle East. He is dealing with stepped-up attacks against U.S. troops in Iraq and Syria by Iranian-backed militias at the same moment that his administration is trying to nudge Iran back to the negotiating table to revive the nuclear agreement that Donald Trump abandoned during his presidency.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the meeting "will be an opportunity to discuss the many challenges facing the Middle East and showcase Jordan's leadership role in promoting peace and stability in the region."

Abdullah had a difficult relationship with Trump, who he saw as undercutting a peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians with his 2017 declaration of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. He also chaffed at the Trump administration's pursuit of what officials called the Abraham Accords — deals with Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan and Morocco that normalized relations with Israel but left out the Palestinians.

Biden has no plans to reverse U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as the capital, and his administration has even offered praise for the Trump-brokered accords — a rare instance of the Democratic administration speaking positively of the former administration's policy-making.

Biden officials plan to stress to Abdullah that the accords are not an "end run" on finding the way to a peace deal that includes a Palestinian state, according to a senior administration official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The two leaders are expected to discuss the situation in Syria — more than 1 million Syrian refugees have fled the war-ravaged nation for Jordan — and a wobbly security situation in Iraq, the official said. At least eight drone attacks have targeted the U.S. military presence in Iraq since Biden took office in January, as well as 17 rocket attacks.

Abdullah is the first Arab world leader to meet face-to-face with Biden. The president is set to host Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi at the White House next week, and Biden has invited Israel's new prime

minister, Naftali Bennett, to visit later this summer.

Abdullah is also set to have a working breakfast Monday with Vice President Kamala Harris and to meet Tuesday with Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The Oval Office meeting with Biden is also a chance for the king to spotlight his closeness to Biden following the attempted coup.

Bassem Awadallah, who has U.S. citizenship and once served as a top aide to King Abdullah II, and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, a member of the royal family, were found guilty of sedition and incitement charges. Both men denied the charges and Awadallah's U.S. lawyer said his client alleged he was tortured in Jordanian detention and fears for his life.

They are alleged to have conspired with Prince Hamzah, the king's half-brother. Biden, who has known Abdullah for years, was quick to publicly express "strong U.S. support for Jordan" and praise the king's leadership after details of the coup attempt were unveiled in April.

Queen Rania and Crown Prince Hussein are expected to join Abdullah for the White House visit. First lady Jill Biden is to host the queen for tea at the White House.

Man faces 1st sentencing for felony in riot at US Capitol

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — A Florida man who breached the U.S. Senate chamber carrying a Trump campaign flag is scheduled to become the first Jan. 6 rioter sentenced for a felony, in a hearing that will help set a benchmark for punishment in similar cases.

Prosecutors want Paul Allard Hodgkins to serve 18 months behind bars, saying in a recent filing that he, "like each rioter, contributed to the collective threat to democracy" by forcing lawmakers to temporarily abandon their certification of Joe Biden's election victory and to scramble for shelter from incoming mobs.

Video footage shows Hodgkins, 38, wearing a Trump 2020 T-shirt, the flag flung over his shoulder and eye goggles around his neck inside the Senate. He took a selfie with a self-described shaman in a horned helmet and other rioters on the dais behind him.

His sentencing Monday in Washington could set the bar for punishments of hundreds of other defendants as they decide whether to accept plea deals or go to trial. Hodgkins and others are accused of serious crimes but were not indicted, as other were, for roles in larger conspiracies.

A lawyer for Hodgkins, who pleaded guilty last month to one count of obstructing an official proceeding, asked U.S. District Judge Randolph Moss not to impose a prison sentence, saying the shame that will attach to Hodgkins for the rest of his life should be factored in as punishment.

"Whatever punishment this court may provide will pale in comparison to the scarlet letter Mr. Hodgkins will wear for the rest of his life," Patrick N. Leduc wrote in a recent filing, citing a Nathaniel Hawthorne novel in which a woman accused of adultery is forced to wear a letter "A."

The filing argues that Hodgkins' actions weren't markedly different from those of Anna Morgan Lloyd — other than Hodgkins stepping onto the Senate floor. The 49-year-old from Indiana was the first of roughly 500 arrested to be sentenced. She pleaded guilty to misdemeanor disorderly conduct and last month was sentenced to three years of probation.

Hodgkins was never accused of assaulting anyone or damaging property. And prosecutors said he deserves some leniency for taking responsibility almost immediately and pleading guilty to the obstruction charge, which carries a maximum 20-years prison sentence.

But they also noted how he boarded a bus in his hometown of Tampa bound for a Jan. 6 Trump rally carrying rope, protective goggles and latex gloves in a backpack — saying that demonstrated he came to Washington prepared for violence.

On the day, he walked through grounds already littered with smashed police barriers and broken windows, evening passing police officers and others injured as the crowd surged toward the Capitol, prosecutors said.

"Time and time again, rather than turn around and retreat, Hodgkins pressed forward," the government filing said.

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Leduc described his client as an otherwise law-abiding American who, despite living in a poorer part of Tampa, regularly volunteered at a food bank. He noted that Hodgkins had been an Eagle Scout.

His actions on Jan. 6 "is the story of a man who for just one hour on one day lost his bearings ... who made a fateful decision to follow the crowd," the attorney said.

Leduc's 33-page presentencing filing devotes several pages to the Civil War, highlighting Abraham Lincoln's calls for reconciliation weeks before his assassination.

"The court has a chance to emulate Lincoln," he wrote.

Texas Democrats see walkout as the way out of party slump

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Jasmine Crockett, a Black civil rights lawyer and one of the youngest lawmakers in Texas, was just a few months into her first term in the Legislature when Republicans were on the cusp of passing new limits on when and how Texans could vote.

Like other Democrats, she was adamantly opposed to the bill. But when they discussed using extraordinary tactics to try to block it — including a walkout — she sensed hesitancy from older, veteran members who are more accustomed to being the minority party in the state House of Representatives.

"I don't understand. Why are we sitting here?" Crockett, 40, recalled of the frustration among her younger colleagues. "We're asking legitimate questions, like, 'Can't we leave? What is the problem?'"

When Texas Democrats bolted for Washington in a dramatic gambit to block the bill, it was a significant strategic victory for Crockett and a group of newer Texas lawmakers, including Black and Latino members, whose instincts are more inclined to confrontational politics. If their long-suffering party is to find a way out of the wilderness in Texas, Democrats need to sharpen their message and their elbows, they argue.

"The demographics are there for someone to win Texas right now. I don't think it can be someone who is completely measured. They have to be loud and outspoken," said Crockett, who is the only first-term Black legislator in a state Capitol that still is mostly older and white.

As Texas Democrats enter the second week of their holdout on Monday, they are continuing their media blitz with a town hall on cable news and meetings with members of Congress. To run out the clock on the GOP's sweeping elections bill back home, Democrats must stay out of Texas for 19 more days, at which point Republican Gov. Greg Abbott says he will immediately call another special session to try for a third time to pass the measure.

Nationwide, younger progressives elected to office are pushing a more aggressive strategy within the Democratic Party, most notably in their calls to rewrite Senate rules and do away with the filibuster — it stands in the way of federal voting rights legislation that Texas Democrats say is their best hope of blunting new GOP restrictions back home. A similar dynamic spurred the first dramatic walkout in May, though Texas Democrats remain more unified.

Still, they acknowledge wanting their party to take a harder edge as the GOP implements a far-reaching conservative agenda after President Donald Trump lost his bid for reelection in November.

"They tend to be a little more combative," said Rice University professor Mark Jones, a political scientist who has scored Texas lawmakers' partisanship since 2009. "The older style would have been to have worked this out behind the scenes. The younger style is more to make it public and make it more of a protest movement."

Jones is skeptical that it helps Democrats' quest to flip America's biggest red state in the long run.

"It's inextricably linked Texas Democrats to national Democrats, who are quite unpopular in Texas," he said.

The demographics of the Texas Legislature haven't much changed with the arrival of younger Democrats. White candidates in 2018 flipped most of the dozen, mainly suburban seats Democrats picked up in the House, where Republicans have an 83-67 majority.

The scramble to leave Austin under the threat of arrest came as Democrats remain stumped by a riddle they have not cracked in 27 years: how to win a statewide race in Texas. Even now, less than a year be-

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fore the 2022 primary elections, Democrats still have no candidate for governor. They are waiting for an answer from former congressman Beto O'Rourke, but if he doesn't run, there is but one other prominent figure flirting with a challenge to Abbott — actor Matthew McConaughey. It's unclear what, if any, party McConaughey would run under.

In Texas, Democrats are fond of looking to Georgia, where Black leaders and progressives mobilized voters and helped flip one of America's most reliably red states in November. But Texas Democrats also have a poor track record of prediction, seldom more glaring than last year when massive expectations foundered, including a failure to pick up additional statehouse seats that would have bolstered their chances of stopping or weakening a voting bill.

Instead, the results emboldened Texas Republicans, who came away seeing new opportunity with Latinos. Of the Texas Democrats who stayed behind, several are from districts on the U.S.-Mexico border.

"I would say we are at Georgia five years ago, Arizona five years ago," said Texas state Rep. James Talarico, 32, who is the youngest House Democrat. "It was young people and young leaders, in particular, that led those states out of the political wilderness. And I think this quorum break perfectly encapsulates this new, fighting spirit."

Republicans call it a fight that Democrats will inevitably lose.

"For many years there was a distinction, I think, between Texas government and D.C.," Republican state Rep. Mayes Middleton said. "And unfortunately ... this younger side of the caucus is pulling the Texas Legislature more towards the direction of D.C. where you have this division."

The GOP's voting bill in Texas would ban 24-hour polling places, prohibit ballot drop boxes and empower partisan poll watchers, moves that Democrats say are designed to suppress and intimidate voters. Republicans are continuing to show up at the state Capitol, even though they can't pass any laws, calling the bills safeguards that have nothing to do with Trump's loss to Democrat Joe Biden last year.

But as recently as last week, state Sen. Larry Taylor, the Senate GOP chair, would not acknowledge that Biden rightfully won the election.

"I don't know that. I hear a lot of discussion about it. There's been no real investigation on that," Taylor said while leading a news conference defending the bill.

Trump has falsely claimed that he was robbed of a second term because of massive voter fraud nationwide. In fact, claims of massive fraud have been refuted by numerous judges, state election officials and even Trump's own administration after the election.

It is those kind of comments that Democrats say justify the extreme measures they are taking to try thwarting the bill. O'Rourke said he has raised more than \$600,000 to keep the absent Democrats afloat. They are set to appear in a town hall on MSNBC on Monday.

Texas state Rep. Jessica Gonzalez, who was voting protection director in Nevada during President Barack Obama's reelection campaign, won her seat in 2018 by challenging a 29-year House incumbent in a primary and itched for harder fights over issues like women's health and LGBT rights. "I was frustrated, you know, that we were getting attacked," said the 40-year-old Gonzalez, who is Latina.

Two years later, she was picked as vice chair of the House Elections Committee.

"They're the ones leading the charge," said Democratic state Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer, who was first elected in 2000. "They deserve a lot of credit."

Number of infected Texas lawmakers who fled state rises to 5

By DOUGLASS K. DANIEL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two more Texas lawmakers who left their state to hobble efforts to pass new voting restrictions have tested positive for the coronavirus, raising to five the number of infected people in the delegation.

State Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer of San Antonio said in a statement Sunday that he had tested positive. "I am quarantining until I test negative, and I am grateful to be only experiencing extremely mild symptoms," he said.

A person familiar with the delegation said the number of infected members had risen to five. The person was not authorized to discuss the matter and requested anonymity.

More than 50 Texas lawmakers traveled to Washington on Monday aboard a private charter flight. A caucus official has said all had been vaccinated. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says "breakthrough" infections — vaccinated people becoming infected — are rare.

After a photo showed them maskless on the plane, Republicans and others criticized the lawmakers for traveling without masks. But federal pandemic guidelines don't require masks to be worn on private aircraft.

Vice President Kamala Harris, who had met last week with members of the Texas delegation, went to the Walter Reed military hospital on Sunday for a routine doctor's appointment, a White House official said. No other information was released, and the White House did not respond to questions about Harris' visit.

After some of the lawmakers tested positive for the virus, Harris' spokesperson said Saturday that Harris and her staff were not at risk of exposure because they were not in close contact with those who tested positive and added that Harris and her staff were fully vaccinated.

The Democrats fled the state to deny the Republican-controlled Legislature the necessary quorum to pass the voting laws.

Padres, Nats recall harrowing scene after shots outside park

By HARVEY VALENTINE Associated Press

When the gunshots started to echo all around Nationals Park, San Diego Padres star shortstop Fernando Tatis Jr. quickly thought about the team's family members and friends in the seats.

Tatis bolted from the bench down the left field line Saturday night, helped open a gate to the stands and began ushering a group back to the dugout for shelter.

"Our family, loved ones, little kids. Feel like somebody needed to go get them," Tatis said Sunday. "I feel like the safest place was the clubhouse and we were trying to get our families into a safe place."

The top half of the sixth inning in the game between the Padres and Washington Nationals had just ended in front of about 33,000 fans when several shots were heard on South Capitol Street, just outside the third-base side of the stadium.

But in the moment, no one knew whether the rapid series of shots was coming from inside the ballpark or beyond.

"It doesn't make the situation better, but someone shooting a firearm in the stadium would have been a completely different situation," longtime Nationals star Ryan Zimmerman said.

The shooting, an exchange of gunfire between people in two cars, left three people injured, according to Ashan Benedict, the Metropolitan Police Department's executive assistant police chief.

A woman who had attended the game was waiting for an Uber outside the park when she was struck by gunfire, according to a police report. She suffered a graze wound to her back, police officials said.

Police said the other two people who walked into a hospital with gunshot wounds were in stable condition.

Padres manager Jayce Tingler was on his way to see plate umpire Jordan Baker about a pitching change in a game San Diego led 8-4 when the shooting erupted.

"He's like, 'Did you hear that?'" Tingler recalled Baker saying. "I'm like, 'yeah, I think so' and it kind of registered what it possibly could have been and obviously it was just a nightmare."

A chaotic scene quickly developed. As the Padres cleared the field, some fans rushed to leave the stadium while others ducked and tried to hide, looking for cover.

"Everybody running. It was crazy. You couldn't figure out what was going on. If it was one or two people," Tatis said. "I was just trying to get to the safest place and get our families."

