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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)

Father Tschakert is new local priest

by Dorene Nelson

On July 1, 2021, Father Greg Tschakert (pronounced "shockert") began serving as the priest for Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church, Groton, and St. Joseph Catholic Church, Turton.

"I'm originally from Florence, SD," Father Tschakert stated, "where I attended elementary school and high school. After graduating from high school, I enrolled in the education program at Northern State University. I graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Secondary Education with an English major."

"After graduating from college, I began my teaching career in Ipswich, SD, where I taught high school English and speech classes for the next four years," Tschakert explained.

"Although I enjoyed teaching, I felt a calling to serve my church and its people in a different capacity," he admitted. "Following that 'call,' I enrolled in the seminary in St. Paul, MN."

"Attending seminary was 'a wonderful thing!'" Tschakert exclaimed. "I was ordained in 1982 and have served in a variety of parishes, schools, and administrative positions for the past 39 years."

"Before I moved to Groton, I had been the pastor of St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church in Sioux Falls for seven years," he said.

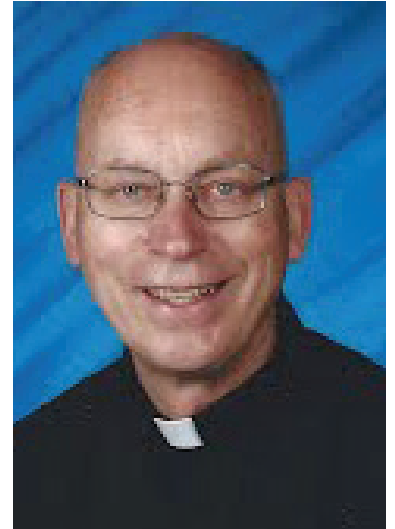
"While serving in various towns and cities in South Dakota, I was involved with the activities and religion education classes at Roncalli (Aberdeen), St. Mary (Dell Rapids), and O'Gorman (Sioux Falls)," Tschakert listed.

"Even though priests are regularly moved from one place to another every six or seven years, Father Tom, who served here before me, served in Groton for only two years," he explained.

The bishop assigns priests to the parishes they will be serving. Priests are eligible for retirement at 70 years of age. The decision to retire at that time is up to the individual priest.

"I really enjoy being a priest," Tschakert admitted. "I especially like celebrating the Sacraments, but I also love to teach religion education classes. These classes are the basis for the faith formation of young members of the congregation."

"I am very happy to be here and plan to stay here until I decide to retire," Father Tschakert smiled.



Fr. Greg Tschakert

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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

July 20, 2021 – 7:00pm

120 N Main Street

(NOTICE ADDRESS)

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
2. Minutes
3. Bills
4. June Finance Report
5. Second Reading of Ordinance #748 Appropriation Ordinance Schedule
6. First Reading of Ordinance #749 Regarding the Issuance of Local Medical Cannabis Establishment Permits and/or Licenses
7. Grant Application for \$15,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act for the Wage Memorial Library has been APPROVED
8. Groton Mitigation Plan Update
9. AB Contracting Application for Payment #5 – \$28,808.70
10. Utility Easement
11. 2021 South Dakota Risk & Safety Conference – November 3&4, 2021 – Pierre, SD
12. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
13. Hire Electric Utility Supervisor
14. Assistant Finance Officer Wage
15. Adjournment



South Dakota again receives highest ratings under IDEA

PIERRE, S.D. – At today’s Board of Education Standards meeting, it was announced that South Dakota has received the highest rating possible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, for both Parts B and C for the most recent reporting year of federal fiscal year 2019. The state is one of only 12 across the country to meet the requirements and purposes of IDEA under both Parts B and C, according to information released recently from the U.S. Department of Education.

“The families, service providers and school districts who work together to provide high quality services to infants, toddlers and students with disabilities are to be commended. Results at this level only happen through dedication and teamwork,” said South Dakota Secretary of Education Tiffany Sanderson.

IDEA Part B measures and reports the effectiveness of special education services at the preschool and K-12 levels, while Part C refers to the state’s Birth to Three program, which provides early intervention services for infants and toddlers ages birth until a child’s third birthday with developmental delays.

Under Part B, federal fiscal year 2019 marks the sixth year in a row that South Dakota “meets requirements,” which is the highest rating a state can receive. Under Part C, this is the fourth year that South Dakota has been determined to “meet requirements.”

IDEA requires each state to develop a State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report that evaluates the state’s efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of the IDEA and describes how the state will improve its implementation.

The Part B and Part C SPP/APRs include indicators that measure child and family results and other indicators that measure compliance with the requirements of the IDEA. Since 2015, Part B and Part C SPP/APRs have included a State Systemic Improvement Plan through which each state focuses its efforts on improving a state-selected child or family outcome through implementation of an evidence-based practice.

IDEA details four categories for determinations:

Meets the requirements and purposes of IDEA

Needs assistance in implementing the requirements of IDEA

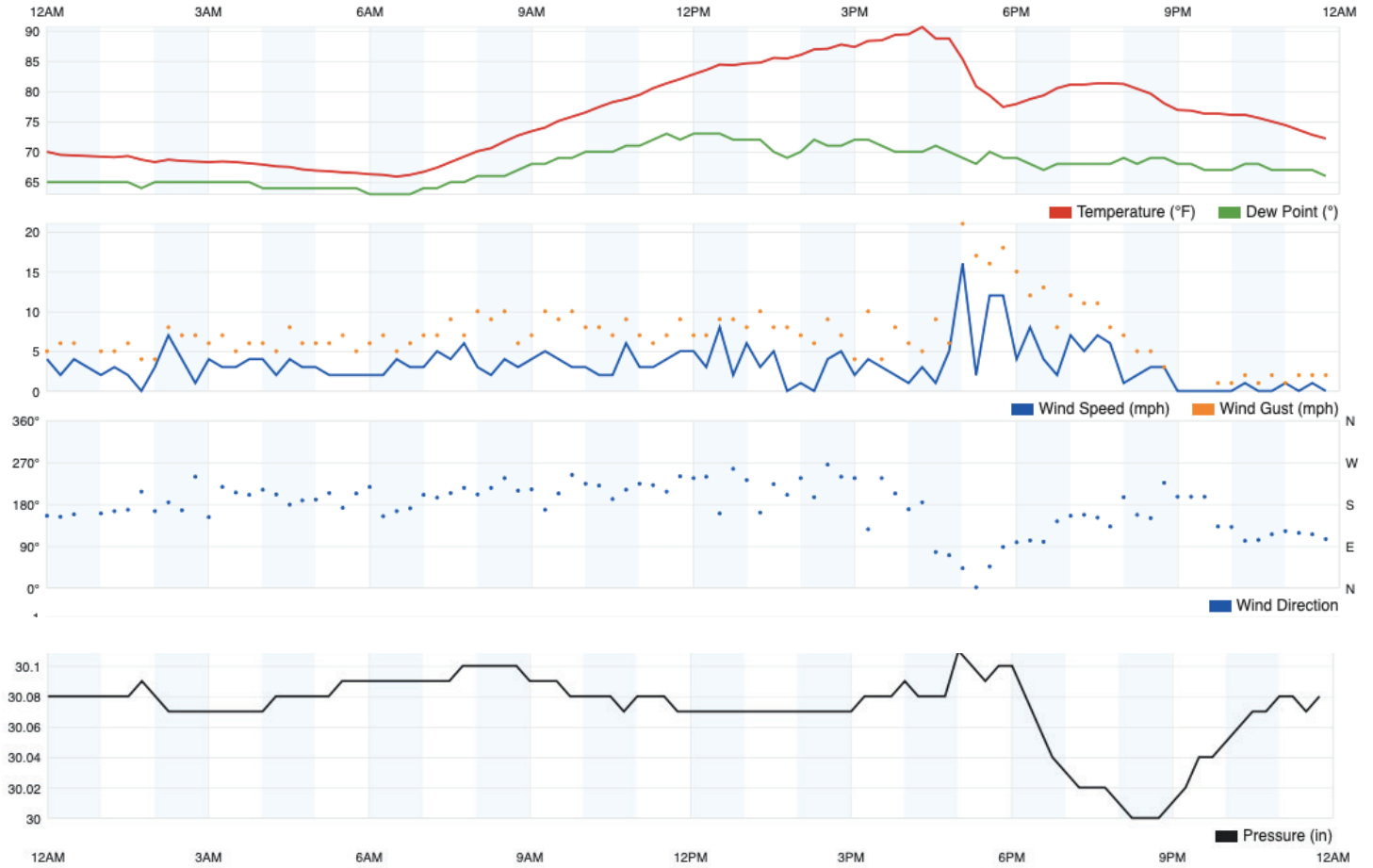
Needs intervention in implementing the requirements of IDEA

Needs substantial intervention in implementing the requirements of IDEA

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Hot

High: 92 °F

Tonight



Increasing
Clouds

Low: 69 °F

Wednesday



Hot

High: 93 °F

Wednesday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 70 °F

Thursday



Hot

High: 98 °F

Today

Highs in the 90s
Breezy West of the James



Tonight

Isolated Showers and Thunderstorms
Across north central SD



Hot and generally dry conditions are expected through mid week. However, an upper level disturbance may bring an isolated shower or thunderstorms to north central SD tonight. Southeast winds will become breezy today west of the James Valley.

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Today in Weather History

July 20, 1951: From the southeast residential section of Watertown, an estimated F2 tornado moved east, passing near Kranzburg and Goodwin. The storms destroyed one home and several barns.

July 20, 2002: A powerful severe thunderstorm moved over Rapid City and across the adjacent plains east of town. Downburst winds and the associated gust front caused damage along a nearly 30-mile long path. Extensive tree damage occurred throughout the eastern half of the city with countless trees and branches more than 24-inch diameter fell. Two roofs were torn off by the winds. Flying debris damaged numerous cars and buildings. The NWS office in downtown Rapid City measured an 80 mph wind gust, with meteorologists noting winds were sustained at 60 to 70 mph for 5 minutes. Ellsworth AFB wind equipment measured a 106 mph wind gust from the thunderstorm as it passed.

1915: A record high temperature of 115 degrees occurred in Yosemite Valley at the National Park Headquarters, California (around 4,000 feet elevation). This reading was the warmest day in a streak of 7 consecutive days of 110 degrees or higher at Yosemite Valley from the 19th through the 25th.

1930 - The temperature at Washington D.C. soared to an all-time record of 106 degrees. The next day Millsboro reached 110 degrees to set a record for the state of Delaware. July 1930 was one of the hottest and driest summers in the U.S., particularly in the Missouri Valley where severe drought conditions developed. Toward the end of the month state records were set for Kentucky with 114 degrees, and Mississippi with 115 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1934 - The temperature at Keokuk, IA, soared to 118 degrees to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1953 - Twenty-two inches of hail reportedly fell northeast of Dickinson, ND. (The Weather Channel)

1977: A flash flood hits Johnstown, Pennsylvania, on this day in 1977, killing 84 people and causing millions of dollars in damages. This flood came 88 years after the infamous Great Flood of 1889 that killed more than 2,000 people in Johnstown.