Tatis and teammates Manny Machado and Wil Myers drew praise for helping guide — and even carry — fans out of harm's way.

"The situation changed immediately," Tatis said. "There's no longer players, fans. I feel like everybody's just people, human beings trying to be secure."

The game was halted then and completed on Sunday, with the Padres finishing off a 10-4 win. Wash-

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ington won 8-7 in the regularly scheduled game.

The games went on without incident, quite a contrast from the previous night.

As the shots rang out, Nationals manager Dave Martinez was making sure his players were safe.

"Then I started worrying about their families and trying to do the best I could to get them down to the players," Martinez said. "And I started worrying about the fans as well."

Seeing the reaction on the third base side of the stadium, fans on the first base side began fleeing their seats as well. Some of them went down to the field.

"There was a bunch of fans, they were in our dugout and I wanted to get them safe as well," Martinez said. "We got them in through the tunnel and got them in safely and tried to keep them safe. For me it was just about protecting our people and doing the best I can to stay calm."

Like Tingle, Martinez got emotional recounting the events.

Minutes after the shots were heard, a message appeared on the Nationals Park scoreboard saying that the incident was outside the park and fans should remain inside. About 10 minutes later, fans were instructed to leave by the center- and right-field gates.

"We started to get word that everything happened right outside the stadium," Tingle said. "That's when we started to feel a little bit better. You never feel great."

In a statement Sunday, Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser and team owner Mark Lerner said police don't think "the Washington Nationals, the ballpark or fans were the target" of the shooting.

"We appreciate the tremendous cooperation of the fans at Saturday night's game who did all that was asked of them under very stressful circumstances, and the police and the fire emergency medical personnel who responded," they said.

The Nationals announced fans holding tickets for Saturday night could redeem them for another game this season.

"Davey Martinez said it best — our fans are our family. We appreciate each and every one of you and we look forward to seeing you back at Nationals Park," the team said.

Zero risk? Virus cases test Olympic organizers' assurances

By STEPHEN WADE, YURI KAGEYAMA and GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Two South African soccer players became the first athletes inside the Olympic Village to test positive for COVID-19, and other cases connected to the Tokyo Games were also confirmed Sunday, highlighting the herculean task organizers face to keep the virus contained while the world's biggest sports event plays out.

The positive tests came as some of the 11,000 athletes and thousands more team officials expected from across the globe began arriving, having traveled through a pandemic to get to Tokyo.

They'll all now live in close quarters in the Olympic Village on Tokyo Bay over the next three weeks.

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said last week there was "zero" risk of athletes passing on the virus to Japanese or other residents of the village. But that bold statement was already being tested.

The Olympics, which were postponed for a year because of the pandemic, are set to officially open Friday and run until Aug. 8.

The two soccer players and a team video analyst who also tested positive had been moved to "the Tokyo 2020 isolation facility," the South African Olympic committee said. The rest of the squad members and officials had also been quarantined.

Those positive tests further stoked local fears, with the South African team scheduled to play against host nation Japan in its first game on Thursday.

There has already been consistent opposition from the Japanese public to holding the Olympics during the pandemic, with fears that it could become a super-spreader event and cause a spike in infections among Japanese people.

Bach and the IOC have insisted it will be safe and have forged ahead against most medical advice. The

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IOC says it sees the Games as a chance to foster international solidarity during difficult times, but the IOC would also lose billions of dollars in broadcast rights if the Games were to be canceled completely.

Also Sunday, Team South Africa confirmed the coach of its rugby sevens team also tested positive at a pre-Olympics training camp in the southern Japanese city of Kagoshima. He was also in isolation there and would miss the entire rugby competition, the team said.

And there were other Olympics-related positive tests. Olympic organizers said that another athlete had tested positive, although they were not residing in the Olympic Village. The athlete was not named and only identified as "non-Japanese."

The first International Olympic Committee official was reported as positive. He recorded a positive test on Saturday when arriving at a Tokyo airport. The IOC confirmed the test and identified him as IOC member Ryu Seung-min of South Korea. He was reportedly being held in isolation, too.

Former distance runner and world championship bronze medalist Tegla Loroupe, the chief of mission of the IOC's Refugee Olympic Team, tested positive for COVID-19 before the team was to depart its Doha, Qatar, training base for Tokyo, two people with knowledge of her condition told the AP. The team delayed its arrival in Tokyo while Loroupe is expected to stay behind, according to the two people, who requested anonymity because they weren't authorized to reveal medical information.

Organizers say that 55 people linked to the Olympics in Japan have reported positive tests since July 1, but that figure does not include athletes or others who may have arrived for training camps but are not yet under the "jurisdiction" of the organizing committee.

The British Olympic Association said six athletes and two staff in the track and field squad are isolating at the team's pre-Olympic base in Yokohama after being deemed close contacts of a person who tested positive following their flight to Japan. U.S. tennis player Coco Gauff didn't travel to Japan after testing positive for the coronavirus.

Tokyo reported 1,008 new COVID-19 cases on Sunday, the 29th straight day that cases were higher than seven days previously. It was also the fifth straight day with more than 1,000 cases. The Olympics will open under a state of emergency in Tokyo and three neighboring prefectures.

No fans, Japanese or foreign, will be allowed at any of the Olympic sports in Tokyo and the three neighboring prefectures. A few outlying venues may allow a small number of local fans, but it has effectively become a TV-only event.

About 200 protesters gathered Sunday outside Shinjuku station in central Tokyo, waving signs that read "No Olympics." It was the latest in a series of small protests against the Games in the last few months.

"This is ignoring human rights and our right to life," protester Karoi Todo told the AP. "Infections are increasing. To do the Olympics is unforgivable."

Japanese and IOC organizers hope stringent testing protocols, where athletes, team officials and others are tested daily, will mitigate the risks posed by the thousands of foreigners arriving at once. Visiting athletes, officials and media will be in a "soft quarantine" situation and restricted to the Olympic venues, the village and designated hotels, and will be kept away from the Japanese general public. The IOC also says more than 80% of the athletes set to compete in Tokyo will be vaccinated against COVID-19.

But, despite the assurances, the positive tests five days out from the opening ceremony showed the regulations aren't — and can't be — foolproof.

The South African team's chief medical officer said every member of the team had two negative tests before traveling to Japan "as per Tokyo 2020 requirements." They also tested negative on arrival in Tokyo, Dr. Phatho Zondi said.

"Team officials and management have followed all relevant Olympic Playbook rules, protocols and procedures throughout the pre-Games and Games arrival routines," the South African Olympic committee said.

Coach Neil Powell and the entire South Africa rugby squad were held at a quarantine facility after arriving in Japan because of a positive COVID test on their flight, Team South Africa said. They were cleared to leave, only for Powell to test positive a few days later.

Powell had been vaccinated against COVID-19 with the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine in South Africa on May 24, team spokesman JJ Harmse told the AP.

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South African Olympic and soccer officials didn't immediately confirm whether the two soccer players and official who tested positive had been vaccinated, although South Africa's Olympic committee said in May it would offer all its Olympic athletes the J&J vaccine.

The Olympics were effectively over before they began for the two soccer players and Powell as they would have to remain in quarantine for 14 days under Japanese regulations.

The only way the soccer players might be able to play is if their team made the semifinals.

Huge Oregon blaze grows as wildfires burn across western US

Associated Press undefined

BLY, Oregon (AP) — The largest wildfire in the U.S. torched more dry forest landscape in Oregon on Sunday, one of dozens of major blazes burning across the West as critically dangerous fire weather loomed in the coming days.

The destructive Bootleg Fire just north of the California border grew to more than 476 square miles (1,210 square kilometers), an area about the size of Los Angeles.

Erratic winds fed the blaze, creating dangerous conditions for firefighters, said John Flannigan, an operations section chief on the 2,000-person force battling the flames.

"Weather is really against us," he said. "It's going to be dry and air is going to be unstable."

Authorities expanded evacuations that now affect some 2,000 residents of a largely rural area of lakes and wildlife refuges. The blaze, which was 22% contained, has burned at least 67 homes and 100 outbuildings while threatening thousands more.

At the other end of the state, a fire in the mountains of northeast Oregon grew to more than 17 square miles (44 square kilometers) by Sunday.

The Elbow Creek Fire that started Thursday has prompted evacuations in several small, remote communities around the Grande Ronde River about 30 miles (50 kilometers) southeast of Walla Walla, Washington. It was 10% contained.

Natural features of the area act like a funnel for wind, feeding the flames and making them unpredictable, officials said.

In California, a growing wildfire south of Lake Tahoe jumped a highway, prompting more evacuation orders, the closure of the Pacific Crest Trail and the cancellation of an extreme bike ride through the Sierra Nevada.

The Tamarack Fire, which was sparked by lightning on July 4, had charred nearly 29 square miles (74 square kilometers) of dry brush and timber as of Sunday morning. The blaze was threatening Markleeville, a small town close to the California-Nevada state line. It has destroyed at least two structures, authorities said.

A notice posted Saturday on the 103-mile (165-kilometer) Death Ride's website said several communities in the area had been evacuated and ordered all bike riders to clear the area. The fire left thousands of bikers and spectators stranded in the small town and racing to get out.

Kelli Pennington and her family were camping near the town Friday so her husband could participate in his ninth ride when they were told to leave. They had been watching smoke develop over the course of the day, but were caught off guard by the fire's quick spread.

"It happened so fast," Pennington said. "We left our tents, hammock and some foods, but we got most of our things, shoved our two kids in the car and left."

About 500 fire personnel were battling the flames Sunday, "focusing on preserving life and property with point protection of structures and putting in containment lines where possible," the U.S. Forest Service said.

Meteorologists predicted critically dangerous fire weather with lightning possible through at least Monday in both California and southern Oregon.

"With the very dry fuels, any thunderstorm has the potential to ignite new fire starts," the National Weather Service in Sacramento, California, said on Twitter.

Extremely dry conditions and heat waves tied to climate change have swept the region, making wildfires

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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.

Firefighters said in July they were facing conditions more typical of late summer or fall.

Northern California's Dixie Fire roared to new life Sunday, prompting new evacuation orders in rural communities near the Feather River Canyon. The wildfire, near the 2018 site of the deadliest U.S. blaze in recent memory, was 15% contained and covered 39 square miles. The fire is northeast of the town of Paradise, California, and survivors of that horrific fire that killed 85 people watched warily as the new blaze burned.

Officials in Montana identified a firefighter who was seriously burned when flames overtook a crew fighting a small blaze there. Dan Steffensen was flown to a Salt Lake City hospital after the winds shifted suddenly on Friday, engulfing his fire engine near the Wyoming border. A second firefighter escaped without injury and called for help.

There were about 70 active large fires and complexes of multiple blazes that have burned nearly 1,659 square miles (4,297 square kilometers) in the U.S., the National Interagency Fire Center said. The U.S. Forest Service said at least 16 major fires were burning in the Pacific Northwest alone.

Flawless finish: Morikawa wins British Open for 2nd major

By STEVE DOUGLAS AP Sports Writer

SANDWICH, England (AP) — Collin Morikawa was making one of the most satisfying walks in golf, down the 18th fairway as a soon-to-be British Open champion, when he looked up at the huge grandstand surrounding the green.

It was filled with spectators, who firstly were applauding and soon giving a standing ovation to a 24-year-old American making a historic start to his major championship career.

So different to 11 months ago, when Morikawa won his first major — the PGA Championship — at an empty venue.

"I hope the thing is off the table," Morikawa said, "that I can play with fans and I can play well on a Sunday."

Fans. No fans. Parkland. Now even links. Morikawa is the real deal, make no mistake.

The mature-beyond-his-years Californian closed with a bogey-free, 4-under 66 at Royal St. George's and won the British Open in his debut Sunday, becoming the first player to capture two different majors on the first attempt.

And this time there was a crowd, at 32,000 the biggest since golf returned following the coronavirus outbreak.

After tapping in for par to win by two shots over Jordan Spieth, he gave a fist pump before applauding the spectators.

Before long, he was being handed the claret jug that so many go their entire career without winning. He gazed adoringly at it, then thrust it into the air and gave it a kiss.

"Those are the moments, the few seconds that you embrace so much," he said. "And you look around, every seat is packed. Everywhere is packed with people."

They were seeing a young player already halfway to the career Grand Slam after eight starts, the first since Bobby Jones in 1926 to win two majors in so few appearances. He follows Gene Sarazen, Jones, Jack Nicklaus, Seve Ballesteros, Tiger Woods, Rory McIlroy and Spieth in winning multiple majors before turning 25.

His total of 15-under 265 was a 72-hole record in 15 British Opens at Royal St. George's. In 13 of them, the winning score has been 5 under or lower.

"When you make history," he said, "it's hard to grasp, it's hard to really take it in ... At 24 years old, it's so hard to look back at the two short years that I have been a pro and see what I've done because I want more."

He did it with style amid immaculate weather on the links off Sandwich Bay, flushing shots with his irons and getting up-and-down on the rare occasions he found trouble. He called his putting display one of the best of his short career, turning a statistical weakness into a strength.

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Starting the final round one shot behind Louis Oosthuizen, Morikawa was tied for the lead after four holes and then made three straight birdies on Nos. 7-9 to overtake the South African, who hadn't trailed since the 12th hole of his second round.

Morikawa made key par saves — pumping his fist both times — at Nos. 10 and 15, between which he rolled a birdie putt up and over a ridge and into the cup on the 14th to build a two-stroke lead he never lost. Spieth parred his final four holes and also shot 66.

By making par at the last after another perfect drive, Morikawa played his final 31 holes without a bogey on a course that has confounded many great players because of its quirky bounces and undulating fairways.

All the more remarkable was that this was his first major test on a seaside links. Morikawa had little experience with this style of golf before playing the Scottish Open last week at The Renaissance Club, which is not a traditional links but featured the kind of tight lies and rolling terrain that prepared him for it. He even had three new irons in his bag this week.

He completed a feat achieved by Ben Curtis on the same course in 2003, winning golf's oldest championship in his links debut.

For Oosthuizen, who was seeking a wire-to-wire win and a second claret jug — he had a runaway victory at St. Andrews in 2010 — it was another near miss in a career full of them. He was runner-up this year at the PGA Championship and the U.S. Open, two of his six second-place finishes at majors.