1986 - The temperature at Charleston, SC, hit 104 degrees for the second day in a row to tie their all-time record high. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather across Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 87 mph at Mosinee, WI, and strong thunderstorm winds capsized twenty-six boats on Grand Traverse Bay drowning two women. Thunderstorms produced nine inches of rain at Shakopee, MN, with 7.83 inches reported in six hours at Chaska, MN. Thunderstorms in north central Nebraska produced hail as large as golf balls in southwestern Cherry County, which accumulated to a depth of 12 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - The temperature at Redding, CA, soared to an all-time record high of 118 degrees. Showers and thunderstorms produced much needed rains from New England to southern Texas. Salem, IN, was deluged with 7.2 inches of rain resulting in flash flooding. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Showers and thunderstorms in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region soaked Wilmington, DE, with 2.28 inches of rain, pushing their total for the period May through July past the previous record of 22.43 inches. Heavy rain over that three month period virtually wiped out a 16.82 inch deficit which had been building since drought conditions began in 1985. Thunderstorms in central Indiana deluged Lebanon with 6.50 inches of rain in twelve hours, and thunderstorms over Florida produced wind gusts to 84 mph at Flagler Beach. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005: Hurricane Emily made landfall in northern Mexico. When the central pressure fell to 29.43 inches of mercury, and its sustained winds reached 160 mph on the 16th, Emily became the strongest hurricane ever to form before August, breaking a record set by Hurricane Dennis just six days before. It was also the earliest Category 5 hurricane ever recorded in the Atlantic basin, beating Hurricane Allen's old record by nearly three weeks.

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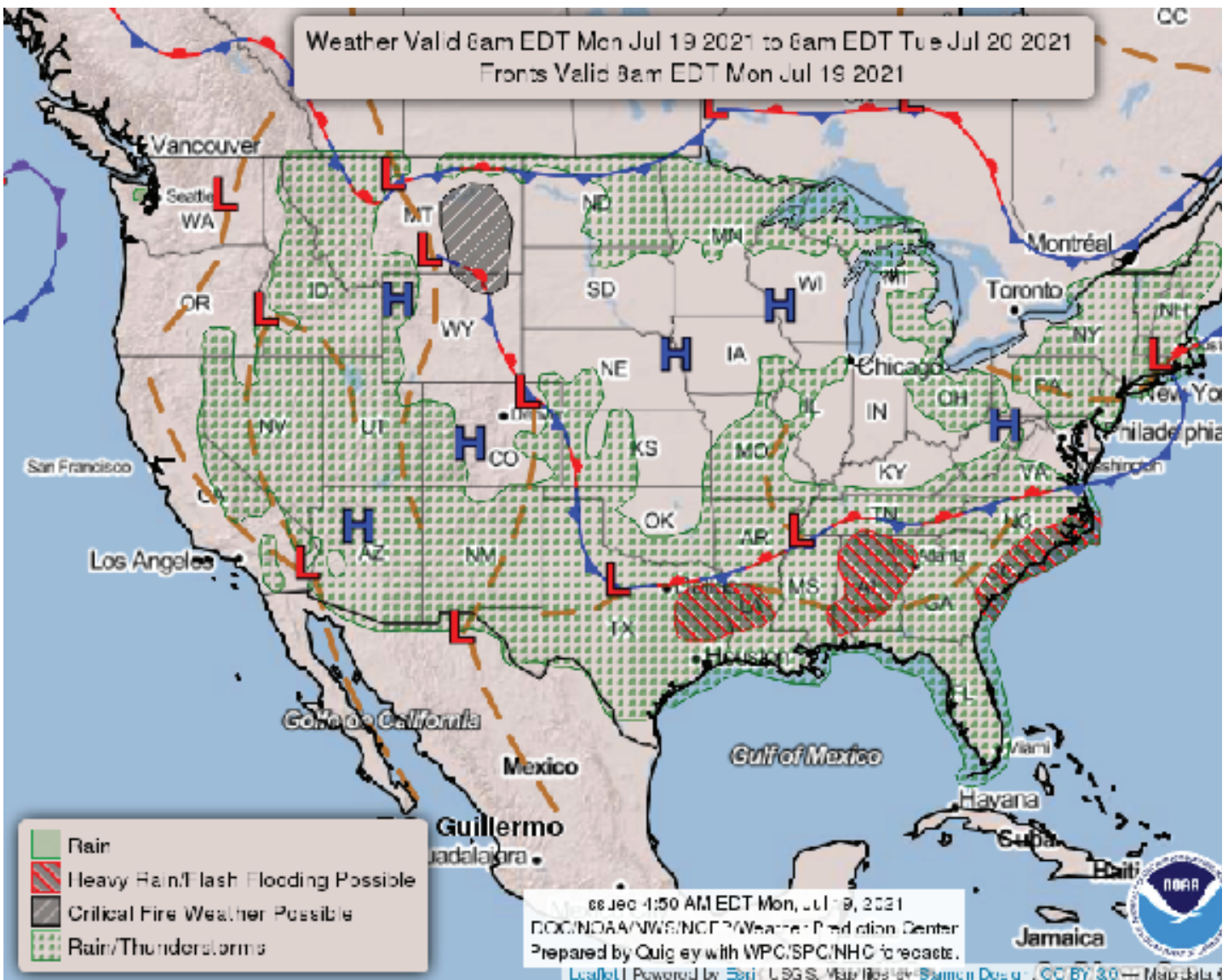
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 91 °F at 4:13 PM
Low Temp: 66 °F at 6:26 AM
Wind: 21 mph at 4:59 PM
Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 111° in 1934
Record Low: 43° in 1970
Average High: 85°F
Average Low: 60°F
Average Precip in July.: 2.09
Precip to date in July.: 1.73
Average Precip to date: 13.10
Precip Year to Date: 6.48
Sunset Tonight: 9:15 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:06 a.m.



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CAN GOD REALLY?

"Can God really clean up the mess in my life? Am I so important to Him that He would hear my voice above all the other voices that call on Him every day? Do I make a difference to Him when so many others seem to have more significant issues or important roles than I? Should I bother Him at all if I don't have much faith? Can God do a few miracles for me – insignificant me? If I don't have money to give, will He still hear me?"

We often hear of God's power but question whether or not He can do what He says He is able to do. Sometimes when we ask the question can God we do so with hope and other times with hopelessness, even resignation, wondering if He really is a can do God!

In Psalm 78:19 our writer makes an interesting statement: "They spoke against God" because they questioned His ability when the Israelites who were walking in the wilderness had no food. They even asked, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" They questioned God's ability to do something when they saw nothing. But God can do anything with nothing. Perhaps they forgot about Creation: "In the beginning God created" everything – and He did it from nothing. Nothing!

God has unlimited resources and power that exceed anything we can imagine. And we must never forget that it is combined with His unlimited love! So, when we add His resources to His power and mix in His love then add His wisdom with the plan He has laid out for each of us, it is not "CAN GOD?" – it is GOD CAN! Our God is a CAN DO GOD!

Prayer: Father, may we accept the fact that our prayers go unanswered because we lack faith in You or that we have abandoned You and Your teachings. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: They spoke against God; they said, "Can God really spread a table in the wilderness?" Psalm 78:19

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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

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News from the Associated Press

\$1 million bail for South Dakota man charged in 2013 death

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A judge set bond at \$1 million for a South Dakota man charged Monday with killing a woman whose decomposed body was found in the Black Hills in 2013.

Richard Melvin Schmitz, 53, was arrested at his home near Hill City without incident Friday morning for the death of 38-year-old Meshell Will, of Custer. Schmitz is charged with second degree murder.

Originally from Wisconsin, Will had been in South Dakota for about six months. She went missing in August 2013.

Judge Scott Bogue cited Schmitz's extensive criminal history as a factor for the high bail. His brushes with the law date back to the 1980s and includes grand theft and burglary, along with aggravated assault. Schmitz's defense attorney had asked for "a reasonable bond," the Rapid City Journal reported.

The Pennington County Sheriff's Office said in a statement that Schmitz has been a person of interest in the case for the past eight years.

New Haiti leader with international backing to take charge

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — A new prime minister supported by key international diplomats will take charge of Haiti, an official said Monday — a move that appeared aimed at averting a leadership struggle following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.

Ariel Henry, who was designated prime minister by Moïse before he was slain but never sworn in, will replace the country's interim prime minister, Haiti Elections Minister Mathias Pierre told The Associated Press.

It wasn't immediately clear how quickly Claude Joseph, who has been leading Haiti with the backing of police and the military since the July 7 assassination of Moïse, would step down.

"Negotiations are still in course," Pierre said, adding that Joseph would go back to being minister of foreign affairs. There was no immediate comment from Joseph.

In an audio recording, Henry referred to himself as prime minister and called for unity, saying he would soon announce the members of what he called a provisional consensus government to lead the country until elections are held.

"I present my compliments to the Haitian people who have shown political maturity in the face of what can be considered a coup. ... Our Haitian brothers gave peace a chance, while leaving the possibility that the truth could one day be restored," Henry said.

"Now it is up to all the national leaders to walk together in unity, towards the same goal, to show that they are responsible."

The political turnover followed a statement Saturday from a key group of international diplomats that appeared to snub Joseph as it called for the creation of "a consensual and inclusive government."

"To this end, it strongly encourages the designated Prime Minister Ariel Henry to continue the mission entrusted to him to form such a government," the statement from the Core Group said.

The Core Group is 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.

On Monday, the U.N. issued a statement calling on Joseph, Henry and other national stakeholders "to set aside differences and engage in constructive dialogue on ways to end the current impasse."

The U.N. added that Joseph and Henry made significant progress in the past week and that it supports dialogue to find "minimal consensus" for holding fair legislative and presidential elections.

Monique Clesca, a Haitian writer, activist and former U.N. official, said she doesn't anticipate any changes under Henry, whom she expects to carry on Moïse's legacy. But she warned Henry might be viewed as tainted because of the international backing that preceded his taking power.

"There is not only a perception, but the reality that he has been put there by the international commu-

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nity, and I think that's his burden to carry," she said.

"What we're calling for is for Haitians to really say this is unacceptable. We do not want the international community stating who ought to be in power and what ought to be done. It is up to us."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday that the Biden administration "welcomes reports that Haitian political actors are working together to determine a path forward in the country."

"We have been encouraging, for several days now, Haitian political actors to work together and find a political way forward," she said.

Earlier, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price had said the U.S. would continue to work with Joseph after noting he was the incumbent in the position and was serving as acting prime minister before the assassination.

On Monday, Price urged all political actors in Haiti as well as the civil society and private sector to work together in the interest of the people, adding that the U.S. is standing with them.

"We have always said, and we continue to believe, that the decision of who should lead Haiti belongs to the Haitian people," he said. "Political gridlock has taken a tremendous toll on the nation of Haiti, and it's vital for the country's leaders to finally come together to chart a united, inclusive path forward."

The Core Group statement was issued hours after Moïse's wife, Martine, arrived in Haiti on Saturday aboard a private jet clad in black and wearing a bulletproof vest after being released from a hospital in Miami. She has not issued a statement or spoken publicly since her return to Haiti as the government prepares for the July 23 funeral that will be held in the northern city of Cap-Haitien. Other events to honor Moïse are planned this week in the capital of Port-au-Prince ahead of the funeral.

Moïse designated Henry as prime minister shortly before he was killed, but he had not been sworn in. The neurosurgeon was previously minister of social affairs and interior minister. He has belonged to several political parties including Inite, which was founded by former President René Prével.

The upcoming change in leadership comes as authorities continue to investigate the July 7 attack at Moïse's private home with high-powered rifles that seriously wounded his wife.

Authorities say more than 20 suspects directly involved in the killing have been arrested. The majority of them are former Colombian soldiers, most of whom Colombian officials say were duped. Another three suspects were killed, with police still seeking additional ones, including an ex-Haitian rebel leader and a former Haitian senator.