This time Oosthuizen tied for third with U.S. Open champion Jon Rahm (66) after closing with a 71 — his first round not in the 60s this week. He never recovered from losing his lead with an ugly bogey on the par-5 seventh hole. He caught way too much ball out of the greenside bunker with his third shot, which bounced onto the putting surface and landed in a bunker on the other side.

Morikawa made a routine birdie on the hole to move two ahead of Oosthuizen. Spieth had made eagle at No. 7 a few minutes earlier.

"Well I do know one thing, the fans at the Open are second (or third) to none," Oosthuizen said on Twitter, having declined to talk to reporters. "Thank you for the incredible support this week, and congrats to Collin Morikawa who played with class and grit today."

Spieth had his closest call in a major since winning the British Open in 2017 at Royal Birkdale. Missing an 8-foot par putt at No. 4 and hitting his tee shot into a bunker at No. 6 led to dropped shots. He made up for those with his eagle and played the final 10 holes in 4 under.

"I did everything I could in the past few hours to win this championship," Spieth said.

It was his bogey-bogey finish on Saturday — he missed a 2-foot par putt on the 18th — that Spieth mostly regretted.

"Had I finished par-par, I'd have been in the final group," he said. "And if you're in the final group, you feel like you have control."

Los Angeles hopes new mask mandate will reverse virus spike

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Los Angeles County residents are again required to wear masks indoors regardless of their vaccination status — a new mandate starting this weekend that health officials hope will reverse the latest spikes in coronavirus cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

The rule went into effect late Saturday for the nation's largest county, home to 11 million people, where a sharp increase in COVID-19 cases is led by the highly transmissible delta variant.

The vast majority of new cases are among unvaccinated people, LA County Supervisor Hilda Solis said Sunday.

"I'm not pleased that we have to go back to using the masks in this matter but, nonetheless, it's going to save lives. And right now that to me is what's most important," Solis said on ABC's "This Week."

California has seen a steady rise in virus cases since the state fully reopened its economy on June 15 and did away with capacity limits and social distancing.

San Francisco Bay Area health officials last week urged residents to again wear masks inside public buildings, offices or businesses regardless of whether they are vaccinated. The counties of San Francisco, Santa Clara, San Mateo, Marin, Alameda, Contra Costa and Sonoma and the city of Berkeley stopped short

of making face coverings a requirement.

Other counties, including Sacramento and Yolo, are also strongly urging people to wear masks indoors but not requiring it.

Los Angeles County's mask rule, announced Thursday, follows a winter where the region experienced a massive surge in infections and deaths, with hospitals overloaded with COVID-19 patients and ambulances idling outside, waiting for beds to open.

Los Angeles County reported a caseload of 1,635 on Sunday — the 10th straight day with more than a thousand new cases. On June 15, when the state reopened, county health officials reported just 210 new cases.

More than 525 people were hospitalized with COVID-19 in LA County on Saturday, the highest number since April 14. There were four new virus-related deaths reported Sunday.

"The level of COVID-19 transmission we are currently experiencing is now leading to significant increases in serious illness and hospitalizations, and requires us to take immediate action to prevent erosion of our recovery efforts," Barbara Ferrer, the county's public health director, said in a statement.

LA County Supervisor Kathryn Barger came out in opposition to the new mask mandate, saying by deviating from the state rules "we create confusion and disagreement at the local level, which hinders public trust."

Sheriff Alex Villanueva said Friday his deputies will not actively enforce the mandate, saying requiring vaccinated people to wear masks "is not backed by science and contradicts the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines."

Solis said that the LA County mask rule is "not punishment, it's prevention." But some vaccinated residents said it felt like they were being penalized despite doing the right thing.

"It feels like the the burden of the unvaccinated is being placed on the vaccinated," Glendale resident Justin Sevakis told ABC7. "It's like there are people that don't have common sense and so therefore all of us have to pay for it. And it sucks. It feels like, you know, the teacher is punishing the whole class."

Senator: Bipartisan infrastructure bill loses IRS provision

WASHINGTON (AP) — A proposal to strengthen IRS enforcement to crack down on tax scofflaws and help fund a nearly \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure spending bill is officially off the table, Republican Sen. Rob Portman said Sunday.

Portman, who is involved in negotiating the bill, cited "pushback" from fellow Republican lawmakers who dislike the idea of expanding the reach of the IRS, which they have accused over the years of unfairly targeting conservatives. He said another reason the IRS provision was shelved is that Democrats are including a more robust enforcement plan in a separate \$3.5 trillion infrastructure bill that they intend to pass through the Senate using special budget rules and without Republican votes.

"That created quite a problem because the general agreement is that this is the bipartisan, negotiated infrastructure package and that we will stick with that," the Ohio senator said on CNN's "State of the Union."

Portman's announcement that the IRS provision had been removed underscores the difficulty facing the bipartisan group of Republican and Democratic senators in finding mutually agreeable ways to pay for billions of dollars of new spending their White House-backed plan calls for.

Portman said meetings were planned Sunday to discuss alternatives to the IRS provision, which had been estimated to bring in an estimated \$100 billion over 10 years. The proposal to go after taxpayers who skip out on income taxes initially had potential bipartisan appeal, but outside groups came forward to lambaste it as a way to enable the IRS to snoop around Americans' personal finances.

IRS Commissioner Charles Rettig said at a congressional hearing in April that the national gap between federal taxes owed and actually collected is about \$1 trillion annually, more than double what official government estimates have previously indicated.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer is pressuring lawmakers to reach agreement this week on the pair of massive domestic spending measures, signaling Democrats' desire to push ahead aggressively on

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President Joe Biden's multitrillion-dollar agenda.

Schumer, D-N.Y., said last week that he is scheduling a procedural vote for Wednesday to begin debate on the still-evolving bipartisan infrastructure bill. Senators from both parties, bargaining for weeks, have struggled to reach final agreement on a \$1 trillion package of highway, water systems and other public works projects.

Portman on Sunday called that an "arbitrary deadline" and one that was premature given that senators haven't even agreed on details of the "complex" bill yet.

"We want to get it right. It's not too much to ask that we have time to do that," Portman said. "We ought not to have an arbitrary deadline forcing this process."

Schumer said he also wanted Democratic senators to reach agreement among themselves by Wednesday on the specific details of a separate 10-year budget blueprint that envisions \$3.5 trillion in spending for climate change, education, an expansion of Medicare and more.

Vaccine inequity: Inside the cutthroat race to secure doses

By LORI HINNANT, MARIA CHENG and ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — No one disputes that the world is unfair. But no one expected a vaccine gap between the global rich and poor that was this bad, this far into the pandemic.

Inequity is everywhere: Inoculations go begging in the United States while Haiti, a short plane ride away, received its first delivery July 15 after months of promises — 500,000 doses for a population over 11 million. Canada has procured more than 10 doses for every resident; Sierra Leone's vaccination rate just cracked 1% on June 20.

It's like a famine in which "the richest guys grab the baker," said Strive Masiyiwa, the African Union's envoy for vaccine acquisition.

In fact, European and American officials deeply involved in bankrolling and distributing the vaccines against coronavirus have told The Associated Press there was no thought of how to handle the situation globally. Instead, they jostled for their own domestic use.

But there are more specific reasons why vaccines have and have not reached the haves and have-nots.

COVID-19 unexpectedly devastated wealthy countries first — and some of them were among the few places that make the vaccines. Export restrictions kept the doses within their borders.

There was a global purchase plan to provide vaccines for poorer countries, but it was so flawed and underfunded that it couldn't compete in the cutthroat competition to buy. Intellectual property rights vied with global public health for priority. Rich countries expanded vaccinations to younger and younger people, ignored the repeated pleas of health officials to donate their doses instead and debated booster shots — even as poor countries couldn't vaccinate the most susceptible.

The disparity was in some ways inevitable; wealthy nations expected a return on their investment of taxpayer money. But the scale of the inequity, the stockpiling of unused vaccines, the lack of a viable global plan to solve a global problem has shocked health officials, though it wasn't the first time.

"This was a deliberate global architecture of unfairness," Masiyiwa told a Milken Institute conference.

"We have no access to vaccines either as donations or available for us to purchase. Am I surprised? No, because this is where we were with the HIV pandemic. Eight years after therapeutics were available in the West, we did not receive them and we lost 10 million people."

"It's simple math," he said. "We have no access. We have no vaccine miracle."

The World Health Organization has duly updated its epidemic playbook after every outbreak, most recently with Ebola in mind. Then, as often in the decades before, an emerging illness was largely contained to countries lacking robust public health services, with poor sanitation and crowded living conditions and limited travel connections.

For years, the WHO assessed countries' readiness for a flu pandemic: The United States, European countries and even India ranked near the top. The U.S. readiness was 96%, and Britain at 93%.

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On Jan. 30, 2020, WHO declared the coronavirus outbreak in China to be a global emergency. It would be months before the word "pandemic" became official.

But that same day, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovations, or CEPI, was planning for the worst. CEPI announced "a call for proven vaccine technologies applicable for large scale manufacturing," according to minutes from its scientific advisory group. CEPI said it would be critical "to support the strategy for global access" early in the game.

CEPI quickly invested in two promising coronavirus vaccines being developed by Moderna and CureVac. "We said very early on that it would be important to have a platform where all countries could draw vaccines from, where there's accountability and transparency," said Christian Happi, a professor at Nigeria's Redeemer's University and a member of CEPI's scientific advisory committee. "But the whole idea was that we thought rich countries would fund it for the developing world."

Happi said officials never expected the pandemic would strike first and hardest in Europe and the U.S. Or that their assessment of preparedness in the world's most advanced economies would prove horrifically optimistic.

Global health experts would soon come to realize that rich countries "could sign a piece of paper saying they believe in equity, but as soon as the chips are down, they will do whatever they want," he said.

On March 16, five days after WHO first described COVID-19 as a "pandemic," the novel mRNA vaccine developed by Moderna was injected into a trial participant for the first time.

By then, the disease was tearing through the elderly populations of Europe and the United States. Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech were the first companies to come out with an mRNA vaccine, devising methods of mass production almost on the fly. Scientists at Britain's Oxford University also came up with a vaccine with a more traditional platform, and Bill Gates brokered a deal for them to partner with AstraZeneca, a pharmaceutical company with global reach but no experience in vaccine production.

On April 30, the deal was confirmed: AstraZeneca took sole responsibility for the global production and distribution of the Oxford vaccine and pledged to sell it for "a few dollars a dose." Over the next few weeks, the U.S. and Britain secured agreements totaling 400 million doses from AstraZeneca.

The race to make and secure vaccines was on, and the United States and Britain were leagues in front of the rest of the world — a lead they wouldn't lose. Still, both countries would see life expectancy decline by at least a year in 2020, the biggest drop since World War II. In the European Union, 22 countries saw their average lifespans cut short, with Italy leading the list.

But as grim as the situation was, all those countries had a major advantage: They were home to the pharmaceutical companies with the most promising vaccine candidates, the world's most advanced production facilities, and the money to fund both.

On May 15, 2020, President Donald Trump announced Operation Warp Speed and promised to deliver vaccines against coronavirus by New Year's. With unparalleled money and ambition behind the project, Warp Speed head Moncef Slaoui was more confident than his counterparts in Europe that a vaccine was in the offing. He signed contracts almost without regard to price or conditions.

"We were frankly focused on getting this as fast as humanly possible. If I had to redo it, I probably should have voiced more of a global dimension," said Slaoui. "The operation had focused, which was frankly also part of its success, on staying out of the politics and making the vaccines."

The idea of including clauses to ensure that vaccines would go to anyone besides Americans wasn't even considered.

At the same time, the U.S. repeatedly invoked the Defense Production Act — 18 times under the Trump Administration and at least once under Biden. The moves barred exports of crucial raw materials as factories were ramping up production of the as-yet-unapproved vaccines — and eventually, of the vaccines themselves.

But it also meant those materials would run low in much of the rest of the world. The U.S. stranglehold would lift only in spring 2021, and only partially.

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Operation Warp Speed supercharged the global race to secure vaccines, but it would still take another two weeks until COVAX — the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility — was formally announced as the entity to ensure equity, with the Serum Institute of India as the core supplier for the developing world.

COVAX had the backing of the World Health Organization, CEPI, vaccines alliance Gavi and the powerful Gates Foundation. What it did not have was cash, and without cash it could secure no contracts.

“Operation Warp Speed signed the first public deals and that started a chain reaction,” said Gian Gandhi, UNICEF’s COVAX coordinator for supply. “It was a like a rush on the banks, but to buy up the expected supply.”

Some involved in the COVAX project flagged India as a potential problem early on, according to minutes of meetings in late spring and early summer of 2020.

India’s government had blocked exports of protective gear, but many global health authorities who hadn’t fully grasped the extent of pandemic nationalism found it unimaginable that the country would block vaccines when the world was counting on them. Also, India had so far been spared the waves of death that were sweeping across Europe and the Americas.

A separate plan put forward by the government of Costa Rica and the World Health Organization to create a technology-sharing platform to expand vaccine production foundered. Not a single company agreed to share its blueprints, even for a fee — and no government pushed them behind the scenes, according to multiple people involved in the project.

On the global scale, the one organization that could have pushed for more technology sharing was the Gates Foundation, whose money to WHO nearly matches that of the U.S. government.

Instead, Bill Gates defended stringent intellectual property rights as the best way to speed innovation. His foundation poured money and influence into the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, which also failed to generate the money or influence needed to ramp up production outside already existing hubs.

In the United States, meanwhile, manufacturing and the trials went on in parallel, which is where taxpayers and the companies took enormous risks that paid off for both.

But in retrospect, Slaoui said, given the sheer amount of taxpayer money involved, each time they signed new contracts the U.S. and other countries could have pushed companies harder to share their knowledge, if only for the duration of the pandemic.

“From a geopolitical standpoint, it’s critical that they do that,” he said.

Nowhere was the situation more dire than Africa. In February, WHO’s African expert in vaccine development, Richard Mihigo, was among many who said the continent’s experience with other pandemics had uniquely prepared it for a complex vaccine deployment.

Five months later, contemplating the plight of a continent that gets 99% of its vaccines from abroad, Mihigo adds a rueful footnote: “One of the lessons we learned from this pandemic is how badly prepared we were in vaccine production in the region and how dependent we were on imports.”