Noem announces \$86 million budget surplus

STIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem announced Monday the state finished the last fiscal year with an \$86 million surplus.

Tax revenue hit a 30-year high, the Republican governor said, and finished \$62 million over what was estimated. The state also spent about \$24 million less than what was budgeted for the fiscal year that ended on June 30.

Noem credited the state's "respect for freedom and our continued emphasis on fiscal responsibility" for the financial windfall, though federal coronavirus relief funds sent both to taxpayers and state government also fueled the surplus. The state government has received over \$2.2 billion in federal COVID-19 relief funds — money that was pumped into businesses and used to cover state expenses tied to the pandemic.

The governor has pointed to the state's growing economy as evidence her mostly hands-off approach to the pandemic worked.

"Our low unemployment rate, strong labor force recovery, and terrific tourism numbers are generating historic revenues for the state," she said in a statement.

The \$86 million surplus was transferred into the state's budget reserves, as required by state law. The state's total reserves are now \$302 million.

Lawmakers approve rules for medical pot in public schools

STIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Department of Education succeeded Monday in its second

attempt to get legislators to approve rules for allowing medical marijuana in public schools.

The Board of Education struck language that would have made the rules apply to private schools after the Legislature's Rules Review Committee last month rejected its first proposal. The state government has been tasked with setting up a medical marijuana program under a law voters passed last year, but the program has seen a clunky rollout at times.

"These are new waters for South Dakota," said Republican Sen. Jean Hunhoff at Monday's committee meeting.

The new medical pot law gives the Department of Education until the start of the school year to implement rules that are substantively identical to Colorado's 2019 policy allowing medical pot in schools. The Colorado policy didn't distinguish between private and public schools, but an amendment was later added that made it clear the rules only applied to public schools.

The new rules will allow schools and school nurses to opt out of administering medical marijuana but will allow caregivers to enter schools to do so. Medical marijuana advocates have said that arrangement would place an unnecessary burden on the parents and caregivers of students who need medical marijuana for conditions such as epilepsy.

The rules also require the students to have a medical marijuana identification card — something that won't be available from South Dakota's government until November. However, the policy will allow schools to accept ID cards from other states or government entities.

Man found dead in Oglala, officer shoots armed individual

OGLALA, S.D. (AP) — A tribal officer shot and wounded an armed individual after responding to a domestic disturbance call on the Pine Ridge Reservation and finding a man dead, according to Oglala Sioux police.

Police said they received a call about 1:30 a.m. Saturday to a Highway 41 address in Oglala. The responding officer found a man who was deceased and another individual "brandishing a weapon."

The officer shot the person with the weapon, who was then taken into custody. The officer was not injured. No other details were provided.

The FBI is investigating.

Beaver hunting under the microscope in South Dakota

WATERTOWN, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks is weighing how to proceed on beaver hunting in the Black Hills and the state.

The idea for a hunting ban came up recently when the Game, Fish and Parks Commission discussed a proposal to create a year-round beaver hunting season across the state, with hunting only allowed in portions of the Black Hills not owned by the U.S. Forest Service from Nov. 1 to April 30.

"By creating one statewide beaver season (with the exception of the Black Hills) that is year-round, it simplifies this regulation and allows landowners in eastern South Dakota the ability to remove beavers that are causing damage," the proposal states.

Keith Fisk, the agency's program administrator, said he receives at least 500 beaver complaints on an annual basis, the Black Hills Pioneer reported.

"There are a number of landowners out there that would take advantage of this opportunity to remove some of those problem beavers whether it is them practicing that or someone they know willing to come and help them out," Fisk said.

But Commissioner Travis Bies said the Black Hills does not have problems with beavers, and the population has been greatly decreased.

"I grew up in the Black Hills all my life and have seen the beaver disappear out of the Black Hills," he said. "They created better water for our cattle. About 15-20 years ago I noticed the beavers were gone, so we had to refill the dams ourselves.

Bies called for a study of the beaver population, a suggestion that prompted the commission to table the proposal to its September meeting.

Haiti awaits new chief as official mourning starts for Moïse

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — While they await a new leader, Haitians are beginning a series of official ceremonies Tuesday to honor President Jovenel Moïse nearly two weeks after he was assassinated at home.

The ceremonies come as designated Prime Minister Ariel Henry prepared to replace interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph, who assumed leadership of Haiti with the backing of police and the military after the July 7 attack at Moïse's private home. Moïse was shot multiple times and his wife was seriously wounded.

Henry is scheduled to be sworn in on Tuesday afternoon after promising to form a provisional consensus government to lead Haiti until elections are held.

"We will need this unity to overcome the many challenges that beset us," Henry said. "Some have observed the latest events with amazement, others wonder with reason about the management of the country."

Henry said he has met with various unidentified actors as well as civil society and the private sector. "I intend to continue and deepen these discussions, because it is the only way to bring the Haitian family together," he said.

The government released the names of Henry's cabinet, with the ministers of justice, economy, finance, agriculture and others keeping their positions.

Haiti elections minister Mathias Pierre told The Associated Press on Monday that Joseph would step down and cede the position to Henry, who was chosen for the post by Moïse shortly before he was killed but had not been sworn in.

The change in leadership comes after a group of key international diplomats called on Henry to create a "consensual and inclusive government" in a statement issued Saturday that made no reference to Joseph. The Core Group is composed of ambassadors from Germany, Brazil, Canada, Spain, the U.S., France and the European Union as well as representatives from the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

Robert Fatton, a Haitian politics expert at the University of Virginia, said Joseph's departure was to be expected.

"Joseph's fate was sealed over the weekend," he said. "Everything that happens in Haiti has a powerful foreign component."

On Monday, the U.N. said that Joseph and Henry had made significant progress in the past week to end the impasse and that it supports dialogue to find "minimal consensus" for holding fair legislative and presidential elections.

Authorities have arrested more than 20 suspects for alleged direct links to the killing. The majority of them were former Colombian soldiers, many of whom officials say were duped.

Japanese PM Suga says world should see safe Olympics staged

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — The world needs to see that Japan can stage a safe Olympics, the country's prime minister told sports officials Tuesday ahead of the Tokyo Games.

Tens of thousands of athletes, officials, games staff and media are arriving in Japan amid a local state of emergency and widespread opposition from the general public.

Events start Wednesday — in softball and women's soccer — two days ahead of the formal opening ceremony of an Olympics already postponed a year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"The world is faced with great difficulties," Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told International Olympic Committee members in a closed-door meeting at a five-star hotel in Tokyo, adding "we can bring success to the delivery of the Games."

"Such fact has to be communicated from Japan to the rest of the world," Suga said through an interpreter. "We will protect the health and security of the Japanese public."

He acknowledged Japan's path through the pandemic toward the Olympics had gone "sometimes back-

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ward at times.”

“But vaccination has started and after a long tunnel an exit is now in our sight,” Suga said.

The prime minister’s office said Monday more than 21% of Japan’s 126 million population has been inoculated.

Health experts in Japan have questioned allowing so many international visitors for the games, which end on Aug. 8. There will be no local or foreign fans at events. The Paralympics will follow in late August.

Praising vaccine manufacturers for working on a dedicated Olympic rollout, IOC President Thomas Bach singled out Pfizer BioNTech for “a truly essential contribution.”

This cooperation meant “85% of Olympic Village residents and 100% of IOC members present here have been either vaccinated or are immune” to COVID-19, Bach said.

About 75 of the 101 IOC members were in the room for their first in-person meeting since January 2020. Their previous two meetings, including to re-elect Bach in March, were held remotely.

The IOC declined to say if any members who are not vaccinated had been asked to stay away. One member missing the meeting, Ryu Seung-min of South Korea, tested positive for COVID-19 after arriving on a flight Saturday.

Bach has been met with anti-Olympic chants from protesters on visits in Japan since arriving two weeks ago, including at a state welcome party with Suga on Sunday.

The IOC leader praised his hosts Tuesday, saying “billions of people around the world will follow and appreciate the Olympic Games.”

“They will admire the Japanese people for what they achieved,” Bach said, insisting the games will send a message of peace, solidarity and resilience.

Canceling the Olympics was never an option, Bach said, because “the IOC never abandons the athletes.”

Staging the games will also secure more than \$3 billion in revenue from broadcasters worldwide. It helps fund the Switzerland-based IOC, which shares hundreds of millions of dollars among the 206 national teams and also with governing bodies of Olympic sports.

Bach said the IOC is contributing \$1.7 billion to Tokyo organizers of the Olympics and the Paralympics.

IOC decisions taken Tuesday, rubber-stamping proposals sent from the Bach-chaired executive board:

— The sport of ski mountaineering was added to the program for the 2026 Winter Games in Milan and Cortina d’Ampezzo. It involves skiing and hiking up and down mountain terrain. Five medal events should be created in sprint and individual races for men and women, and a mixed gender relay.

— The Olympic motto “Faster Higher Stronger” was updated to include the word “Together.” The formal Latin motto will now be “Citius, Altius, Fortius — Communis.”

— The IOC formally recognized the governing bodies of six sports: lacrosse, cheerleading, kickboxing, muay Thai, sambo and ice stock sport.

— Spending by the IOC was \$55 million more than its revenue in 2020, when most income from the postponed Tokyo Olympics could not be declared. A “strong, solid” financial position was reported with the IOC’s fund balances — of assets exceeding liabilities — at almost \$2.5 billion.

Calls for outside help as extreme weather fuels Oregon fires

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The threat of thunderstorms and lightning has prompted officials in fire-ravaged Oregon to ask for help from outside the Pacific Northwest to prepare for additional blazes as many resources are already devoted to a massive fire in the state that has grown to a third the size of Rhode Island.

The 537-square-mile (1,391-square-kilometer) Bootleg Fire is burning 300 miles (483 kilometers) southeast of Portland in and around the Fremont-Winema National Forest, a vast expanse of old-growth forest, lakes and wildlife refuges. Evacuations and property losses have been minimal compared with much smaller blazes in densely populated areas of California.

But eyeing how the Bootleg Fire — fueled by extreme weather — keeps growing by miles each day, officials with the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest in southwest Oregon are asking for more outside

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crews to be ready should there be a surge in fire activity there.

"Although the lightning activity predicted for early this week is expected to occur east of us, we are prepared for the worst, and hoping for the best," Mike McCann, an assistant fire staff, said Monday in a statement released by the national forest.

The worry is that dry conditions, a drought and the recent record-breaking heat wave in the region have created tinderbox conditions, so resources like fire engines are being recruited from places like Arkansas, Nevada and Alaska.

Meanwhile, to the east, the Bootleg Fire's jaw-dropping size contrasted with its relatively small impact on people underscores the vastness of the American West and offers a reminder that Oregon, which is larger than Britain, is still a largely rural state, despite being known mostly for its largest city, Portland.

If the fire were in densely populated parts of California, "it would have destroyed thousands of homes by now," said James Johnston, a researcher with Oregon State University's College of Forestry who studies historical wildfires. "But it is burning in one of the more remote areas of the lower 48 states. It's not the Bay Area out there."

At least 2,000 homes have been evacuated at some point during the fire and another 5,000 threatened. At least 70 homes and more than 100 outbuildings have gone up in flames. Thick smoke chokes the area where residents and wildlife alike have already been dealing with months of drought and extreme heat. No one has died.