Those imports have only barely begun to materialize — and they are insufficient to meet even the limited goals of the COVAX initiative to vaccinate at least 20% of the population of 92 low- and middle-income countries by the end of this year.

From the start, the coalition of organizations that created COVAX found themselves fighting the last war.

The plan was designed as an international pool to spur demand for vaccines and treatment of diseases with a relatively small global footprint, said Winnie Byanyima, head of UNAIDS.

Something like Ebola. But the coronavirus pandemic looked nothing like an Ebola outbreak.

“That itself was a structural weakness,” she said.

Although the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund had between them set aside billions for vaccinating the developing world, that money was intended to go to countries and was out of bounds for a global vaccine sharing plan like COVAX, said Mike Muldoon, managing director for innovative finance at the Rockefeller Foundation.

Meanwhile, governments competed to secure contracts for vaccines by the hundreds of millions.

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On Dec. 8, Britain became the first country to formally authorize a start to widespread vaccinations, injecting 90-year-old Margaret Keenan with a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Six days later, the United States started its own vaccinations. And on Dec. 26, the EU followed suit. China and Russia had been vaccinating even before releasing data from their homegrown inoculations.

The Western companies with the most promising doses, including Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca, had by then been churning out vials for months before formal approval, based on pledges from the wealthy countries that an enormous market awaited. Those doses were stockpiled in Europe and North America and a small number of countries, like Israel, that paid a premium.

COVAX pleaded for cash to do the same. Instead, it got pledges.

"As time passed and it became clear which vaccine candidates were going to be the leading contenders and which were most likely to succeed, the governments that had resources went and bought the supplies," CEPI chief executive Dr. Richard Hatchett told the AP. "COVAX was not in a position to do that."

Months later, when COVAX finally had the money to sign deals for global supplies, Hatchett acknowledged they were at the end of the line.

The lack of capital available to vaccine makers to boost their capacity outside the small number of existing manufacturing hubs was also "a lost opportunity," Hatchett said.

"We approached the international financing institutions, including the World Bank and the (International Finance Corporation) about making those investments and they were not willing to do that," he said. CEPI ended up investing about \$1.5 billion, far less than what a major financial institution might have been able to commit.

COVAX missed its own goal of beginning vaccinations in poor countries at the same time as rich ones. It finally delivered vaccines on Feb. 24, to Ghana, a load of 600,000 AstraZeneca doses manufactured by the Serum Institute of India and transported by UNICEF planes.

By that date, 27% of the population in Britain had been vaccinated, 13% in the U.S., 5% in Europe — and 0.23% in Africa, in countries that had secured their own bilateral deals after growing impatient with COVAX delays. The rift was growing by millions of doses every day.

And pharmaceutical plants were beginning to crumble under the promises they'd made.

AstraZeneca announced repeated delivery cuts to Europe. Pfizer's production briefly slowed. A fire at a Serum Institute construction site prompted a letter to Brazil warning that "supply to you cannot be guaranteed in the foreseeable months." Moderna supply cuts soon followed to Britain and Canada.

In the United States, officials tossed millions of corrupted doses of vaccine from the Emergent Biosolutions plant in Baltimore after discovering that workers had inadvertently blended ingredients from the AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson vaccines. An untold number of doses were never produced because of new restrictions meant to prevent errors. Many of those vaccines were intended for export.

So COVAX had to hope that the AstraZeneca vaccine being produced in India would come through, because it had secured few of the innovative mRNA doses that are now considered the most effective against the coronavirus variants. The initial refrigeration requirements were daunting, and the price was higher than the traditional vaccine candidates.

The mRNA vaccines are widely considered a scientific and manufacturing triumph — and a risky bet. Never before approved for use against any disease, they are now considered a hugely promising medical innovation and a potential gamechanger against infection.

But by the time it was clear the mRNA doses were a viable alternative, even in poor countries with limited cold chain, the available supply had been snapped up in Europe, the United States and Canada. And India, in the throes of its own COVID-19 surge, diverted its vaccines for its own use.

According to the People's Vaccine Alliance, a grouping of human rights organizations advocating for broader sharing of vaccines and their underlying technology, the coronavirus has created nine new billionaires. The top six are linked to the successful mRNA vaccines.

For Byanyima, of UNAIDS, this is a travesty and a sign that the world has learned little in the decades since the AIDS pandemic was brought under control in the United States, only to kill millions in Africa

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because treatments were unaffordable: "Medicines should be a global public good, not just like a luxury handbag you buy on the market."

COVAX has delivered only 107 million doses, and now is forced to rely upon uncertain donations from countries that may prefer to donate directly to the needy, so they can receive the credit.

A readout from its June board meeting slipped in an acknowledgement that it needed to better interpret and respond to market conditions and "the reality that a higher risk appetite is needed in a pandemic setting."

For the pharmaceutical industry, mRNA is the ultimate confirmation that hard work and risk-taking is rewarded. And those companies keep tight hold on the keys to their successful vaccines.

When Moderna and Pfizer created new production lines, it was in the insular European and American manufacturing networks that had as much stake as anyone in both ensuring that the injections meet the highest standards and keeping promises not to abuse intellectual property.

Many public health officials have pushed for technology transfer during the pandemic. Initially resistant, the Gates Foundation has changed its position in favor of sharing.

Dr. Clemence Auer, the EU's lead negotiator for vaccine contracts last summer, said the question of compelling pharmaceutical companies to suspend their vaccine intellectual property rights to increase the worldwide supply of coronavirus vaccines never even came up.

"We had a mandate to buy vaccines, not to talk about intellectual property," Auer said.

"The global community should have had this discussion back in 2020 but that didn't happen," he said. "Maybe we should have done it last year, but now it's too late. It is spilled milk."

CEPI includes equity clauses in the vaccines that it invests in, among them the successful Moderna candidate, but has yet to invoke them during the pandemic. Some include requirements to make a vaccine available to populations in need at affordable prices, as is the case in CEPI's Moderna contract. But Moderna was first available exclusively in wealthy countries and even now only limited amounts are going outside Europe and the United States.

A separate push to lift intellectual property restrictions on vaccines and medicines has also gone nowhere in the World Trade Organization.

And WHO is reticent to criticize donor nations or the pharmaceutical companies. The U.N. health agency works by consensus and needs them for other aspects of global health — and for its own continued existence. The Biden administration has reversed Trump's decision to defund and leave WHO, but the damage has been done.

"A lot of these multinational organizations, these plans, these coalitions, they don't have teeth to enforce what they think is a fair and equitable way to distribute resources," said Dr. Ingrid Katz, an infectious disease researcher at the Center for Global Health at Massachusetts General Hospital. She said the key question is whether vaccines and essential medications are a commodity or a right.

"If it's going to be a commodity, we're going to keep walking down this road every time we have something like this," she said.

And if it is all going to rely on the generosity of rich countries, a lot of people are going to die. Four million have died already.

In all, at the recent Group of Seven meeting of wealthy nations pledged to donate 850 million doses, compared with the 11 billion that WHO says will be needed to end the pandemic.

A close look at the G-7 promises of donations shows that most aren't expected to be delivered until well into 2022. The Biden administration fell short on its pledge to send 80 million doses abroad by the end of June: By mid-July, at least 44 million doses had been sent, including 2.5 million to Canada, which has already given at least one vaccine dose to more of its population than any other country. Africa has yet to receive its doses from the United States.

Oceans away from the deprivation of the developing world, 7-year-old Russell Bright and his 5-year-old

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brother went to Ochsner Medical Center in New Orleans to get their shots — part of a trial for young children. Maybe they got the vaccine; maybe they got the placebo.

Wearing a Spider-Man mask, Russell said he longs for a vacation trip to the water park and then a return to school without having to wear masks and stay at arms' length from his friends.

"Both me and my wife are already vaccinated," said his father, Adam, "and so the sooner I can get them vaccinated and to feel comfortable being outside, not having to wear a mask, I thought the easiest way to get it is to go through the trial."

Scientists agree that children are at low risk from COVID-19. But that hasn't stopped richer countries from stockpiling precious vaccine supplies to inoculate the young, even as poor countries have few or no shots to give.

A recent meeting of WHO's vaccine allocation group disbanded with nothing accomplished, because there was no vaccine to allocate. "Zero doses of AstraZeneca vaccine, zero doses of Pfizer vaccine, zero doses of J&J vaccine," said Dr. Bruce Aylward, a senior advisor at the organization.

"Every single one of our suppliers is unable to supply during this period because others are making demands on those products, others who are vaccinating very young populations that are not at risk," Aylward said.

Both Trump and Biden administration officials reject the notion that the U.S. or any country would share vaccines until they'd protected their own. And they both note that the U.S. bore the brunt of the pandemic last year, topping the world in confirmed cases and deaths.

"We had a responsibility to what I say, 'put on our own oxygen masks before helping others,'" CDC Director Rachele Walensky said in May.

But a plummeting jet takes all passengers with it, whether or not they are wearing masks. And the failure to provide vaccines across the globe ensures that COVID-19 will continue to spread, and mutate, and sicken, and kill.

"It speaks volumes about where we are as a globe when you have the source of decision-making sitting with very few people who have a lot of wealth and are essentially making life and death decisions for the rest of the globe," Mass General's Katz said. "Every month that we lost put us further and further behind."

With pandemic worsening in US, surgeon general worried

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

The U.S. surgeon general said Sunday that he's concerned about what lies ahead with cases of COVID-19 increasing in every state, millions still unvaccinated and a highly contagious virus variant spreading rapidly.

Noting that nearly all coronavirus deaths now are among the tens of millions of people who haven't received shots, despite widespread vaccine availability, Dr. Vivek Murthy painted an unsettling picture of what the future could hold.

"I am worried about what is to come because we are seeing increasing cases among the unvaccinated in particular. And while, if you are vaccinated, you are very well protected against hospitalization and death, unfortunately that is not true if you are not vaccinated," Murthy said on CNN's "State of the Union."

U.S. cases of COVID-19 last week increased by 17,000 nationwide over a 14-day period for the first time since late fall, and an increase in death historically follows a spike in illness. Much of the worsening problem is being driven by the delta variant first identified in India, that has since hit the United Kingdom and other countries, said Murthy.

While U.S. case numbers and hospitalizations are still far below levels from the worst of the pandemic early this year, Murthy said the worsening situation shows the need to convince more people to get inoculations.

"It is our fastest, most effective way out of this pandemic," he said.

About 186 million Americans have received at least one shot, but another 90 million eligible Americans haven't. Officials are trying to overcome a refusal among some — particularly conservative, rural white people — to get vaccinated, but it's unclear how to do that. So, for the meantime at least, some places have reverted to health precautions that had been cast aside.

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In Las Vegas, some resorts and casinos are again requiring employees to wear masks in response to a recommendation issued by health officials amid rising COVID-19 case rates in Nevada; it ranks fifth among U.S. states for the most new cases per capita over the last two weeks.

Los Angeles County late Saturday reinstated rules requiring everyone to wear masks inside public buildings. Around San Francisco's Bay Area, which has some of the highest vaccination rates in California, health officials have recommended that everyone again wear masks inside public buildings, regardless of their vaccination status.

But in conservative Alabama, where COVID-19 hospitalizations have more than doubled in a month and only about a third of the population is fully vaccinated, officials have refused to reinstitute statewide health rules or use gimmicks such as lotteries to boost immunizations.

"I think the best thing for us to do is just encourage everyone to use their common sense and practice personal responsibility and make themselves and their families safe," Gov. Kay Ivey told reporters last week.

Cases also are on the rise in Springfield, Missouri, where Mayor Ken McClure told CBS-TV's "Face the Nation" that false information about the pandemic was hampering the fight to get people vaccinated.

"I think we are seeing a lot spread through social media as people are talking about fears which they have, health related fears, what it might do to them later on in their lives, what might be contained in the vaccinations," he said.

Murthy, the surgeon general, said "not nearly enough" progress was being made in the fight against misinformation spread through social media about COVID-19 and vaccines. Individuals, not just platforms such as Facebook, need to combat the problem, he said.

"Each of us has a decision that we make every time we post something on social media, and I'm asking people to pause and to see, is a source accurate? Is it coming from a scientifically credible authority? And if it's not, or if you're not sure, don't share," he said.

Wildfires rage in Russia's Siberia, cause airport to close

MOSCOW (AP) — Heavy smoke from raging wildfires covered the Russian city of Yakutsk and 50 other Siberian towns and settlements Sunday, temporarily halting operations at the city's airport.

Russia has been plagued by widespread forest fires, blamed on unusually high temperatures and the neglect of fire safety rules, with the Sakha-Yakutia region in northeastern Siberia being the worst affected.

Local emergency officials said 187 fires raged in the region on Sunday, and the total area engulfed by blazes has grown by 100,000 hectares (about 247,000 acres) in the past 24 hours.

"The situation with wildfires in our republic is very difficult. I repeat that we are experiencing the driest summer in the past 150 years in Yakutia, and the month of June was the hottest on record. This, together with the dry thunderstorms that occur nearly daily in our republic, brought about significant wildfires," Aysen Nikolayev, Yakutia's governor, told reporters.

Smoke from the fires covered 51 towns, settlements and cities in the region, including the capital Yakutsk, forcing authorities to suspend all flights in and out of the city.

"We can't see each other because of the smoke, our eyes are burning and overall the smoke is very dangerous for the health of us villagers," said Vasilii Krivoshapkin, resident of Magaras. "We see on television planes that are dropping water on the burning forest but they aren't sending these planes to help us for some reason. Why is there no help?"

Russia's Emergency Ministry said Sunday it had deployed two amphibious aircraft to Yakutia to help tackle the fires. More than 2,200 people are involved in the firefighting effort.

Rights group in Russia shuts down amid government crackdown

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — A rights group in Russia announced Sunday that it was shutting down, citing fear of prosecution of its members and supporters after Russian authorities blocked its website for allegedly publishing content from an "undesirable" organization.

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The Team 29 association of lawyers and journalists specializing in treason and espionage cases and freedom of information issues said Sunday that Russian authorities accused it of spreading content from a Czech non-governmental organization that had been declared "undesirable" in Russia.

The group's website was blocked Friday, even though it rejected the accusations, and its lawyers said they believed the government's next step could be to prosecute members and supporters.

"In these conditions, continuation of Team 29's activities creates direct and clear threat to the safety of a large number of people, and we can't ignore that risk," the group said, adding that it would take down all of its online content in order to avoid any risks and that its lawyers would continue representing their clients in a personal capacity.

Team 29 shutting down comes as pressure mounts on opposition supporters, independent journalists and human rights activists in Russia ahead of September's parliamentary election. The vote is widely seen as an important part of President Vladimir Putin's efforts to cement his rule ahead of the 2024 presidential election. The 68-year-old Russian leader, who has been in power for more than two decades, pushed through constitutional changes last year that would potentially allow him to hold onto power until 2036.

In recent months, Russian authorities have increased the pressure on independent news media, designating two popular independent outlets, Meduza and VTimes, as "foreign agents" and outlawing the publisher of the Proekt investigative media outlet, while also listing its journalists as "foreign agents." VTimes shut down shortly after that.

Last month, a Moscow court outlawed organizations founded by imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny by labeling them extremist. The ruling barred people associated with Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption and his sprawling regional network from seeking public office. Many of Navalny's allies had planned to run for parliamentary seats in Russia's Sept. 19 election.

Team 29, including its prominent lawyer Ivan Pavlov, was involved in defending Navalny's foundation in court. In April, Russian authorities launched a criminal case against Pavlov, who is also representing a former Russian journalist accused of treason in a high-profile case, accusing him of disclosing information related to a police investigation.

Haiti faces uncertain future as mourning first lady returns

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Haiti's political future on Sunday grew murkier after the surprise return of first lady Martine Moïse, who was released from a hospital in Miami where she was treated for injuries following an attack in which the president was assassinated.

Martine Moïse did not make any public statements after she descended a private jet wearing a black dress, a black bulletproof vest, a black face mask and her right arm in a black sling as she mourned for President Jovenel Moïse, who was killed July 7 at their private home.

Some experts — like many in this country of more than 11 million people — were surprised at how quickly she reappeared in Haiti and questioned whether she plans to become involved in the country's politics.

"The fact that she returned could suggest she intends to play some role," said Laurent Dubois, a Haiti expert and Duke University professor. "She may intervene in one way or another."

Martine Moïse arrived just hours after a prominent group of international diplomats issued a statement that appeared to shun interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph, the man currently running the country with the backing of police and the military.

Joseph's name was never mentioned in the statement made by the Core Group, composed of ambassadors from Germany, Brazil, Canada, Spain, the U.S., France, the European Union and representatives from the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

The group called for the creation of "a consensual and inclusive government," adding, "To this end, it strongly encourages the designated Prime Minister Ariel Henry to continue the mission entrusted to him to form such a government."

Henry was designated prime minister a day before Jovenel Moïse was killed. He did not respond to

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requests for comment.

The U.N., OAS and U.S. State Department did not offer further explanation when contacted.

Given the current state of Haitian politics, Dubois said he believes the arrival of Martine Moïse could have an impact.

"She's obviously in a position to play a role ... given how wide open things are," he said, adding that the Core Group's statement is striking because it makes no reference to Joseph. "One has to wonder whether the developments in the investigation have anything to do with this. They're all these puzzle pieces that are just changing moment to moment. Right now it seems very hard to figure out how to put these together."

Authorities in Haiti and Colombia say at least 18 suspects directly linked to the killing have been arrested, the majority of them former Colombian soldiers. At least three suspects were killed and police say they are looking for numerous others. Colombian officials have said that the majority of former soldiers were duped and did not know of the assassination plot.

Police in Haiti on Sunday identified another suspect in the case: Pierre Joseph Ashkard. Online records show he is a Canadian-based businessman who runs a medical business in Texas with Christian Emmanuel Sanon, a Haitian physician and pastor whom local authorities recently arrested and consider a key suspect.

A day after the killing, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price had said Joseph was the incumbent in the position and was serving as acting prime minister before the assassination: "We continue to work with Claude Joseph as such," he said.

On July 11, a delegation of representatives from various U.S. agencies traveled to Haiti to review critical infrastructure, talk with Haitian National Police and meet with Joseph, Henry and Haitian Senate President Joseph Lambert in a joint meeting.

The deepening political turmoil has prompted dozens of Haitians to visit the U.S. embassy in Port-au-Prince in recent days to seek a visa or political asylum.

"We can't stay anymore in the country," said Jim Kenneth, a 19-year-old who would like to study medicine in the U.S. "We feel very insecure."

Merkel tours 'surreal' flood scene, vows aid, climate action

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German Chancellor Angela Merkel surveyed what she called a "surreal, ghostly" scene in a devastated village on Sunday, pledging quick financial aid and a redoubled political focus on curbing climate change as the death toll from floods in Western Europe climbed above 180.

Merkel toured Schuld, a village on a tight curve of the Ahr River in western Germany where many buildings were damaged or destroyed by rapidly rising floodwaters Wednesday night.

Although the mayor of Schuld said no one was killed or injured there, many other places weren't so lucky. The death toll in the Ahrweiler area, where Schuld is located, stood at 112. Authorities said people are still missing and they fear the toll may still rise.

In neighboring North Rhine-Westphalia state, Germany's most populous, 46 people were killed, including four firefighters. Belgium confirmed 31 deaths.

Merkel said she came away from Schuld, still partly strewn with rubble and mud in bright sunshine, with "a real picture of, I must say, the surreal, ghostly situation."

"It is shocking — I would almost say that the German language barely has words for the devastation that has been wreaked," she said at a news conference in a nearby town.

Merkel said authorities will work to "set the world right again in this beautiful region, step by step," and her Cabinet will approve an immediate and medium-term financial aid program on Wednesday.

Finance Minister Olaf Scholz told the Bild am Sonntag newspaper that more than 300 million euros (\$354 million) will be needed immediately. And he said officials must set up a longer-term rebuilding program which, from experience with previous flooding, will be in the billions of euros.

"Thankfully, Germany is a country that can manage this financially," said Merkel, who is stepping down as chancellor following an election in September. "Germany is a strong country and we will stand up to

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this force of nature in the short term — but also in the medium and long term, through policy that pays more regard to nature and the climate than we did in recent years. That will be necessary too.”

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

Scientists can't yet say for sure whether climate change caused the flooding, but they insist that it certainly exacerbates the extreme weather disasters on display around the world.

“We must get faster in the battle against climate change,” Merkel said, pointing to policies already set in motion by Germany and the European Union to cut greenhouse gas emissions. “And nevertheless, the second lesson is that we must pay great attention to adaptation” to climate change.

Investing in fighting climate change is expensive, she said, but failing to do so is even more costly.

“One flood isn't the example of climate change, but if we look at the loss events of recent years, decades, then they are simply more frequent than they were previously — so we must make a great effort,” Merkel said.

Residents in the devastated areas will be needing support and comfort for a long time yet.

“This flood will leave scars on the people of Schuld — scars that you don't forget, that can't be overcome, because our lives changed from one day to the next,” Mayor Helmut Lussi said, breaking into sobs as he spoke.

Although the rain has stopped in the worst-affected areas of Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, storms and downpours have persisted elsewhere in western and central Europe. There was flooding Saturday night in the German-Czech border area, in Germany's southeastern corner, and over the border in Austria.

About 130 people were evacuated in Germany's Berchtesgaden area after the Ache River swelled. At least one person was killed and the rail line to Berchtesgaden was closed.

The Berchtesgaden area also is the home of the sliding track in Koenigssee, the site of major international bobsled, skeleton and luge events for more than 50 years. Large segments of that track were destroyed, parts of the concrete chute turned into rubble by the rushing water.

A flash flood hit the nearby Austrian town of Hallein late Saturday, but there were no reports of casualties. Farther west, flooding struck parts of the town of Kufstein. Heavy rain and storms caused serious damage in several parts of Austria.

Pope Francis prayed for the flood victims and in support of the “efforts of all to help those who suffered great damage.”

“I express my closeness to the populations of Germany, Belgium and Holland, hit by catastrophic flooding,” he said Sunday in his first public appearance to the faithful in St. Peter's Square after major surgery. “May the Lord welcome the deceased and comfort the family members.”

In the eastern Belgian town of Pepinster, soldiers and firefighters on Sunday searched for any remaining survivors or bodies, according to public broadcaster RTBF. All the houses still standing have been searched, so the effort focused on those that collapsed and in a valley downstream for anyone possibly swept away by the raging torrent.

The ground in the town remains unstable and several more houses could collapse. “We have to be careful with every step we take,” fire officer Olivier Jüst was quoted as saying.

The flood-stricken Dutch town of Venlo allowed most residents back home Sunday, and trains began running again in the area, authorities said.

Meanwhile, a cow swept 100 kilometers (60 miles) along a flooded Dutch river will live out its days in a meadow, according to its owner. Farmer Har Smeets told local broadcaster 1Limburg that he lost 10 other cows to high water in the southern part of the Netherlands, but one was found by a cyclist outside the town of Escharen and rescued by firefighters.

The cow, originally from the town of Echt, was seen Saturday standing with only its nose poking out of the muddy water of the Maas River, unable to free itself. Fire brigades managed to pull the animal onto dry land, and authorities traced the owner via an ear tag. Smeets says the cow has eaten and is resting comfortably.

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"It is unbelievable that such an animal can swim or float for so long and then still have the strength to come ashore," he said.

Pennsylvania election audit gets GOP campaign trail embrace

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Former President Donald Trump's false claims of a stolen election have been debunked by the courts, his own Justice Department and scores of recounts.

But in the battleground state of Pennsylvania, where Trump lost by 80,000 votes eight months ago, they're finding new signs of life.

A Republican state lawmaker, bolstered by campaign trail support from top Republican candidates for governor and U.S. Senate, has launched a push for a "forensic investigation" of the presidential election results, a review modeled on the widely discredited process underway in Arizona.

The effort is likely to face legal challenges and is still limited to three counties, where it is getting push-back even from Republican commissioners. But its march forward is forcing many to stop viewing it as one lawmaker's pet project and take it seriously.

The audit has fast become a litmus test in an election cycle where an open governor's office and an open U.S. Senate seat — the political equivalent of a blue moon — have triggered fiercely competitive Republican primaries.

That has some GOP party officials and donors squirming with discomfort, albeit quietly. Some Republicans privately worry that the spectacle of a protracted election audit is a time bomb that not only will damage the state's democratic institutions, but also the party's credibility with critical swing voters.

"Most of the Republicans I know, at the very least, have misgivings and, at worst, are like me and realize this is just really a blunder of epic proportions," said former congressman Charlie Dent, a centrist Republican from the Allentown area. "Why bring the Arizona clown show to Pennsylvania?"

Those worries have been easily drowned out by supporters of the effort.

One, state Sen. Doug Mastriano, who has claimed that Trump "asked me" to run for governor, is the ringleader of the audit campaign and is fundraising off it.

"All I'm asking for is a transparent and thorough investigation to prove to U.S. voters that our votes were fairly counted, and that we have nothing to worry about," Mastriano wrote in the email appeal last weekend.

A rival, former congressman Lou Barletta, who is running for governor, has said that he was for an audit way back in December.

Earlier this month, Mastriano sent letters to three counties — including Philadelphia, a Democratic bastion and the state's largest city — to request access to a sweeping list of information, documents and equipment, with the threat of subpoenas for holdouts.

Gov. Tom Wolf and state Attorney General Josh Shapiro, both Democrats, have vowed to fight the subpoenas in court, giving Republicans who are leery of Trump's antics hope that the audit will have a short life.

Subpoenas are a tool lawmakers have rarely used in the past, leaving it unclear whether a court would block such an effort, order counties to comply or just choose not to intervene, said Bruce Ledewitz, a Duquesne University law professor who teaches constitutional law.

"No court is going to get in the way, probably," he predicted. "But that doesn't mean you get some kind of enforceable enforcement order."

Meanwhile, Mastriano has left key questions unanswered, including who will do the work, how it will be funded and where such a vast amount of documents and equipment would be stored securely.

That has not stopped candidates for U.S. Senate or governor from backing it.

Sean Parnell, a candidate for U.S. Senate, said that "half the state" not trusting the election result is a problem that can be remedied with an audit, and dismissed the official state and county audits as simply "recounts" that were inadequate to investigate allegations that something went wrong.

"And now after the fact, that people are saying, 'Hey, wait a minute, maybe there were some problems,' they just blow us all off and say, 'No, no, screw you, you don't know what you're talking about,' like, 'You're just a bunch of crazy conspiracy theorists,'" Parnell told a radio show host Wednesday.

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In Arizona, the Senate's Republican leadership initiated the unprecedented partisan audit of votes in Maricopa County, home to Phoenix, despite the fact that the votes already had been counted, recounted and certified. The effort has been supported by many Republican state lawmakers, state party chair Kelli Ward and state Attorney General Mark Brnovich, a Republican who is running for U.S. Senate.

However, it has drawn withering criticism from some other establishment Republicans, including those who control the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors; Cindy McCain, the wife of the late senator and GOP presidential nominee; and former U.S. Sen. Jeff Flake. Republican Gov. Doug Ducey has avoided the topic altogether.

In Pennsylvania, Republican Party and Senate Republican leaders have responded with silence.

Many Republicans who want to distance the party from an audit question the cost for counties to comply with Mastriano's demands or argue that it's time to focus on future elections. Some say it is highly unlikely it would uncover smoking-gun evidence of widespread fraud, or they point to a slew of GOP-led legislative hearings that, they say, already covered the topic thoroughly and produced legislation.

"At the end of the day, I don't know what you're going to achieve," said Sam DeMarco, the GOP chair of Allegheny County, home to Pittsburgh.

Still, even Republicans who avoid repeating Trump's election fraud claims have perpetuated the idea that Democrats cheated.

They routinely distort the actions of state judges and officials as "unconstitutional" or "illegal" in settling legal disputes and questions over Pennsylvania's fledgling mail-in voting law in the weeks before November's election.

Weeks ago, Republican leaders of the state House of Representatives rejected doing any such 2020 election audit through their chamber.

Instead, those Republican lawmakers advanced a "Voting Rights Protection Act" that, they said, would make elections more secure and accessible and fix 2020's alleged problems.

In addition, it would have shifted authority over election policy away from the executive branch and assigned broad new election-auditing authority in future elections to the state auditor general, currently a Republican.