Pushed by strong winds from the southwest, the fire is spreading rapidly to the north and east, advancing toward an area that's increasingly remote.

Evacuation orders on the fire's southern edge, closer to more populous areas like Klamath Falls and Bly, have been lifted or relaxed as crews gain control. Now it's small, unincorporated communities like Paisley and Long Creek — both with fewer than 250 people — and scattered homesteads that are in the crosshairs.

But as big as the Bootleg Fire is, it's not the biggest Oregon has seen. The fire's size so far puts it fourth on the list of the state's largest blazes in modern times, including rangeland fires, and second on the list of infernos specifically burning in forest.

These megafires usually burn until the late fall or even early winter, when rain finally puts them out.

The largest forest fire in modern history was the Biscuit Fire, which torched nearly 780 square miles (2,000 square kilometers) in 2002 in the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest in southern Oregon and northern California.

The Bootleg Fire is now about 25% contained.

On Monday, flames forced the evacuation of a wildlife research station as firefighters had to retreat for the ninth consecutive day due to erratic and dangerous fire behavior. Sycan Marsh hosts thousands of migrating and nesting birds and is a key research station on wetland restoration in the upper reaches of the Klamath Basin.

The Bootleg Fire was one of many fires burning in a dozen states, most of them in the U.S. West. Sixteen large uncontained fires burned in Oregon and Washington state alone on Monday.

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

And in Northern California, authorities expanded evacuations on the Tamarack Fire in Alpine County in the Sierra Nevada to include the mountain town of Mesa Vista. That fire, which exploded over the weekend and forced the cancellation of an extreme bike ride, was 36 square miles (93 square kilometers) with no containment.

Thunderstorms expected to roll through Monday night could bring winds to fan the flames and lightning that could spark new ones, the National Weather Service said.

Biden wants spending to boost economy, but GOP to block vote

By JOSH BOAK and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said his infrastructure and families agenda must be passed to sustain the economic momentum of his first six months in office, aiming to set the tone for a crucial week of congressional negotiations on the two bills.

But a Wednesday deadline set by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer on the bipartisan infrastructure bill was in doubt as Republicans signaled they would block a procedural vote, for now, while details are still being worked out. Senators are wrangling over how to pay for the new spending in the \$1 trillion package of highway, water system and other public works projects.

At the same time, Democrats are developing the particulars of a separate bill that would invest a stunning \$3.5 trillion nationwide across Americans' lives — with support for families, education, climate resiliency and other priorities that they aim to ultimately pass with solely Democratic support. Democrats hope to show progress on that bill before lawmakers leave Washington for their recess in August.

The legislative maneuvering marks a major test of Biden's ability to deliver on a massive package of economic promises and reforms he made during his campaign. He's been putting public pressure on lawmakers with a series of speeches highlighting the strengthening economy while emphasizing the need for further investment to continue that growth and to bolster the middle class. Biden's top aides met with senators late Monday.

"What the best companies do — and what we as a country should do — is make smart, sustainable investments with appropriate financing," the president said Monday at the White House.

Calling his plans a "blue-collar blueprint for building an American economy back," Biden said, "This is the best strategy to create millions of jobs and lift up middle class families, grow wages and keep prices affordable for the long term."

The economy has come back to life as more Americans have gotten vaccinated and Biden's earlier \$1.9 trillion relief package has coursed through the country. Employers have added an average of nearly 543,000 jobs a month since January, with Federal Reserve officials anticipating overall economic growth of roughly 7% this year that would be the highest since 1984. Yet there is also uncertainty as employers say they're struggling to find workers at the current pay levels and inflation concerns have yet to fully abate.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell decried the "spending spree" as "the last thing American families need."

McConnell and outside groups including the conservative Americans for Prosperity encouraged Republicans to vote against proceeding to the bipartisan package until they have more details. "I think we need to see the bill before we decide whether or not to vote for it," McConnell told reporters at the Capitol.

The president is pushing for more than \$4 trillion in combined spending with the hopes of prolonging solid economic gains. Biden's \$3.5 trillion package focused on climate, schools and families will need support from all 50 Senate Democrats to clear a party line vote.

Key to Biden's message is that the growth is occurring as intended and helping the U.S. middle class. Yet much of it is expected to fade as the economy fully heals from the pandemic.

But the \$973 billion infrastructure deal Biden struck with a group of Republican and Democratic senators lacks a clear plan for how to pay for it as GOP lawmakers have backed away from tax compliance enforcement by the IRS.

Instead, senators in the bipartisan group are considering rolling back a Trump-era rule on pharmaceutical rebates that could bring in some \$170 billion to be used for infrastructure. No decisions have yet been made as senators huddled late Monday with administration officials on next steps.

Sen. Rob Portman of Ohio, a chief Republican negotiator, said they resolved half of the estimated two dozen unresolved issues after a marathon round of talks late Sunday with the White House.

"It's absurd to move forward with a vote on something that is not yet formulated," he said.

Over the weekend Republicans chafed at the prospect of a Wednesday vote, noting that major questions over how to pay for the spending still remain unanswered. The package needs 60 votes to defeat a GOP filibuster, a delaying tactic, and pass the Senate — which means at least 10 Republicans have to join all 50 Democrats in supporting it. With Republicans still expressing concerns over the package, the success

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of the Wednesday procedural vote remains in doubt.

"It's time to begin the debate," Schumer said Monday, setting up the votes.

Sen. Jon Tester of Montana, a key Democratic negotiator, said if Republicans block the vote with a filibuster "that's a problem. Hopefully, people will be smarter than that."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki dismissed questions Monday over the future of the bill and what the administration would do if Wednesday's vote is unsuccessful.

"Two days is a lifetime in Washington, so I don't think we're going to make predictions of the death of the infrastructure package," she told reporters.

Biden also used his Monday remarks to push back against Republican critics of his plans who argue massive federal investments in the economy will accelerate inflation.

Consumer prices climbed 5.4% for the year that ended in June, the highest annual increase since August 2008. Higher inflation can erode the wages of workers and ultimately hurt economic growth.

Biden said Monday that his proposed investments would help rebuild U.S. supply chains and ease pressures on U.S. production that some economists say have contributed to inflation.

"If we make prudent, multi-year investments in better roads, bridges, transit systems and high speed internet, a modern resilient electric grid, here's what will happen: It breaks up the bottlenecks in our economy," he said.

"These steps will enhance our productivity, raising wages without raising prices. That won't increase inflation, it'll take the pressure off of inflation," Biden added.

China rejects hacking charges, accuses US of cyberspying

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China on Tuesday rejected an accusation by Washington and its Western allies that Beijing is to blame for a hack of the Microsoft Exchange email system and complained Chinese entities are victims of damaging U.S. cyberattacks.

A foreign ministry spokesman demanded Washington drop charges announced Monday against four Chinese nationals accused of working with the Ministry of State Security to try to steal U.S. trade secrets, technology and disease research.

The announcement that the Biden administration and European allies formally blame Chinese government-linked hackers for ransomware attacks increased pressure over long-running complaints against Beijing but included no sanctions.

"The United States ganged up with its allies to make unwarranted accusations against Chinese cybersecurity," said the spokesman, Zhao Lijian. "This was made up out of thin air and confused right and wrong. It is purely a smear and suppression with political motives."

"China will never accept this," Zhao said, though he gave no indication of possible retaliation.

China is a leader in cyberwarfare research along with the United States and Russia, but Beijing denies accusations that Chinese hackers steal trade secrets and technology. Security experts say the military and security ministry also sponsor hackers outside the government.

On Monday, U.S. authorities said government-affiliated hackers targeted American and other victims with demands for millions of dollars. Officials alleged contract hackers associated with the MSS engaged in extortion schemes and theft for their own profit.

Microsoft Corp. blamed Chinese spies for the Microsoft Exchange attack that compromised tens of thousands of computers around the world. The British foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, on Monday called that "a reckless but familiar pattern of behavior."

Also Monday, the Justice Department announced charges against four Chinese nationals who prosecutors said worked with the MSS to target computers at companies, universities and government entities. The defendants are accused of targeting trade secrets, scientific technologies and infectious-disease research.

"China firmly opposes and combats any form of cyberattacks, and will not encourage, support or condone any cyberattacks," Zhao said.

Citing what he said was Chinese cybersecurity research, Zhao accused the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency of carrying out hacking attacks on China's aerospace research facilities, oil industry, internet companies and government agencies over an 11-year period.

Those attacks "severely compromised" national and economic security, Zhao said.

"China once again strongly demands that the United States and its allies stop cyber theft and attacks against China, stop throwing mud at China on cybersecurity issues and withdraw the so-called prosecution," he said. "China will take necessary measures to firmly safeguard China's cybersecurity and interests."

New chief selected for Capitol Police after 1/6 insurrection

By ERIC TUCKER, MICHAEL BALSAMO and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A police official who has run large departments in Maryland and Virginia has been selected as chief of the U.S. Capitol Police in the aftermath of the Jan. 6 insurrection, in which pro-Trump rioters stormed the building in a violent rage, disrupting the certification of Joe Biden's presidential win.

J. Thomas Manger, who most recently served for 15 years as chief in Montgomery County, Maryland, was picked for the position following an extensive search, according to four people briefed on the matter. The people were not authorized to discuss the selection process publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity.

The decision comes as the Capitol Police and other law enforcement agencies are struggling to determine the best way to secure the Capitol and what direction to take the 2,300-person force that guards the building and the lawmakers inside it and functions as mashup of a national security agency and local police department.

The department has asked for more funding for more officers and better riot gear. In the meantime, the massive fence that encircled the grounds was taken down in the past few weeks.

The Capitol Police Board, which includes the House and Senate sergeant at arms and the Architect of the Capitol, is charged with oversight of the police force and led the search.

Manger served as chief in Montgomery County, outside Washington, from 2004 to 2019. Before that, he led the Fairfax, Virginia, police department. Those jobs, as well as a leadership position in the Major Cities Chiefs Association, have made him a familiar face in Washington law enforcement circles and on Capitol Hill.

Acting Chief Yogananda Pittman was elevated to the role after the agency's top official, Steven Sund, was forced out a day after the riot.

Pittman, a longtime Capitol police officer, wasn't expected to get the job permanently. And her appointment did little to soothe the tumult inside the department or to quell concerns about failures of preparation and intelligence-sharing ahead of the insurrection.

She faced steep criticism from her own officers after they said she showed little to no leadership on the day of the insurrection. The union voted overwhelmingly to show no confidence in her.

As the invaders wielded metal pipes, planks of wood, stun guns and bear spray, the vastly outnumbered rank-and-file officers inside the building were left to fend for themselves without proper communication or strong guidance from supervisors. The officers weren't sure when they could use deadly force, had failed to properly lock down the building and could be heard making frantic radio calls for backup as they were shoved to the ground and beaten by rioters, with some left bloodied.

A new House committee is investigating the insurrection and the mistakes made by the Capitol Police and other law enforcement that allowed hundreds of Trump's supporters to break in. The panel announced Monday that four police officers, including two Capitol Police, will testify about their experiences that day at the committee's first hearing on July 27.

Seven people died during and after the rioting, including a woman who was shot and killed by police as she tried to break into the House chamber and three other Trump supporters who suffered medical emergencies. Two police officers died by suicide in the days that followed, and a third officer, Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, collapsed and later died after engaging with the protesters. A medical examiner

determined he died of natural causes.

Pittman had been in charge of intelligence leading up to the riot, which caught law enforcement badly off guard. She conceded to Congress that multiple levels of failures allowed pro-Trump rioters to storm the building but denied that law enforcement had failed to take the threat seriously, noting how Capitol Police several days before the riot had distributed an internal document warning that extremists were poised for violence.

Pittman became the first Black and female police chief in the department's nearly 200-year history after becoming one of the first two Black women promoted to captain. The department has long faced allegations of racism, notably in a 2001 class action lawsuit brought on behalf of more than 300 current and former officers who alleged they lost out on promotions and assignments to less-qualified officers and were harassed with racial epithets.

Afghan president slams Taliban; rockets target Kabul palace

By RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — At least three rockets hit near the presidential palace on Tuesday shortly before Afghan President Ashraf Ghani was to give an address to mark the major Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha.

There were no injuries and the rockets landed outside the heavily fortified palace grounds, said Mirwais Stanikzai, spokesman for the interior minister.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the rocket attack, but police quickly fanned out across the area. One car parked on a nearby street was completely destroyed; the police said it was used as launching pad for the rockets.

The palace is in the middle of a so-called Green Zone that is fortified with giant cement blast walls and barbed wire, and streets near the palace have long been closed off.

The barrage came as the U.S. and NATO complete their final withdrawal from Afghanistan. Many Afghans are worried whether their war-ravaged country will fall deeper into chaos and violence as foreign forces withdraw and the Taliban gain more territory on the ground, having captured several districts and key border crossings with neighboring countries over the past weeks.

The withdrawal is more than 95% complete and the final U.S. soldier will be gone by Aug. 31, President Joe Biden said in an address earlier this month.

"This Eid has been named after Afghan forces to honor their sacrifices and courage, especially in the last three months," Ghani said in his address to the nation following morning prayers for Eid al-Adha, or the "Feast of Sacrifice."

"The Taliban have no intention and willingness for peace" Ghani said. "We have proven that we have the intention, the willingness and have sacrificed for peace."

However, Afghan forces have complained about being left without reinforcements and supplies, often running low on food as the Taliban advanced. In many instances, Afghan troops surrendered rather than fight. Washington's watchdog monitoring U.S. spending in Afghanistan reported that troops are deeply demoralized and corruption is rampant. After their pullout, the U.S. and NATO are committed to spending \$4 billion annually on Afghan forces until 2024, the majority of that money coming from Washington.

Ghani said he deplored his government's decision to release 5,000 Taliban prisoners to get peace talks started last year as a "big mistake" that only strengthened the insurgents.

Yet Ghani has released other prisoners, including several sought by warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, with whom he signed a peace deal in 2017. Among those freed at Hekmatyar's request was Abdul Basir Salangi, who killed two U.S. military personnel in 2011 in Kabul.

Meanwhile, Abdullah Abdullah, the No. 2 official in the government, was inside the palace during the rocket attack on Tuesday, having returned on Monday from peace talks with the Taliban in Qatar. Those inside the palace, however, were far removed from where the rockets landed.

The two days of meetings in Doha — the highest level of negotiations between Kabul and the Taliban so far — aimed at jumpstarting stalled talks but ended with a promise of more high-level talks.

In his speech, Ghani also assailed neighboring Pakistan, which Kabul blames for harboring the Taliban leadership and providing a safe haven and assistance to the insurgents. In the most recent fighting in the Afghan border town of Spin Boldak, Taliban fighters were seen receiving treatment at a Pakistani hospital across the border in Chaman.

Pakistan is seen as key to peace in Afghanistan. The Taliban leadership is headquartered in Pakistan and Islamabad has used its leverage, which it claims is now waning, to press the Taliban to talk peace.

Pakistan has also been deeply critical of Kabul, saying it has allowed another militant group, the Pakistani Taliban — Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan — to find safety in Afghanistan from where they have launched a growing number of attacks targeting the Pakistan military.

“Pakistan does not want a Taliban regime in its homeland” but their media have been “campaigning for a Taliban regime in Afghanistan,” Ghani added.

The Eid al-Adha is the most important Islamic holiday, marking the willingness of the Prophet Ibrahim — Abraham to Christians and Jews — to sacrifice his son. During the holiday, which in most places lasts four days, Muslims slaughter sheep or cattle and distribute part of the meat to the poor.

Bezos riding own rocket on company's 1st flight with people

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

VAN HORN, Texas (AP) — Jeff Bezos is about to soar on his space travel company's first flight with people on board.

The founder of Blue Origin as well as Amazon on Tuesday will become the second billionaire to ride his own rocket. He'll launch from West Texas with his brother, an 18-year-old from the Netherlands and an 82-year-old female aviation pioneer from Texas — the youngest and oldest to ever hurtle off the planet.

Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket is set to blast off with its eclectic group of passengers on the 52nd anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing.

Bezos is aiming for an altitude of roughly 66 miles (106 kilometers), more than 10 miles (16 kilometers) higher than Richard Branson's ride on July 11.

The capsule is fully automated, so there's no need for trained staff on the quick up-and-down flight, expected to last just 10 minutes. Branson's Virgin Galactic rocket plane needs two pilots to operate.

Bezos' dream-come-true trip follows 15 successful test flights to space by New Shepard rockets since 2015, all of them unoccupied. If successful, Blue Origin plans two more passenger flights by year's end.

The company has yet to open ticket sales to the public and is filling upcoming flights with those who took part in last month's \$28 million charity auction for the fourth capsule seat. The mystery winner bowed out of Tuesday's launch because of a scheduling conflict. That opened up the slot for Oliver Daemen, a college-bound student from the Netherlands whose father was among the unsuccessful bidders.

Also flying: Bezos' younger brother Mark and Wally Funk, one of 13 female pilots who went through the same testing back in the early 1960s as NASA's Mercury astronauts, but failed to make the cut because they were women.

Not everyone in the remote, desert town of Van Horn was excited about the drama unfolding 25 miles (40 kilometers) to the north.

“It's a luxury that's going to be set aside for the wealthy,” said pizza shop owner Jesus Ramirez. He planned to watch the morning launch from his restaurant's patio with a cup of coffee.

Muslims mark Eid al-Adha holiday in pandemic's shadow

By MARIAM FAM Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Muslims around the world were observing Tuesday yet another major Islamic holiday in the shadow of the pandemic and amid growing concerns about the highly infectious delta variant of the coronavirus.

Eid al-Adha, or the “Feast of Sacrifice,” is typically marked by communal prayers, large social gatherings

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and, for many, slaughtering of livestock and giving meat to the needy. This year, the holiday comes as many countries battle the delta variant first identified in India, prompting some to impose new restrictions or issue appeals for people to avoid congregating and follow safety protocols.

The pandemic has already taken a toll for the second year on a sacred mainstay of Islam, the hajj, whose last days coincide with Eid al-Adha. Once drawing some 2.5 million Muslims from across the globe to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, the Islamic pilgrimage has been dramatically scaled back due to the virus.

This year, 60,000 vaccinated Saudi citizens or residents of Saudi Arabia have been allowed to perform the hajj, preventing Muslims from other countries from fulfilling the Islamic obligation.

Indonesia marked a grim Eid al-Adha amid a devastating new wave of coronavirus cases in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation. Large gatherings were banned and tougher travel restrictions imposed. Vice President Ma'ruf Amin, also an influential Islamic cleric, appealed to people to perform holiday prayers at home with their families.

"Don't do crowds," Amin said in televised remarks ahead of the start of the holiday. "Protecting oneself from the COVID-19 pandemic is obligatory."

The surge is believed to have been fueled by travel during another holiday — the Eid al-Fitr festival in May — and by the rapid spread of the delta variant.

In Malaysia, measures have been tightened after a sharp spike in infections despite a national lockdown since June 1 — people are banned from travelling back to their hometowns or crossing districts to celebrate. House visits and customary trips to graveyards are also banned.

Healthy worshippers are allowed to gather for prayers in mosques, with strict social distancing and no physical contact. Ritual animal sacrifice is limited to mosques and other approved areas.

Health Director-General Noor Hisham Abdullah has urged Malaysians not to "repeat irresponsible behavior," adding that travel and celebrations during Eid al-Fitr and another festival on the island of Borneo led to new clusters of cases.

"Let us not in the excitement of celebrating the Feast of Sacrifice cause us all to perish because of COVID-19," he said in a statement.

Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin urged Muslims to stay home. "I appeal to you all to be patient and abide by the rules because your sacrifice is a great jihad in Allah's sight and in our effort to save lives," he said in a televised speech on the eve of the festival.

The World Health Organization has reported that COVID-19 deaths had climbed after a period of decline. The reversal has been attributed to low vaccination rates, relaxed mask rules and other precautions, and the delta variant.

Lockdowns will severely curtail Eid al-Adha festivities in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia's two largest cities.

Sydney resident Jihad Dib, a New South Wales state government lawmaker, said the city's Muslims were sad but understood why they would be confined to their homes with no visitors allowed.

"It's going to be the first Eid in my life I don't hug and kiss my mum and dad," Dib told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

Melbourne Muslims face their second Eid al-Adha in lockdown in as many years. The sudden announcement of the Melbourne lockdown last week will also deal a huge financial blow to retailers who had stocked up on food ahead of what they thought would be usual Eid festivities.

Iran on Monday imposed a week-long lockdown on the capital, Tehran, and the surrounding region as the country struggles with another surge in the coronavirus pandemic, state media reported. The lockdown begins on Tuesday.

Not everyone is imposing new restrictions. In Bangladesh, authorities have allowed an eight-day pause in the country's strict lockdown for the holiday that health experts say could be dangerous.

In Egypt, Essam Shaban travelled to his southern hometown of Sohag to spend Eid al-Adha with his family. He said ahead of the start of the holiday that he planned to pray at a mosque there on Tuesday

while taking precautions such as bringing his own prayer rug and wearing a mask.

"We want this Eid to pass by peacefully without any infections," he said. "We must follow instructions."

Shaban had been looking forward to pitching in with his brothers to buy a buffalo to slaughter, going door-to-door to give some of the meat to the poor and to the traditional festive meal later in the day with his extended family.

"It's usually boisterous with laughter and bickering with the kids," he said. "It's great."

But others will be without loved ones.

In India, where Eid al-Adha starts Wednesday, Tahir Qureshi would always go with his father for prayers and then to visit family and friends. His father died in June after contracting the virus during a surge that devastated the country, and the thought of having to spend the holiday without him is heartbreaking.

"It will be difficult without him," he said.

India's Muslim scholars have been urging people to exercise restraint and adhere to health protocols. Some states have restricted large gatherings and are asking people to observe the holiday at home.

Meanwhile the pandemic's economic fallout, which threw millions of Indians into financial hardship, has many saying they cannot afford to buy sacrificial livestock.

In Indian-controlled Kashmir, a disputed, Muslim-majority region, businessman Ghulam Hassan Wani is among those cutting back.

"I used to sacrifice three or four sheep, but this year we can hardly afford one," Wani said.

In flood-hit German town, a priest struggles to give comfort

By FRANK JORDANS and BRAM JANSSEN Associated Press

AHRWEILER, Germany (AP) — The Rev. Joerg Meyrer steels himself before making his way through the stinking piles of mud-caked debris that permeate this once-beautiful town in Germany's wine-growing Ahr valley.

For the past five days, the 58-year-old Catholic priest has pulled on his galoshes and walked the streets to try to give comfort to his parishioners as they get on with the grim task of cleaning up what was destroyed by Wednesday's flash flood — and recovering the bodies of those who perished in it.