Democrats dismissed the bill as "voter suppression" and Wolf vetoed it, but it gave Republican Party figures something to point to, at the very least, as an alternative to an Arizona-style audit of the 2020 election.

"I think that's the issue," said Jeffrey Piccola, the GOP chair in Republican-controlled York County. "I don't think going back to 2020 is going to solve any problems, and I'm not sure you can solve any problems."

'Space Jam' dunks on 'Black Widow' to take box office No. 1

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

"Black Widow" ceded its No. 1 spot to an unlikely foe in its second week in theaters: The Tune Squad.

LeBron James, Bugs Bunny and the rest of the stars of Warner Bros.' "Space Jam: A New Legacy" defied expectations and won the box office this weekend. According to studio estimates Sunday, "Space Jam: A New Legacy" grossed \$31.7 million in North America, while "Black Widow" took in \$26.3 million.

Not many expected "Space Jam: A New Legacy" to pull off this win. The poorly reviewed film was pegged for an opening in the \$20 million range. But a sizable number of families and millennials who grew up with the original "Space Jam" left the house and went to a theater to see it, even though it's currently streaming on HBO Max free for subscribers. Not only that, audiences also gave the film a promising A-CinemaScore, suggesting word of mouth could be strong.

"Space Jam: A New Legacy" is the largest pandemic opening for Warner Bros., which is significant since the studio in 2021 is releasing all its films simultaneously in theaters and on HBO Max.

It's also the largest domestic opening for a family film since the beginning of the pandemic. Warner Bros. said 32% of the audience was under 18, which is larger than usual. Most of the major family films that have come out during the pandemic — from "The Boss Baby: Family Business" to "Raya and the Last Dragon"

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— have opened well under \$20 million. But audiences of all ages turned out for the new “Space Jam.”

“It shows that families have waited for a movie that everyone can go to and that’s this movie,” said Jeff Goldstein, Warner Bros.’ head of domestic distribution. “It’s just a fun movie for the family.”

“Black Widow,” meanwhile fell 67% in its second weekend, which, although steep, is also fairly normal for superhero films, which tend to have frontloaded audiences. Internationally, the Scarlett Johansson-led film picked up another \$29.9 million, bringing its global grosses to \$264 million.

Last weekend, “Black Widow” became the highest grossing film of the pandemic. Disney also surprised many in the industry by revealing its first weekend profits from the movie’s streaming rentals. Rental grosses were not provided this week, however.

This weekend also saw the launch of “Escape Room: Tournament of Champions,” a sequel to the high-concept 2019 film. Sony is projecting that the film will gross \$8.8 million over the weekend, which is actually better than the first film’s debut and in line with studio expectations.

“F9” took fourth place with \$7.6 million. The “Fast & Furious” film has made \$591.2 million globally to date. The fifth and sixth place spots also went to Universal films: “The Boss Baby: Family Business” with \$4.7 million and “The Forever Purge,” with \$4.1 million.

“A Quiet Place Part II,” which recently became available on Paramount+, is still doing good numbers into its eighth week in theaters. It added another \$2.3 million, bringing its domestic total to \$155 million.

The Anthony Bourdain documentary “Roadrunner” also did well this weekend, grossing around \$1.9 million from 925 theaters, making it the top grossing specialty debut of the year.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. “Space Jam: A New Legacy,” \$31.7 million.
2. “Black Widow,” \$26.3 million.
3. “Escape Room: Tournaments of Champions,” \$8.8 million.
4. “F9,” \$7.6 million.
5. “The Boss Baby: The Family Business,” \$4.7 million.
6. “The Forever Purge,” \$4.2 million.
7. “A Quiet Place Part II,” \$2.3 million.
8. “Roadrunner: A Film About Anthony Bourdain,” \$1.9 million.
9. “Cruella,” \$1.1 million.
10. “Pig,” \$945,000.

EXPLAINER: How Blue Origin’s Jeff Bezos will soar into space

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — When Blue Origin launches people into space for the first time, founder Jeff Bezos will be on board. No test pilots or flight engineers for Tuesday’s debut flight from West Texas, just Bezos, his brother, an 82-year-old aviation pioneer and a teenage tourist.

The capsule is entirely automated, unlike Richard Branson’s Virgin Galactic rocket plane that required two pilots to get him to space and back a week ago.

Branson’s advice? “Just sit back, relax, look out of the window, just absorb the view outside,” he said on CBS’ “The Late Show with Stephen Colbert.”

Differences in quirks and rockets aside, the billionaire rivals are gearing up to launch just about anybody willing to shell out hundreds of thousands of dollars for a brief up-and-down space hop.

A brief look at what awaits Bezos and his passengers:

BEZOS ON BOARD

Bezos created Blue Origin in 2000, a move that he said prompted his high school girlfriend to observe, “Jeff started Amazon just to get enough money to do Blue Origin — and I can’t prove her wrong.” He has said he finances the rocket company by selling \$1 billion in Amazon stock a year. Bezos caught the space bug at age 5 while watching Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin’s moon landing on July, 20, 1969. He chose

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the 52nd anniversary for his own launch. Enamored by space history, Bezos named his New Shepard rocket after Alan Shepard, the first American in space, and his bigger, still-in-development New Glenn rocket after John Glenn, the first American in orbit. The 57-year-old Bezos — who also owns The Washington Post — stepped down as Amazon's CEO earlier this month and last week donated \$200 million to the Smithsonian Institution to renovate its National Air and Space Museum and launch an education center. "To see the Earth from space, it changes you. It changes your relationship with this planet, with humanity," he said. "It's a thing I've wanted to do all my life."

WHO ELSE IS FLYING

Bezos personally invited two of his fellow passengers — his 50-year-old brother Mark, an investor and volunteer firefighter, and female aviation pioneer Wally Funk. Joining them will be Oliver Daemen, a last-minute fill-in for the winner of a \$28 million charity auction who had a scheduling conflict. At age 82, Funk will become the oldest person in space. She was among 13 female pilots — the so-called Mercury 13 — who took the same tests in the early 1960s as NASA's Mercury 7 astronauts, but were barred because of their gender. "Finally!" Funk exclaimed when offered a seat alongside Bezos. As for the Dutch Daemen — who at 18 will become the youngest person in space — his financier father bid on the capsule seat in June, but dropped out when the price soared. Blue Origin came calling just over a week ago, after the unidentified auction winner switched to a later flight. The teenage space fanatic, who starts college this fall, is Blue Origin's first paying customer; no word on what his ticket cost.

ROCKET AND CAPSULE

While Bezos won't be the first boss to ride to space on his own rocket, he can lay claim to strapping in for his company's first human launch. He's also aiming higher, with an anticipated altitude of about 66 miles (106 kilometers) versus Branson's 53.5 miles (86 kilometers). Blue Origin's 60-foot (18-meter) New Shepard rocket will accelerate toward space at three times the speed of sound, or Mach 3, before separating from the capsule and returning for an upright landing. The passengers will experience three to four minutes of weightlessness, before their capsule parachutes onto the desert just 10 minutes after liftoff. That's five minutes less than Alan Shepard's 1961 Mercury flight. Blue Origin, though, offers the biggest windows ever built for a spacecraft. Bezos purchased the desolate, parched land for launching and landing rockets. The closest town is Van Horn, population 1,832.

TRACK RECORD

Blue Origin has completed 15 test flights to space since 2015, carrying up experiments, children's postcards and Mannequin Skywalker, the company's passenger stand-in. Except for the booster crash-landing on the first trip, all the demos were successful. One rocket ended up flying seven times and another five. The capsules also were recycled. Blue Origin deliberately aborted a couple flights after liftoff to test the emergency escape system on the capsule. The pace seemed slow compared with the competition, and many wondered why Blue Origin — its motto Gradatim Ferociter, or step by step ferociously — was taking so long to launch people. Based in Kent, Washington, the company kept fairly mum on its launch plans. Bezos finally announced "it's time" following the last test flight in April, a dress rehearsal that saw mock passengers briefly climb aboard before liftoff. The rocket and capsule that will be used Tuesday have flown twice before.

WHAT'S NEXT

Blue Origin is expected to open ticket sales soon after Bezos flies and has already lined up some of the other auction bidders. The company hasn't disclosed the cost of a ride. The fourth seat on the upcoming flight was auctioned off for \$28 million. Nineteen space advocacy and education groups are getting \$1 million each as a result, with the rest to be used by Blue Origin's Club for the Future for its own education effort. While the diminutive New Shepard is meant to launch people on brief flights to the edge of space, the mega New Glenn will be capable of hauling cargo and eventually crew into orbit from Cape Canaveral, Florida, possibly beginning late next year. Blue Origin also has its eyes on the moon. Its proposed lunar lander, Blue Moon, lost to SpaceX's Starship in NASA's recent commercial competition to develop the technology for getting the next astronauts onto the moon. Blue Origin is challenging the contract award, as is , the other competitor.

Nightclubs elated but doubts cloud England's 'Freedom Day'

By SYLVIA HUI and UROOBA JAMAL Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Sparkling wine, confetti, a midnight countdown: It's not New Year's Eve, but it might as well be for England's clubbers. After 17 months of empty dance floors, the country's nightclubs are reopening with a bang.

Beginning Monday, face masks will no longer be legally required, and with social distancing rules shelved, there will be no more limits on people attending theater performances or big events.

Public health officials fear the celebrations could trigger a major hangover, as more social mixing drives up Britain's already-surging coronavirus infection rates.

From London to Liverpool, thousands of young people plan to dance the night away at "Freedom Day" parties after midnight Sunday, when almost all coronavirus restrictions in England are to be scrapped. Nightclubs, which have been shuttered since March 2020, can finally reopen.

London nightclub The Piano Works plans to kick off its "Freedom Day" bash Sunday with a countdown to midnight, when staff members plan to cut a ribbon to the dance floor and serve customers free prosecco.

"I think it is going to be the most magical moment, when you've got people who haven't been able to dance and sing and just be normal, all rush onto the floor at midnight and get back to what we love," said Daisy Robb, the club's head of sales.

But while entertainment businesses and ravers are jubilant, many others are deeply worried about the British government's decision to scrap restrictions at a time when COVID-19 cases are on a rapid upswing. More than 54,000 new cases were confirmed on Saturday, the highest daily number since January, although reported virus deaths have stayed comparatively low so far.

Officials have repeatedly expressed confidence that the U.K.'s country's vaccine rollout — 68.3% of adults, or just over half of the total population, has received two doses — will keep the threat to public health at bay. But leading international scientists on Friday described England's "Freedom Day" as a threat to the whole world, and 1,200 scientists backed a letter to British medical journal *The Lancet* that criticized the Conservative government's decision.

"I can't think of any realistic good scenario to come out of this strategy, I'm afraid," said Julian Tang, a clinical virologist at the University of Leicester. "I think it's really a degree of how bad it's going to be."

Even Prime Minister Boris Johnson's chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, warned that "we could get into trouble again surprisingly fast." Johnson himself played down talk of freedom and stressed that life wouldn't instantly revert to how it was pre-pandemic.

Monday definitely won't be business as usual for Johnson. The prime minister and Treasury chief Rishi Sunak are both self-isolating for 10 days after contact with Health Secretary Sajid Javid, who tested positive for COVID-19 on Saturday despite being fully vaccinated.

They are among hundreds of thousands of Britons who have been told to quarantine because they have been near someone who tested positive. The situation is causing staff shortages in restaurants, car manufacturers and public transport.

One worry, Tang said, is of "super variants" that could surface after people are allowed to mix without precautions over the summer. Add a flu resurgence in the colder months and that spells "a winter of very serious proportions," he said.

Nightclubs in particular are potent spreading grounds, Tang said, because their core customer base — people 18 to 25 — only became eligible for a first vaccine dose last month and haven't yet been offered the second shots needed to boost immunity.

"That population is not fully vaccinated. They're not masking. They're in very close contact, heavily breathing, shouting very loudly to the music, dancing with different people," he said. "That's the perfect mixing vessel for the virus to spread and to even generate new variants."

Johnson urged the public on Sunday to exercise "prudence and respect for other people and the risks that the disease continues to present." He wants nightclubs and other crowded venues to use COVID-19

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status certification "as a matter of social responsibility," and only to admit patrons who can show they are double-jabbed, have a negative test result or have recovered from the disease.

There is no legal requirement for them to do so, however. In a flash poll of 250 late night bars and clubs by the Night Time Industries Association last week, 83% said they won't be asking people about their COVID-19 status, according to Michael Kill, the trade body's chief executive. Many owners see the passes as a huge turn-off for customers and accuse the government of "passing the buck" to businesses.

"We've heard people will boycott businesses that adopt this," Kill said. "The last thing we want after months of closure is to be again hindered in terms of capacity to trade. Either mandate it or don't mandate it. This is putting an inordinate amount of pressure on us."

Johnson's decision to scrap the legal requirement for face masks in indoor public spaces has also sowed confusion. Days after the prime minister said masks would still be "expected and recommended" in crowded indoor places but not compulsory, London Mayor Sadiq Khan announced that passengers on the capital's subways and buses must continue to wear them.

Some retailers, like the bookstore chain Waterstones, said they would encourage customers to keep their masks on. But many believe implementing such policies will be tricky without the backing of the law.

The end of restrictions in England on Monday will be a critical moment in Britain's handling of the pandemic, which has killed more than 128,000 people nationwide, the highest death toll in Europe after Russia. Other parts of the U.K. — Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland — are taking slightly more cautious steps out of lockdown.

Salsa instructor Esther Alvero is one of the many who say they're excited but fearful. A co-founder of Cubaneando, a company that ran salsa club nights, classes and performances for gala events before the pandemic, Alvero says she has had next to no income in the past year. Her savings are gone and her dancers have had to survive by taking part-time jobs as cleaners or Amazon delivery drivers.

"I'm scared but we have to survive," she added. "We have no option because the economic consequences could be worse than COVID itself."

In U-turn, UK's Johnson to quarantine after COVID-19 contact

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will spend 10 days self-isolating after contact with a confirmed coronavirus case, his office said Sunday — reversing an earlier announcement that he would not have to quarantine after facing an uproar.

Johnson's 10 Downing St. office said the prime minister and Treasury chief Rishi Sunak were both alerted overnight by England's test-and-trace phone app. Both had met recently with Health Secretary Sajid Javid, who tested positive for COVID-19 on Saturday. Javid, who has been fully vaccinated, says he is experiencing mild symptoms.