"It came over us like a tsunami," Meyrer recalls. "Bridges, houses, apartments, utility pipes — everything that actually constitutes this town, what it lives on, has been gone since that night."

Residents of Ahrweiler had been told to expect the Ahr River, a tributary of the Rhine, to crest at 7 meters (nearly 23 feet), but Meyrer said few comprehended what that would mean. The last serious flood in the area south of Bonn was more than a century ago.

Nearly 200 people were killed when heavy rainfall turned streams into raging torrents across parts of western Germany and Belgium, and officials put the death toll in Ahrweiler county alone at 110, making it the hardest hit region.

Meyrer, who expects that figure to rise significantly, said the victims came from all walks of life.

"Old people who died in bed because they couldn't get up or because they didn't hear it; young people who died minutes after helping others; people who died in their car because they wanted to drive it out when the flood wave surprised them."

Townsppeople recounted grim cases of delayed grief, as the realization began to sink in that those reported missing would not return.

Meyrer said he was called in when firefighters found the body of a woman he had known well.

"The husband knew his wife had been in the basement and he had to wait two days for her to be recovered," he said.

For now, many residents are focusing on the cleanup before dealing with the longer task of rebuilding.

"We need to start over," said Paddy Amanatidis, the owner of La Perla pizzeria, as she took a break from cleaning the rubble out of the restaurant.

"We fought our way through (the coronavirus pandemic) and the flood won't get us down either," she said, adding that the solidarity shown by neighbors and friends had helped to boost spirits.

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Meyrer believes that even for those lucky enough not to have lost loved ones, the enormous impact of the disaster has not fully hit them.

"When the first lot (of debris) has been cleared and people have nothing to do, then I think many will understand for the first time what they've lost and what that means," he said.

German officials have rejected allegations that they failed to properly warn people of the severity of the floods, but conceded that more lessons can be learned from the disaster. Experts say global warming may make such floods even more frequent.

Upriver in the village of Schuld, which was largely destroyed, Mayor Helmut Lussi said the scars would last a long time. "Our lives changed from one day to the next," he told German Chancellor Merkel, who visited on Sunday.

As for mourning the victims, Meyrer says that daunting task will require the help of clergy from across the town and beyond.

Aside from the sheer number of dead, authorities also must figure out where to bury them, because the local cemetery, too, was flooded, with hardly any tombstone left standing.

While the freshly renovated Gothic walls of the 13th century St. Lawrence Church remained miraculously untouched by the flooding, Meyrer plans to keep walking the streets for now, offering a helping hand, a sympathetic ear and a shoulder to cry on.

But even he is struggling, saying that prayer hasn't come easily in the days since the disaster struck.

"I don't have the words, the time, the peace," he said. "I can't do that right now."

"In the evening I try to say, 'Lord, somehow you have to take over now.' That's got to be good enough," he added.

Olympics finally to start, 1 year later and far from Tokyo

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (AP) — Skippy the yellow kangaroo with green paws was affixed to the first base dugout railing, watching the Australia Spirit become the first team to work out at Fukushima Azuma Baseball Stadium, seven weeks after they became first foreign athletes to arrive at the Olympics.

Coach Laing Harrow hit grounders and flies to his women starting at 9 a.m. Tuesday, exactly 24 hours before the eighth-ranked Aussies step to the plate when host Japan, the No. 2-ranked softball team, throws the very first pitch of the very first event of the pandemic-delayed Olympics.

The Games of the 32nd Olympiad were to have started last July 22 but were pushed back by the coronavirus pandemic. Despite many in Japan questioning whether it is wise with the virus still raging in the country, the International Olympic Committee is pushing ahead.

This ballpark, located about 150 miles north of Tokyo and similar to a big league spring training camp, has only several handfuls of the 11,000 athletes who are converging on the Tokyo Games. The stadium, 42 miles northwest of the location of the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, will host the first two days of the softball tournament and the opening day of the baseball event on July 28, with the remainder at the home of the Central League's Yokohama DeNA BayStars, a big ballpark 17 miles from the capital.

In their bright yellow jerseys, the Aussies were excited to be about to get underway.

"It was disappointing for the girls, obviously, being postponed for a year," Harrow said. "Some of them would have had plans from after August 2020. And, sure, it wasn't in their plans to continue to be in the gym every day and training every day. But overall, the girls have really handled that well. And I think one thing we're very good at is being adaptable."

The top-ranked United States, seeking to regain the gold medal it lost when it was upset by Japan 3-1 in the 2008 final in Beijing, opens against No. 9 Italy in the second game of a tripleheader that ends with No. 5 Mexico against third-ranked Canada.

Host Japan took batting practice next on a broiling day with 95-degree heat and high humidity, followed by Italy, the United States, Mexico and Canada.

A 15-woman U.S. roster includes a pair of veterans: 38-year-old left-hander Cat Osterman, the last

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holdover from the 2004 gold medal-winning team, and 35-year-old left-hander Monica Abbott, who joined Osteman on the 2008 team.

Outfielder Janie Reed is the wife of Los Angeles Dodgers right-hander Jake Reed, who made his big league debut July 6, had six appearances and was optioned Monday to Triple-A Oklahoma City.

"The aspect of having 16 months, 17 months now since the decision to delay the Olympics has probably caused some environmental things to happen," U.S. coach Ken Eriksen said. "Number one, the natural order of aging another year for some of the players as far as either enhanced, or maybe it has brought in some consternation, especially emotionally."

The American team trained in the U.S. through June 20 and started in Japan on July 5 in Iwakuni, 525 miles southwest of Tokyo.

Canada's team dispersed last March, didn't gather again until January and landed in Japan on July 6.

"We relied on what many people did, just Zoom calls and just virtual communication and trying to stay connected, but fortunately this time gave way to a lot more individual preparation and a lot of learning and a lot of people pursuing knowledge and just continuing to perfect their craft," said Canada outfielder Victoria Hayward, who trains at Proswings in Longwood, Florida, to take advantage of better weather. "So we feel very fortunate that we had a little bit of extra time to sharpen our axes and to work together and then in 2021 we've been able to be together for a majority of the year unbroken."

Nordstrom pivots as shopper habits change during pandemic

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

Like many of its peers, venerable department store chain Nordstrom is having a tough time keeping pace with customer demand for new clothes because of supply issues.

That will be an even bigger challenge heading into the full swing of its anniversary sale, a tradition since the 1960s. Last year, customers stayed away because there was no reason to buy dressy clothes during a pandemic.

But Nordstrom is framing this year's event as an opportunity for shoppers to reinvent themselves as they come out of their homes. Amid product delays, the retailer says it developed a back-order feature on its website for customers who want to take advantage of the sale but find the item not in stock.

Jamie Nordstrom, president of Nordstrom stores and great-grandson of company founder John W. Nordstrom, recently spoke with The Associated Press at its Manhattan store to share some thoughts about changing shopper habits, shipping delays and why the Seattle-based Nordstrom plans to pack up masks soon. The interview has been edited for clarity and length.

Q. What kind of delays in merchandise shipments are you seeing?

A. Anywhere from a couple of days to a month. And you don't really always know exactly what's causing it. Is it the port in Asia? Is it the port at Long Beach where ships anchored out there can't get offloaded. We're retailers. We're focused on serving customers. We've got a great team that's focused on the inbound supply chain. And whether it's a few days or a couple of weeks, we're ready to roll with the punches on that.

Q. Anything left of the COVID-19 safety measures?

A. In most cities and markets we do business in, we are able to do the full makeover in our beauty departments and in our spas. That was probably one of the last things that we're able to unlock. But we want customers to know — and it's been this way for quite a while now — that when they come to Nordstrom store, they're getting the full experience. It's not a watered-down COVID version of Nordstrom.

Q. What's the customer traffic like?

A. It has been very different across the regions. It started in the South — South Florida, Texas — over the last several months. It's the states that dropped the restrictions first is where traffic started to build. And then as you moved North and West, as states dropped restrictions, we saw that traffic come back pretty quickly. And so we're encouraged by the path that we're on and the pace that customers are coming back in.

Q. What makes the anniversary sale extra important this year?

A. More than anything, it's a wardrobe refresh. People have discovered comfort. They don't want to sacrifice style. There's a big demand out there for people to really go through their closets and kind of reinvent how they want to look over the next couple of seasons.

Q. Which trends from the pandemic will remain and how are you reacting?

A. So casual, athleisure, denim. We are scrambling to get after what the new suit is. It may not be the same suit that it was. It's a sport coat and it's a pair of jeans. It's an interesting time to try and react to very quickly changing customer needs.

Q. What's not coming back?

A. Maybe masks. We've been selling a lot of masks the last year and a half. We're not selling a whole lot right now, which is a good thing. And so I think maybe we'll pack those masks away, and hopefully we'll never have to bring them out again.

Research: India's deaths during pandemic 10X official toll

By SHEIKH SAALIQ and KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's excess deaths during the pandemic could be a staggering 10 times the official COVID-19 toll, likely making it modern India's worst human tragedy, according to the most comprehensive research yet on the ravages of the virus in the south Asian country.

Most experts believe India's official toll of more than 414,000 dead is a vast undercount, but the government has dismissed those concerns as exaggerated and misleading.

The report released Tuesday estimated excess deaths — the gap between those recorded and those that would have been expected — to be between 3 million to 4.7 million between January 2020 and June 2021. It said an accurate figure may "prove elusive" but the true death toll "is likely to be an order of magnitude greater than the official count."

The report, published by Arvind Subramanian, the Indian government's former chief economic adviser, and two other researchers at the Center for Global Development and Harvard University, said the count could have missed deaths occurring in overwhelmed hospitals or while health care was delayed or disrupted, especially during the devastating peak surge earlier this year.

"True deaths are likely to be in the several millions not hundreds of thousands, making this arguably India's worst human tragedy since Partition and independence," the report said.

The Partition of the British-ruled Indian subcontinent into independent India and Pakistan in 1947 led to the killing of up to 1 million people as gangs of Hindus and Muslims slaughtered each other.

The report on India's virus toll used three calculation methods: data from the civil registration system that records births and deaths across seven states, blood tests showing the prevalence of the virus in India alongside global COVID-19 fatality rates, and an economic survey of nearly 900,000 people done thrice a year.

Researchers cautioned that each method had weaknesses, such as the economic survey omitting the causes of death.

Instead, researchers looked at deaths from all causes and compared that data to mortality in previous years — a method widely considered an accurate metric.

Researchers also cautioned that virus prevalence and COVID-19 deaths in the seven states they studied may not translate to all of India, since the virus could have spread worse in urban versus rural states and since health care quality varies greatly around India.

And while other nations are believed to have undercounted deaths in the pandemic, India is believed to have a greater gap due to it having the world's second highest population of 1.4 billion and its situation is complicated because not all deaths were recorded even before the pandemic.

Dr. Jacob John, who studies viruses at the Christian Medical College at Vellore in southern India, reviewed the report for The Associated Press and said it underscores the devastating impact COVID-19 had on the country's under-prepared health system.

"This analysis reiterates the observations of other fearless investigative journalists that have highlighted

the massive undercounting of deaths," Jacob said.

The report also estimated that nearly 2 million Indians died during the first surge in infections last year and said not "grasping the scale of the tragedy in real time" may have "bred collective complacency that led to the horrors" of the surge earlier this year.

Over the last few months, some Indian states have increased their COVID-19 death toll after finding thousands of previously unreported cases, raising concerns that many more fatalities were not officially recorded.

Several Indian journalists have also published higher numbers from some states using government data. Scientists say this new information is helping them better understand how COVID-19 spread in India.

Murad Banaji, who studies mathematics at Middlesex University and has been looking at India's COVID-19 mortality figures, said the recent data has confirmed some of the suspicions about undercounting. Banaji said the new data also shows the virus wasn't restricted to urban centers, as contemporary reports had indicated, but that India's villages were also badly impacted.

"A question we should ask is if some of those deaths were avoidable," he said.

Afghan war's end quiets chaplain's litany of funeral prayers

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del. (AP) — This is the place where widows wailed, where mothers buckled to the tarmac in grief and where children lifted their teddy bears to see daddy carried off in a flag-covered box.

This is where presidents stood and generals saluted because this is the place where the price of the war in Afghanistan was made plain.

This is the place where Chaplain David Sparks saw it all. This is the place he found his calling.

"This," the minister says, "is holy ground."

The end of the war is sobering for those who have tended to the battle's dead, who unzipped their body bags, dressed them in uniform one last time and clutched their bereft families.

Virtually all of the Afghan war's dead arrived back on American soil here at Dover Air Force Base. Seeing to those remains is such trying work that many do it for just six months. But Sparks was here when the war was launched and the first casualties arrived, through waves of bloodshed, and now, two decades years later.

In the belly of C-17s carrying the fallen, his voice quivered in prayer, and in the autopsy suite, he smelled the stench of death. He watched a father reaching for his dead son, repeatedly bellowing the Marine's name, and he heard little boys weep. In anger, families cursed him, and in gratitude, they held him tight.

After two decades of it, two decades of decimated bodies returned home, of survivors so haunted they turned to a bottle or their own gun, of folded flags and mournful trumpets and torn families, it's finally ending. America's longest war is nearly over. And Sparks will walk away, left with the emotional remains.

"My heart has been torn out so many times," the 74-year-old says, "I can hardly count."

Dover Air Force Base has housed a mortuary since 1955, when airmen first received the dead in a pair of Quonset huts. In the years since, it has seen victims of base shootings, aircraft crashes, terror attacks and space shuttle disasters. More than 20,000 of the Vietnam War's dead passed through here.

As if its history alone didn't make Dover synonymous with sacrifice, the base is teeming with reminders.

At a uniform shop, posthumously awarded medals are polished to a high shine and positioned on jackets with a ruler so a slain servicemember can be dressed perfectly one last time.

In a building reserved for the personal possessions of the dead, workers inventory every belonging of a troop, from love letters to stashes of Sour Patch Kids to ultrasounds of a baby they'd never meet.

And in a waiting area for relatives, copies of "When You Become a Single Parent After a Loss" are lined on a bookcase and a blackboard in a play area has a child's drawing of a family with the letters "RIP" hovering overhead.

Precision dictates everything, down to the V-formation of Yoo-Hoos in a Subzero and flawless stacks of Hershey's Miniatures in a candy dish at the base's lodging for bereaved families.

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"We want to make sure everything is done to perfection," says Army Sgt. 1st Class Nicole McMinamin, who runs the uniform shop. "They put their life on the line for this country."

Sparks arrived on base in 1980 as a chaplain in the Air Force Reserves and largely was tasked with the spiritual needs of the 436th Airlift Wing, organizing Sunday school and seminars, talking through service-members' problems at home, attending events, and otherwise becoming a familiar face while juggling his full-time job as pastor of a small Nazarene church.

By the time he'd been at it for 21 years, he'd risen to lieutenant colonel and was starting to think about his military retirement. Then Sept. 11, 2001, arrived. He was called to active duty and assigned to the mortuary, where the Pentagon's dead were being brought, and where he was to be a source of solace for those charged with the somber task of identifying, autopsying and preparing the dead.

Weeks turned to months, one war turned to two, and by the time Sparks submitted his resignation from pastoring a third time, the church board accepted. He found himself with a life entwined with death.

He'd don a white Tyvek suit and draw a black cross on the breast, standing by as x-ray technicians, dentists and medical examiners worked on remains. If they needed help moving a body, he'd pitch in, but mostly he talked with workers about their cat or their crazy ex-girlfriend or anything that would get their mind off the horror laid before them on a gurney.

"Normal conversation," he says, "in an abnormal venue."

At the height of the war, the pace at the mortuary could be staggering. The staff raced to keep up as remains arrived almost daily. Chaplains, in turn, were swamped as the work took its toll on the staff.

"You couldn't really grasp it. It was a firehose," says Electa Wright, a former Air Force reservist who is now a civilian mortuary worker. "You had to learn how to cope with that amount of death."

Though Sparks had rarely spent time at the mortuary before 9/11, he found he was unwittingly prepared. As a seminarian, he volunteered as a pallbearer, and as a young minister, he shadowed a mortician friend at work. Dying congregants kept him in and out of hospices and hospitals for years.

He was able to shift his focus from what lay before him in the morgue, a scene that was often jarring.

"All we receive may be a hand or a leg," says Air Force Col. Alice Briones, a former combat medic who went on to become a forensic pathologist and now runs the military's medical examiner system. "But with every remain, whether it's a fingernail, a hand or the whole torso, it's the same dignity, honor and respect."

Sparks' office is off an atrium that houses a koi pond and is crowned by a curved glass roof that mimics the huts of the base's first mortuary. Red Sox paraphernalia and bereavement books line his desk and his computer is a repository for the prayers he slid into the acetate sleeves of a small photo album and read aboard or beside the plane when remains arrived, covered by flags, in aluminum crates.

The military calls the movement of remains, from planes onto grey Ford cargo vans with the silhouette of saluting servicemembers painted on the back, "dignified transfers." Aside from the quiet commands of seven-member honor guards who carry the boxes, the short prayers of the chaplain typically are the only words spoken during the ritual, and feeling the weight of such a responsibility, Sparks wrote a new one for each of the more than 400 times he was called to that duty.

He saves them in Word files named for something defining about the day. "One Suicide May 2005" references loved ones of the soldier "whose confusion is overwhelming and whose sorrow is deeper than we can begin to imagine." "Christmas Eve 2004" notes the irreparable imprint left on the family of the Marines "for whom Christmas future will always bring back the awful memory." "40 Transfer Cases (Jan 05)," marvels at the enormity of what the victims gave their country, calling it "the price of freedom."

"Where do we find such men and women who prize liberty and freedom over the risk to their lives, and who knowing the price they might have to pay, are willing to volunteer for the mission, put on the uniform and serve in harm's way?" he prayed that day. "We look around and see them everywhere."

After the Afghan war's deadliest single incident, when a transport helicopter carrying 30 Americans and eight Afghans was shot down in 2011, their bodies arrived at Dover. As Sparks climbed the ramp of the plane, his eyes welled at the sea of flags, and as the honor guards broke their at-attention stance, they shifted their gaze downward to cue the start of his prayer. He opened his mouth but nothing came out.

Seconds felt like minutes as he blinked away tears, took a deep breath and coaxed his voice to emerge.

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"It's easy for most of us to go about our day and do our job and put the pegs in the holes and not think, 'How am I affecting the lives of the people around me,'" Sparks says. "When I'm staring at a flag-draped transfer case of someone who has given their life, it's a good opportunity to think if we can do better."

He's repeated the routine too many times, though, and the memories run together in his mind. The shell-shocked spouse, the inconsolable parent, all those flag-draped crates. He no longer recalls the first time he stood before a soldier's corpse much less the stories of each of their lives.

"The movements and the prayer can become routine. And when I discover that I don't really like it," he says.

At the start of the war, Sparks' attention was almost exclusively on the mortuary staff. But a 2009 policy change offered troops' next of kin the opportunity to travel to dignified transfers at government expense, bringing a surge of families to Dover and a second congregation to Sparks.

As a pastor, he was used to relationships with churchgoers that continued for years. Here, so many families come before him that he knows he can't keep up contact forever. He centers himself before meeting them, listening to jazz and reminding himself he can only be with them for part of their journey.

"They may not remember my name, probably don't," he says, "but I know that I had an impact."

Some families seem to sink into a catatonia that he knows means he should give them space. Others come clutching photos of the lost or otherwise tip Sparks off that his conversation might help.

"Tell me about your love story," he'll ask a spouse. "What did you call him?" he'll ask a parent.

Sometimes, he'll find a child hasn't been told why they're there. Others pose wrenching questions, like a boy who asked the minister who would play catch with him now that his father was gone.

"We don't talk about closure anymore," he says. "That's always going to be with you."

The work can bring some of the steeliest to crumble. He's seen drivers who transported families of the dead bawling and embalmers who reached their breaking point and found a new profession. A handful of times over the years, a mortuary staffer has died by suicide or suffered through an attempt.

"You can't focus on the horror," he says. "You can't focus on that all of the time and survive."

Images of the most gruesome remains are still in his mind and dreams of dying soldiers have stirred him. He insists he's not haunted by the visions and says his counselor tells him he's healthily processing it.

Sparks never expected to be here this long. On 9/11, he thought he'd be deployed a month. Even once he resigned his church post, he wasn't sure this is something he'd be doing for years.

Now, he's long past the military's mandatory retirement age. He submitted his papers and traded his battle fatigues for business casual years ago and was promptly hired back to the job as a civilian.

This year is his last. He hasn't set a retirement date yet but thinks either the 20th anniversary of 9/11 or his 75th birthday, on Nov. 28, would make meaningful last days in a place that's come to define him.

"It just feels like I've been here forever," he says.

The frenzy of the war's darkest days has now passed. The last of 2,312 U.S. military deaths may already have been recorded in the Afghan war. American bases in Afghanistan have emptied out. Troops are heading home.

Today, the transfer vans are idle in the loading dock; the gurneys are unused inside. On a file cabinet outside the autopsy room, a sign says "Make Good From the Bad," and through the door, the 10 bays are empty. There are no families to host, no uniforms to prepare, no prayers to write.

Sparks doesn't look back in sadness at his years here. As he walked with the grieving and stood with the dead, he found constant reminders of hope.

"It's in those moments," he says, "that the presence of God is most real to me."

Leftist teacher, political novice, is Peru's president-elect

By FRANKLIN BRICEÑO and REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — A teacher in one of the poorest communities in the Andes who had never held office is now Peru's president-elect after officials in the South American country declared him the winner of a runoff election held last month.

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Leftist Pedro Castillo catapulted from unknown to president-elect with the support of the country's poor and rural citizens, many of whom identify with the struggles the teacher has faced. Castillo was officially declared winner Monday after the country's electoral count became the longest in 40 years as his opponents fought the results.

Castillo received 44,000 more votes than right-wing politician Keiko Fujimori in the June 6 runoff. This is the third presidential election defeat for the daughter of imprisoned former President Alberto Fujimori.

"Let's not put the obstacles to move this country forward," Castillo asked his opponent in his first remarks in front of hundreds of followers in Lima.

Wielding a pencil the size of a cane, symbol of his Peru Libre party, Castillo popularized the phrase "No more poor in a rich country." The economy of Peru, the world's second-largest copper producer, has been crushed by the coronavirus pandemic, increasing the poverty level to almost one-third of the population and eliminating the gains of a decade.

The shortfalls of Peru's public health services have contributed to the country's poor pandemic outcomes, leaving it with the highest global per capita death rate. Castillo has promised to use the revenues from the mining sector to improve public services, including education and health, whose inadequacies were highlighted by the pandemic.