People who are notified through the app are supposed to self-isolate for 10 days, though it is not a legal requirement.

But Johnson's office initially said the prime minister and Sunak would instead take daily coronavirus tests as part of an alternative system being piloted in some workplaces, including government offices.

That plan was reversed less than three hours later after an outcry over apparent special treatment for politicians. Downing St. said Johnson would self-isolate at Chequers, the prime minister's country residence, and "will not be taking part in the testing pilot." It also said Sunak would self-isolate.

In a video message, Johnson said he and Sunak had "briefly" considered taking part in the pilot scheme. "But I think it is far more important that everyone sticks to the same rules, and that's why I'm going to be self-isolating until Monday, July 26," he said.

Keir Starmer, leader of the opposition Labour Party, likened Johnson's Conservative government to bank robbers who "got caught and have now offered to give the money back."

"Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak have been busted yet again for thinking the rules that we are all following don't apply to them," he said. "The way the prime minister conducts himself creates chaos, makes for

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bad government and has deadly consequences for the British public.”

Britain is experiencing rising coronavirus cases due to the more infectious delta variant, and is seeing a related “ping-demic” of hundreds of thousands of people being told to quarantine because they have been near someone who tested positive.

Whole classes have been sent home from schools. Hospitals are short of workers. Businesses including restaurants, car manufacturers and the London subway say they are facing staff shortages because of the self-isolation rules.

Many London theaters, which have only recently resumed performances as restrictions eased, have had to cancel performances because cast and crew members were told to quarantine. On Sunday, Kenneth Branagh’s theater company announced it was canceling the entire run of its show “The Browning Version” because of “an increasing number of COVID-enforced absences.”

The government says it will remove the requirement for people who have been fully vaccinated to self-isolate after contact with an infected person, but not until Aug. 16.

Johnson was seriously ill with coronavirus in April 2020, spending three nights hospitalized in intensive care.

In a touch of irony, his spell in isolation comes as his government prepares to lift remaining lockdown measures on Monday. Nightclubs can reopen in England for the first time since March 2020, sports and entertainment venues can admit capacity crowds and face masks are no longer mandatory indoors. Thousands of people were planning to go clubbing once the clock struck midnight Sunday.

But the government is urging people to be cautious, as cases surge because of the delta variant, first identified in India. More than 54,000 new infections were confirmed Saturday, the highest daily total since January. COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths are also rising, but remain far lower than at previous infection peaks thanks to widespread vaccination. More than 87% of British adults have had one vaccine shot and 68% have had both shots.

Still, British officials are looking nervously at Israel and the Netherlands, both of which opened up widely after vaccinating most of their people but had to reimpose some restrictions after new infection surges. The Dutch prime minister admitted that opening up too early “was a mistake.”

Court blocks order lifting CDC virus rules on cruise ships

By CURT ANDERSON AP Legal Affairs Writer

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — Pandemic restrictions on Florida-based cruise ships will remain in place after a federal appeals court temporarily blocked a previous ruling that sided with a Florida lawsuit challenging the regulations.

The one-paragraph decision by a three-judge panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals was filed at 11:50 p.m. Saturday, just minutes before a Tampa judge’s previous ruling on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention restrictions was set to take effect.

The judges’ issuance of a temporary stay keeps the CDC regulations regarding Florida-based cruise ships in place while the CDC appeals the June decision by U.S. District Judge Steven Merryday.

The lawsuit, championed by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, claims that the CDC’s multiple-step process to allow cruising from Florida is overly burdensome, harming both a multibillion-dollar industry that provides some 159,000 jobs and revenue collected by the state.

A spokeswoman for DeSantis did not immediately respond Sunday to an email and a text message seeking comment. In court filing, attorneys for Florida urged the 11th Circuit to reject the CDC request to keep its rules intact for now.

“The equities overwhelmingly favor allowing the cruise industry to enjoy its first summer season in two years while this Court sorts out the CDC’s contentions on appeal,” Florida’s lawyers argued.

The CDC, however, said keeping the rules in place would prevent future COVID-19 outbreaks on ships that are vulnerable to the spread of the virus because of their close quarters and frequent stops at foreign ports.

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"The undisputed evidence shows that unregulated cruise ship operations would exacerbate the spread of COVID-19, and that the harm to the public that would result from such operations cannot be undone," the CDC said in a court filing.

The CDC first flatly halted cruise ships from sailing in March 2020 in response to the coronavirus pandemic, which had affected passengers and crew on numerous ships.

Then the CDC on Oct. 30 of last year imposed a four-phase conditional framework it said would allow the industry to gradually resume operations if certain thresholds were met. Those included virus mitigation procedures and a simulated cruise to test them before embarking regular passengers.

Merryday's decision concluded that the CDC can't enforce those rules for Florida-based ships and that they should merely be considered nonbinding recommendations or guidelines. Several cruise lines have begun preliminary cruises under those guidelines, which the Tampa judge agreed with Florida are too onerous.

"Florida persuasively claims that the conditional sailing order will shut down most cruises through the summer and perhaps much longer," the judge wrote in June, adding that Florida "faces an increasingly threatening and imminent prospect that the cruise industry will depart the state."

The 11th Circuit's brief decision did not include any opinions from the judges, which the panel said would be released later. The decision noted that one appeals judge dissented.

Disney Cruise Lines held its first simulated sailing under CDC rules Saturday when the Disney Dream departed from Port Canaveral, Florida. The passengers were volunteer Disney employees.

In Trump's Jan. 6 recast, attackers become martyrs, heroes

By CALVIN WOODWARD, COLLEEN LONG and DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A cocktail of propaganda, conspiracy theory and disinformation — of the kind intoxicating to the masses in the darkest turns of history — is fueling delusion over the agonies of Jan. 6.

Hate is "love." Violence is "peace." The pro-Donald Trump attackers are patriots.

Months after the then-president's supporters stormed the Capitol that winter day, Trump and his acolytes are taking this revisionism to a new and dangerous place — one of martyrs and warlike heroes, and of revenge. It's a place where cries of "blue lives matter" have transformed into shouts of "f--- the blue."

The fact inversion about the siege is the latest in Trump's contorted oeuvre of the "big lie" compendium, the most specious of which is that the election was stolen from him, when it was not.

It is rooted in the formula of potent propaganda through the ages: Say it loud, say it often, say it with the heft of political power behind you, and people will believe. Once spread by pamphlets, posters and word of mouth, now spread by swipe of finger, the result is the same: a passionate, unquestioning following.

Techniques of glorifying your side and demonizing the other with skewed information, if not outright lies, have been in play at least since World War I, when the U.S. government roused sentiment for the cause with posters depicting the German soldier as an ape-human with a willowy American maiden in his clutches. That paled next to what followed years later with Nazi Germany's terrifying use of propaganda for the slaughter and subjugation of millions.

Whether the deception feeds warmongering or merely a defeated president's ego, some of the methods are the same, like telling the same fabrication over and over until it sticks.

Trump perfected the art of repetition — about the "election hoax," the "rigged election" and "massive voter fraud," with none of those accusations substantiated in the dozens of court cases and official post-election audits but engrained nonetheless among his supporters.

Four years ago, Trump appeared to equate white supremacists and racial justice protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, with his comment that there were "very fine people, on both sides."

This time, in this telling, the very fine people on Jan. 6 were on one side: his.

For the other side — the police, overwhelmed for hours and bloodied in the insurrection — Trump only has an in-your-face question that doubles as a four-word conspiracy theory: "Who killed Ashli Babbitt?"

Those words have become a viral mantra meant to elevate Babbitt as a righteous martyr in the cause of liberty. They ricochet around the mainline social media platforms where Trump is banned for spreading

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misinformation but his followers still commiserate. The woman died from a police officer's bullet fired as she tried to climb through the jagged glass of a smashed window toward the House chamber during the riot.

Babbitt has become the face of the insurrection — emblazoned on T-shirts and cheered in basement ballrooms at hotels around the country where conspiracy theorists gather to vent. In Washington's Georgetown neighborhood, flyers are plastered on street lamps and building facades telling of an unveiling of a statue of Babbitt in nearby Alexandria, Virginia, on July 27, at "high noon."

Trump and many Republicans have cycled through various characterizations of the insurrection, each iteration wholly unlike the previous one. The attackers were said to be leftist antifa followers in disguise. Then they were said to be overexcited tourists. Now they are heralded as foot soldiers for freedom.

Each iteration has required Americans to ignore the rage they saw on their screens, and some lawmakers to ignore that they were among the shocked targets of the attackers that day. The hunted now praise the hunters.

Taken together, the revisionists and their believers are "swimming in a vast sea of nonsense," said Brendan Buck, a former top aide to onetime House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis.

That sea's currents are familiar to historians who study what makes some conspiracy theories and propaganda persuasive.

Once people buy into the lies, there can be no convincing them they aren't true, said Dolores Albarracín, a psychology professor at the University of Pennsylvania and co-author of a coming book, "Creating Conspiracy Beliefs: How Our Thoughts are Shaped."

Despite the well-documented facts about what happened on Jan. 6, believers often dismiss anyone who tries to set them straight by claiming they are either duped or part of the conspiracy, Albarracín said.

"The belief contains a device that protects it," she said. "Nothing can invalidate the conspiracy theory. Trying to refute the theory proves the theory and signals you as a conspirator."

DJ Peterson, an expert on authoritarianism and propaganda, is president of Longview Global Advisors, a Los Angeles-based consulting firm, and worked at the Eurasia Group and the RAND Corporation. He said that in an online world awash in information and a real world riven by polarization, "you pick and choose what you want to believe, including sticking your head in the sand."

Trump, Peterson said, excels at amplifying claims that galvanize his core supporters and turn them against other Americans.

"That's where the power of Trump is," he said. "He's good at picking up on these threads ... that lower the level of trust and create division."

Recent polls are consistent in illustrating the country's divide over Trump and his post-election histrionics. In essence, two-thirds of the population is against him; two-thirds of Republicans for him. In one of the latest, Quinnipiac found that 66% of Republicans consider President Joe Biden to have been illegitimately elected.

That number and others like it in multiple polls represent tens of millions of people who were hoodwinked into believing allegations of election fraud that have been thoroughly investigated and refuted, including by Trump's own attorney general, William Barr. Trump's fabrications have stuck and now undergird the attempts by him and those closest to him to glorify the Jan. 6 mob.

"The consequence of lying is you kind of never get back to where you were before," said Harvard historian Jill Lepore, whose podcast, "The Last Archive," explores hoaxes, deceptions and what has happened to truth. "That's what's pernicious about our particular moment."

Of Trump, she said: "His method is generally to just create chaos so that people really don't know which way to look."

In the case of the insurrection, his followers looked away. An aggressive amnesia seems to have taken hold over how ugly it all was, even though the scenes that were broadcast and streamed in real time are forever.

Swarming to the Capitol after a staging rally where Trump told them to "fight like hell," and vowed, falsely, that he would be right there with them, the attackers beat the vastly outnumbered law enforcement officers, injuring scores of them. In one particularly awful case, an officer was crushed against a door by

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people pushing to get in, his mouth bleeding as the side of his face pressed against the glass of the door. Lawmakers inside ran for their lives, hiding for hours as the mob wandered the halls of Congress holding up Trump flags. The assailants called out for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and wanted Trump's vice president, who was there, too. "Hang Mike Pence," they chanted.

Babbitt was part of the group that was trying to beat down the doors of the House chamber as Capitol Police officers were evacuating the House floor and as some members were still trapped in the upper gallery. The officers used furniture to barricade the glass doors separating the hallway from the Speaker's Lobby to try to stave off the attackers, who were breaking glass with their fists, flagpoles and other objects.

Only three police officers were guarding the doors on the other side of the stacked furniture as at least 20 attackers tried to get in, screaming, "F--- the blue!" and "Break it down!" One smashed the door glass next to an officer's head; another warned the officers they would be hurt if they didn't get out of the way.

A Capitol Police lieutenant pointed his gun. "Gun!" "Gun!" the attackers shouted as the hysteria reached a fever pitch. They started to lift Babbitt up, to climb through the window. The officer fired one round.

Babbitt was struck in the shoulder. She later died. The officer was cleared of wrongdoing, and his name was not released.

Trump now states falsely — and with a stream of repetitions — that she was shot "right in the head."

"They were there for one reason, the rigged election," he told Fox News a week ago. "They felt the election was rigged. That's why they were there. And they were peaceful people. These were great people. The crowd was unbelievable. And I mentioned the word love. The love — the love in the air, I have never seen anything like it."

Thai police use tear gas against anti-government protesters

By CHALIDA EKVITTAYAVECHNUKUL Associated Press

BANGKOK, Thailand (AP) — Thai police used tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannons Sunday to disperse hundreds of anti-government protesters who held a rally in Bangkok despite coronavirus restrictions banning gatherings of more than five people.

The demonstrators were demanding Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's government step down, insisting the budget of the monarchy and the military be cut during the pandemic, and calling for the importing mRNA coronavirus vaccines that have yet to be brought to Thailand on a large scale to fight a growing surge of the virus.

The rally came as Thailand recorded its largest single-day jump in virus infections — nearly 11,400 — and as fresh restrictions were announced such as the shut down of most domestic flights. Many parts of the country, including Bangkok, are already under some form of lockdown that includes restrictions on gatherings and business operations as well as a nighttime curfew.

As infections and deaths climb and as more people face economic suffering, disapproval of the government's handling of the pandemic has grown.

Criticism of Prayuth's government for failing to secure early and adequate vaccine supplies is widespread. Thailand mostly relies on two vaccines, including China's Sinovac shot, which some studies indicate is less effective against the delta variant, which is currently wrecking havoc across Southeast Asia.

Thailand's other main vaccine is AstraZeneca, which a Thai company owned by the country's king has been producing, but only since June and in smaller than expected quantities.

Sunday's rally was led by Free Youth, a student protest group that drew tens of thousands to its protests last year, when it had three main demands: that Prayuth's government step down, the constitution be amended to make it more democratic and the nation's monarchy become more accountable.

Jutatip Sirikhan, one of Free Youth's main activists, charged in a phone interview with The Associated Press that many people have died from COVID-19 because of the lack of transparency and mismanagement of Prayuth and his Cabinet.

Thailand has recorded a total of 403,386 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 3,341 related deaths since the pandemic started. More than 90% of cases and deaths have occurred since April this year. This weekend

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daily virus deaths rose above 100 for the first time.

"If we don't come out now, we don't know how long we shall survive and whether we will have a chance to do it again," she said of the virus and the protests.

The protesters started gathered at the capital's Democracy Monument in the early afternoon, where organizers distributed N95 masks, medical gloves, sanitizer spray and raincoats to them before attempting to go to Government House, which hosts the prime minister's offices.

Organizers also handed out mock corpses in white burial shrouds representing COVID-19 victims, which were later placed on the ground atop an image of Prayuth at an intersection near Government House and set alight. The eerie figures also evoked images of the bodies of several Thai activists who had apparently been kidnapped in 2019 from where they lived in exile in neighboring Laos.

In an effort at avoiding the spread of infection, many of the protesters drove cars or rode motorbikes, instead of marching as they had in previous protests.

Around 1,500 riot police were deployed, along with water cannon trucks. Deputy National Police Spokesman Kissana Pattanacharoen acknowledged that the authorities used water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the protesters after several warnings were given.

Reports of injuries were not complete, but the city's Erawan Medical Center emergency services said two people were sent to the hospital from the protests, which the organizers called an end to before nightfall.

OPEC, allies raise limits for 5 countries to end oil dispute

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — OPEC and allied nations agreed Sunday to raise the production limits imposed on five countries next year and boost their production by 2 million barrels per day by the end of this year, ending a dispute that roiled oil markets.

The disagreement, sparked by a demand by the United Arab Emirates to increase its own production, temporarily upended an earlier meeting of the cartel. In a statement Sunday, the cartel announced that Iraq, Kuwait, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE would see their limits rise.

"What bonds us together is way much beyond what you may imagine," Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said. "We differ here and there but we bond."

Prince Abdulaziz declined to elaborate on how they came to that consensus, saying it would see the cartel "lose our advantage of being mysterious and clever." But he clearly bristled at earlier reports on the dispute between Saudi Arabia, long the heavyweight of the Vienna-based cartel, and the UAE.

Prince Abdulaziz deferred at the beginning of a news conference afterward to al-Mazrouei in a sign of respect.

"The UAE is committed to this group and will always work with it and within this group to do our best to achieve the market balance and help everyone," al-Mazrouei said. He praised the deal as a "full agreement" among all the parties.

Outside of OPEC, however, tensions still remain between the neighboring nations. The UAE largely has withdrawn from the Saudi-led war in Yemen, while also diplomatically recognizing Israel. Saudi Arabia also has opened its doors to Qatar again after a yearslong boycott, though relations remain icy between Abu Dhabi and Doha. Saudi Arabia also has aggressively sought international business headquarters — something that could affect the UAE's business hub Dubai.

Abu Dhabi's powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, the country's de facto ruler, and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman have been close though over the years. The two leaders likely will meet Monday in Saudi Arabia.

Under the new production limits, the UAE would be able to produce up to 3.5 million barrels of crude oil a day beginning in May 2022. That's below the 3.8 million barrels a day it reportedly sought. Saudi Arabia's limit of 11 million barrels a day would rise to 11.5 million, as would Russia's. Iraq and Kuwait saw smaller increases.

In its statement, OPEC acknowledged oil prices continued to improve.

"Economic recovery continued in most parts of the world with the help of accelerating vaccination pro-

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grams," the cartel said.

Prince Abdulaziz also mentioned OPEC members Algeria and Nigeria had raised concerns about their production limits as well.

Oil prices collapsed amid the coronavirus pandemic as demand for jet fuel and gasoline dropped amid lockdowns across the globe, briefly seeing oil futures trade in the negatives. Demand since has rebounded as vaccines, while still distributed unequally across the globe, reach arms in major world economies.

Benchmark Brent crude oil traded around \$73 a barrel Friday.

Once muscular enough to grind the U.S. to a halt with its 1970s oil embargo, OPEC needed non-members like Russia to push through a production cut in 2016 after prices crashed below \$30 a barrel amid rising American production. That agreement in 2016 gave birth to the so-called OPEC+, which joined the cartel in cutting production to help stimulate prices.

OPEC+ agreed in 2020 to cut a record 10 million barrels of crude a day from the market to boost prices. It's slowly added some 4.2 million barrels back over time.

Beginning this August, the cartel said it separately will increase its production by 400,000 barrels a day each month through December — a total of 2 million barrels. The cartel then will assess plans on whether to phase out its current 5.8 million barrel of oil production cut by the end of 2022 as planned by the initial agreement.

OPEC member nations include Algeria, Angola, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Venezuela. Members of the so-called OPEC+ include Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, Sudan and South Sudan.

Prince Abdulaziz, in praising Sunday's agreement, offered a cheery assessment of the future despite the recent turmoil, suggesting at one point the enlarged group might last beyond the expiration of the cuts next year.

"OPEC+ is here to stay," the prince proclaimed.

South Africa's leader vows to restore order, catch plotters

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — South Africa's leader went to Johannesburg's Soweto township Sunday to view badly damaged shopping centers where people were trampled to death in rioting sparked by the imprisonment of former President Jacob Zuma.

President Cyril Ramaphosa toured the N dofaya Mall in the Meadowlands part of Soweto, where at least 10 people died in the ransacking.

South Africa's unrest erupted earlier this month when Zuma began serving a 15-month sentence for contempt of court. He had defied a court order to testify at a state-backed inquiry investigating allegations of corruption while he was president from 2009 to 2018.

The protests quickly escalated to a weeklong spree of violence, South Africa's worst rioting since the country achieved majority rule democracy in 1994. The unrest hit the KwaZulu-Natal province, which is Zuma's home area, and Gauteng, South Africa's most populous province, which includes Johannesburg, the country's largest city. Trucks were burned, strategic highways blocked and thousands of rioters ransacked malls and shopping centers in the two provinces.

In the eastern port of Durban, rioters attacked industrial areas, where they emptied warehouses and factories and arsonists set them alight.

At least 212 people died in the unrest, many trampled to death when shops were looted, said police. More than 2,500 people have been arrested for theft and vandalism.

Looking at the shattered glass entrance to a cellphone shop Sunday in Soweto, Ramaphosa was told several people died there.

"We are all really concerned about what happened here," Ramaphosa said. "But we are also saying we have learned valuable lessons. The most important lesson is, in the end, that we must tighten up our security forces."

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Thanking the community volunteer groups helping to clear up the debris, Ramaphosa, speaking in the Zulu language, reiterated his pledge that those who plotted the rioting would be brought to justice.

"They'll be arrested, all those who are behind this damage," he vowed sternly. "We are going to make sure that they are arrested and sent to prison for a long time."

He thanked law-abiding South Africans for standing together against the lawlessness.

"We shall never be defeated because a united people will never be defeated," said Ramaphosa, to cheers from a small group that had gathered. "Whether they like it or not, they'll never defeat us. We will be victorious."

Ramaphosa spoke on the anniversary of the birth of Nelson Mandela, the country's first Black president, whose election in 1994 marked the end of South Africa's brutal apartheid regime of white-minority rule. To honor Mandela, many South Africans on Sunday did acts of community service.

Taliban say they want Afghan deal, even as they battle on

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — The leader of the Taliban said Sunday that his movement is committed to a political settlement to end decades of war in Afghanistan, even as the insurgents battle in dozens of districts across the country to gain territory.

The statement by Maulawi Hibatullah Akhunzada came as Taliban leaders were meeting with a high-level Afghan government delegation in the Gulf state of Qatar to jump-start stalled peace talks. The Kabul delegation includes the No. 2 in the government, Abdullah Abdullah, head of Afghanistan's national reconciliation council.

The talks resumed Saturday, ahead of the four-day Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, which in many parts of the world is expected to start Tuesday. A second session was to take place Sunday afternoon.

Washington's peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, who is in Qatar, previously expressed hopes for a reduction in violence and possibly a cease-fire over Eid al-Adha.

Akhunzada said that "in spite of the military gains and advances, the Islamic Emirate strenuously favors a political settlement in the country, and every opportunity for the establishment of an Islamic system."

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is what the Taliban called their government when they ruled the country for five years, until their ouster by a U.S.-led coalition in 2001.

Still, there are few signs of a political agreement on the horizon. Battles between the Taliban and government forces are continuing in dozens of provinces, and thousands of Afghans are seeking visas in hopes of leaving the country. Most are frightened that the final withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops after nearly 20 years will plunge their war-ravaged nation into deeper chaos. With the U.S. withdrawal more than 95% complete, Afghanistan's future seems mired in uncertainty.

Militias with a brutal history have been resurrected to fight the Taliban but their loyalties are to their commanders, many of them U.S.-allied warlords with ethnic-based support.

This has raised the specter of deepening divisions between Afghanistan's many ethnic groups. Most Taliban are ethnic Pashtuns and in the past there have been brutal reprisal killings by one ethnic group against another.

In a sign of how little progress has been made in negotiations, both sides are still haggling over terminology, unable to even agree on the name for the war-tortured nation. The Taliban are insisting on the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Kabul wants the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Meanwhile Akhunzada's statement demanded an Islamic system without explaining what that meant.

He promised to support education, but for girls he said the "Islamic Emirate will . . . strive to create an appropriate environment for female education within the framework of sublime Islamic law."

He didn't say how that differed from the educational institutions that have been created over the last 20 years and whether women would be allowed the freedom to work outside their home and move freely without being accompanied by a male relative.

He said the Taliban have ordered their commanders to treat civilians with care and to protect institutions

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and infrastructure. Yet, reports have emerged from areas coming under Taliban control that schools have been burned, women have been restricted to their homes and some government buildings have been blown up.

The Taliban have denied reports of such destruction, saying that the footage being shown is old and accused the government of being engaged in disinformation and propaganda.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, July 19, the 200th day of 2021. There are 165 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 19, 1969, Apollo 11 and its astronauts, Neil Armstrong, Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin and Michael Collins, went into orbit around the moon.

On this date:

In 1848, a pioneering women's rights convention convened in Seneca Falls, New York.

In 1943, Allied air forces raided Rome during World War II, the same day Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini met in Feltre in northern Italy.

In 1961, TWA became the first airline to begin showing regularly scheduled in-flight movies as it presented "By Love Possessed" to first-class passengers on a flight from New York to Los Angeles.

In 1975, the Apollo and Soyuz space capsules that were linked in orbit for two days separated.

In 1980, the Moscow Summer Olympics began, minus dozens of nations that were boycotting the games because of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan.

In 1989, 111 people were killed when United Air Lines Flight 232, a DC-10 which sustained the uncontained failure of its tail engine and the loss of hydraulic systems, crashed while making an emergency landing at Sioux City, Iowa; 185 other people survived.

In 1990, baseball's all-time hits leader, Pete Rose, was sentenced in Cincinnati to five months in prison for tax evasion.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton announced a policy allowing homosexuals to serve in the military under a compromise dubbed "don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue."

In 2005, President George W. Bush announced his choice of federal appeals court judge John G. Roberts Jr. to replace Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. (Roberts ended up succeeding Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, who died in Sept. 2005; Samuel Alito followed O'Connor.)

In 2006, prosecutors reported that Chicago police beat, kicked, shocked or otherwise tortured scores of Black suspects from the 1970s to the early 1990s to try to extract confessions from them.

In 2007, "Mad Men," a cable TV series about a New York advertising agency, premiered on AMC.

In 2014, a New York City police officer (Daniel Pantaleo) involved in the arrest of Eric Garner, who died in custody two days earlier after being placed in an apparent chokehold, was stripped of his gun and badge and placed on desk duty. (Pantaleo was fired in August 2019.) Actor James Garner, 86, died in Los Angeles.

Ten years ago: Summoned by British lawmakers to answer for a phone hacking and bribery scandal at one of his tabloids, media mogul Rupert Murdoch told a parliamentary committee hearing he was humbled and ashamed, but accepted no responsibility for wrongdoing.

Five years ago: Republicans meeting in Cleveland nominated Donald Trump as their presidential standard-bearer; in brief videotaped remarks, Trump thanked the delegates, saying: "This is a movement, but we have to go all the way." Writer-director Garry Marshall, 81, whose deft touch with comedy and romance led to a string of TV hits that included "Happy Days" and "Laverne & Shirley" and the box-office successes "Pretty Woman" and "Runaway Bride," died in Burbank, California.

One year ago: President Donald Trump refused to publicly commit to accepting the results of the upcoming election, telling Chris Wallace on "Fox News Sunday" that it was too early to make any such guarantee. U.S. House leaders said they were "alarmed" by the tactics used by federal agents against protesters in

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Portland, Oregon and other cities; the mayor of Portland said the presence of the agents was worsening tensions in the city, which had seen nearly two months of nightly protests since the death of George Floyd. The Bahamas said it would ban travelers from the United States; a surge in coronavirus infections had followed the islands' reopening to international tourism.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Helen Gallagher is 95. Country singer Sue Thompson is 95. Singer Vikki Carr is 81. Blues singer-musician Little Freddie King is 81. Country singer-musician Commander Cody is 77. Actor George Dzundza is 76. Rock singer-musician Alan Gorrie (Average White Band) is 75. International Tennis Hall of Famer Ilie Nastase is 75. Rock musician Brian May is 74. Rock musician Bernie Leadon is 74. Actor Beverly Archer is 73. Movie director Abel Ferrara is 70. Actor Peter Barton is 65. Rock musician Kevin Haskins (Love and Rockets; Bauhaus) is 61. Movie director Atom Egoyan is 61. Actor Campbell Scott is 60. Actor Anthony Edwards is 59. Actor Clea Lewis is 56. Percussionist Evelyn Glennie is 56. Classical singer Urs Buhler (Il Divo) is 50. Actor Andrew Kavovit is 50. Rock musician Jason McGerr (Death Cab for Cutie) is 47. Actor Benedict Cumberbatch is 45. Actor Erin Cummings is 44. TV chef Marcela Valladolid is 43. Actor Chris Sullivan ("This is Us") is 41. Actor Jared Padalecki is 39. Actor Trai Byers is 38. Actor Kaitlin Doubleday ("Nashville") is 37. Actor/comedian Dustin Ybarra is 35. Actor Steven Anthony Lawrence is 31.