"Those who do not have a car should have at least one bicycle," Castillo, 51, told The Associated Press in mid-April at his adobe house in Anguía, Peru's third poorest district.

Since surprising Peruvians and observers by advancing to the presidential runoff election, Castillo has softened his first proposals on nationalizing multinational mining and natural gas companies. Instead, his campaign has said he is considering raising taxes on profits due to high copper prices, which exceed \$10,000 per ton.

Historians say he is the first peasant to become president of Peru, where until now, Indigenous people almost always have received the worst of the deficient public services even though the nation boasted of being the economic star of Latin America in the first two decades of the century.

"There are no cases of a person unrelated to the professional, military or economic elites who reaches the presidency," Cecilia Méndez, a Peruvian historian and professor at the University of California-Santa Barbara, told a radio station.

Hundreds of Peruvians from various regions camped out for more than a month in front of the Electoral Tribunal in Lima, Peru's capital, to await Castillo's proclamation. Many do not belong to Castillo's party, but they trust the professor because "he will not be like the other politicians who have not kept their promises and do not defend the poor," said Maruja Inquilla, an environmental activist who arrived from a town near Titicaca, the mythical lake of the Incas.

Castillo's meteoric rise from unknown to president elect has divided the Andean nation deeply.

Author Mario Vargas Llosa, a holder of a Nobel Prize for literature, has said Castillo "represents the disappearance of democracy and freedom in Peru." Meanwhile, retired soldiers sent a letter to the commander of the armed forces asking him not to respect Castillo's victory.

Fujimori, who ran with the support of the business elites, said Monday that she will accept Castillo's victory, after accusing him for a month of electoral fraud without offering any evidence. The accusation delayed his appointment as president-elect as she asked electoral authorities to annul thousands of votes, many in Indigenous and poor communities in the Andes.

The United States, European Union and 14 electoral missions determined that the voting was fair. The U.S. called the election a "model of democracy" for the region.

Steven Levitsky, a political scientist at Harvard University, told a radio station that Castillo is arriving to the presidency "very weak," and in some sense in a "very similar" position to Salvador Allende when he came to power in Chile in 1970 and to Joao Goulart, who became president of Brazil in 1962.

"He has almost the entire establishment of Lima against him," said Levitsky, an expert on Latin American politics.

He added that if Castillo tried to change the constitution of Peru — enacted in 1993 during the tenure

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of Alberto Fujimori — “without building a consensus, (without) alliances with center games, it would be very dangerous because it would be a justification for a coup.”

The president-elect worked as an elementary school teacher for the last 25 years in his native San Luis de Puna, a remote village in Cajamarca, a northern region. He campaigned wearing rubber sandals and a wide-brimmed hat, like the peasants in his community, where 40% of children are chronically malnourished.

In 2017, he led the largest teacher strike in 30 years in search of better pay and, although he did not achieve substantial improvements, he sat down to talk with Cabinet ministers, legislators and bureaucrats.

Over the past two decades, Peruvians have seen that the previous political experience and university degrees of their five former presidents did not help fight corruption. All former Peruvian presidents who governed since 1985 have been ensnared in corruption allegations, some imprisoned or arrested in their mansions. One died by suicide before police could take him into custody. The South American country cycled through three presidents last November.

Castillo recalled that the first turn in his life occurred one night as a child when his teacher persuaded his father to allow him to finish his primary education at a school two hours from home. It happened while both adults chewed coca leaves, an Andean custom to reduce fatigue.

“He suffered a lot in his childhood,” his wife, teacher Lilia Paredes, told AP while doing dishes at home. The couple has two children.

He got used to long walks. He would arrive at the classroom with his peasant sandals, with a woolen satchel on his shoulder, a notebook and his lunch, which consisted of sweet potatoes or tamales that cooled with the hours.

Castillo said his life was marked by the work he did as a child with his eight siblings, but also by the memory of the treatment that his illiterate parents received from the owner of the land where they lived. He cried when he remembered that if the rent was not paid, the landowner kept the best crops.

“You kept looking at what you had sown, you clutched your stomach, and I will not forget that, I will not forgive it either,” he said.

Indonesian Muslims mark grim Eid amid devastating virus wave

By NINIEK KARMINI Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Muslims across Indonesia marked a grim Eid al-Adha festival for a second year Tuesday as the country struggles to cope with a devastating new wave of coronavirus cases and the government has banned large gatherings and toughened travel restrictions.

Indonesia is now Asia’s COVID-19 hot spot with the most confirmed daily cases, as infections and deaths have surged over the past three weeks and India’s massive outbreak has waned.

Most of Indonesia’s cases are on the densely populated island of Java, where more than half of the country’s 270 million people live. Authorities in the world’s most populous Muslim-majority nation have banned many of the crowd-attracting activities that are usually part of Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice that marks the end of the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca.

Authorities allowed prayers at local mosques in low-risk areas, but elsewhere houses of worship had no congregations, including Jakarta’s Istiqlal Grand Mosque, the largest in Southeast Asia.

Officials also banned the huge crowds that usually fill the yards of mosques to participate in ritual animal slaughter for the festival. Religious leaders urged the faithful to pray inside their homes and children were told to not go out to meet friends.

Indonesia’s health ministry reported 34,257 new coronavirus cases and 1,338 deaths on Monday, making it the country’s deadliest day since the start of the pandemic.

COVID-19 infections in Indonesia are at their peak last week with the highest daily average reported at more than 50,000 new infections each day. Until mid-June, daily cases had been running at about 8,000.

Overall, Indonesia has reported more than 2.9 million cases and 74,920 fatalities. Those figures are widely believed to be a vast undercount due to low testing and poor tracing measures.

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The government put emergency restrictions in place on July 3 across Java island and the tourist island of Bali, limiting all nonessential travel and gatherings and shutting malls, places of worship and entertainment centers. They were set to end on Tuesday in time for the country to celebrate Eid al-Adha.

But with the wave of infections still expanding, the government's COVID-19 task force issued a special directive for the holiday week that bans all public travel, communal prayers, family visits and gatherings across Java and Bali, and expanded the lockdown measures to 15 cities and districts outside the two islands that have recorded sharp increases in COVID-19 cases.

President Joko Widodo appealed to Muslims to perform Eid prayers and recitation of God is great at home with their families.

"In the midst of the current pandemic, we need to be willing to sacrifice even more," Widodo told televised remarks on the eve of Eid. "Sacrificing personal interests and putting the interests of the community and others first," he said.

Police set up highway checkpoints and blocked main roads for non-essential vehicles. Domestic flights and other modes of transportation were suspended, blocking people from making traditional family visits.

"This is unfair ... but we should follow for the sake of people's safety," said Eka Cahya Pratama, a civil servant in the capital, Jakarta. He said he has lost many relatives because of COVID-19, including his aunt and two uncles.

"I feel really sad, I really miss them on the day of Eid," he said.

Indonesia's current wave was fueled by travel during the Eid al-Fitr festival in May and by the rapid spread of the more contagious delta variant that emerged in India. Hospitals are swamped and oxygen supplies are running out, with growing numbers of the ill dying in isolation at home or while waiting to receive emergency care.

With the health care system struggling to cope, even patients fortunate enough to get a hospital bed are not guaranteed oxygen.

Other Asian countries are also struggling to contain rapidly rising infections amid sluggish vaccination campaigns and the spread of the delta variant. Among them are Muslim-majority places like Malaysia, Bangladesh and the southernmost four provinces of Thailand.

Unlike Indonesia's restrictions, Bangladesh controversially paused its coronavirus lockdown for eight days to mark Eid al-Adha, and its millions of people are shopping and traveling this week, raising fears the holiday will cause a virus surge that will collapse its already-struggling health care system.

Malaysia also has struggled to control its outbreak, which has worsened despite being under a lockdown since June 1. Total cases have soared by 62% since June 1 to above 927,000. Hospitals, especially in the state of Selangor, have been overwhelmed, with some patients reportedly being treated on the floor due to a lack of beds, and corpses piling up in mortuaries. Vaccinations, however, have picked up, with nearly 15% of the population now fully inoculated.

Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin urged Muslims to stay home and celebrate the holiday modestly. "I appeal to you all to be patient and abide by the rules because your sacrifice is a great jihad in Allah's sight and in our effort to save lives," he said in a televised speech on the eve of the festival.

Indonesia began vaccinating aggressively earlier than many countries in Southeast Asia. About 14% of its population have had at least one dose, primarily China's Sinovac. But that may leave them susceptible, since Sinovac may be less effective against the delta variant. Both Indonesia and Thailand are planning booster shots of other vaccines for their Sinovac-immunized health workers.

In Indonesia, land continues to be cleared for the dead as daily burials at dedicated graveyards for COVID-19 victims have increased 10-fold since May in Jakarta alone, according to government data.

Families wait turns to bury their loved ones as gravediggers work late shifts. Last year, Indonesia's highest Islamic clerical body issued a decree that mass graves — normally forbidden in Islam — would be permitted during the pandemic.

Biden: 'Killing people' remark was call for big tech to act

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By ZEKE MILLER and BARBARA ORTUTAY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden tempered his assessment that social media giants are “killing people” by hosting misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccines on their platforms, saying Monday that he hoped they would not take it “personally” and instead would act to save lives.

While companies like Facebook defend their practices and say they’re helping people around the world access verified information about the shots, the White House says they haven’t done enough to stop misinformation that has helped slow the pace of new vaccinations in the U.S. to a trickle. It comes as the U.S. sees a rise in virus cases and deaths among those who haven’t gotten a shot, in what officials call an emerging “pandemic of the unvaccinated.”

Speaking at the White House, Biden insisted he meant “precisely what I said” when he said Friday of the tech giants that “they’re killing people.” But he said the point of his rhetoric was to ramp up pressure on the companies to take action.

“My hope is that Facebook, instead of taking it personally that somehow I’m saying ‘Facebook is killing people,’ that they would do something about the misinformation,” Biden said.

Biden’s comments come as the White House has struggled to counteract resistance to getting a shot, particularly among younger and more Republican demographics. Fewer than 400,000 Americans are getting their first vaccine dose each day — down from a high of more than 2 million per day in April. More than 90 million eligible people have not received a dose.

The administration has increasingly seized on false or misleading information about the safety and efficacy of the vaccines as a driver of that hesitance. It has referenced a study by the Center for Countering Digital Hate, a nonprofit that studies extremism, that linked a dozen accounts to spreading the majority of vaccine disinformation on Facebook.

“Facebook isn’t killing people. These 12 people are out there giving misinformation, anyone listening to it is getting hurt by it, it’s killing people,” Biden said. “It’s bad information.”

“I’m not trying to hold people accountable. I’m trying to make people look at themselves, look in the mirror,” Biden said, adding, “Think about that misinformation going to your son, your daughter, your relative.”

In the view of the administration, chastising the social media companies — who have come under mounting scrutiny in Washington over not just disinformation, but also antitrust and privacy practices — is a proxy for criticizing the originators of disinformation themselves. To avoid amplifying falsehoods, the White House has generally sought to avoid engaging directly with those spreading misinformation.

The platforms, the White House says, have not been transparent about the vaccine misinformation they promote to users, and Facebook in particular has not engaged all its tools to prevent the spread of false information as it tries to avoid alienating its user base and cutting into its profits. The platforms, officials argued, should prevent vaccine misinformation from appearing as suggested or potentially relevant content in users’ feeds.

The Biden team has clashed repeatedly with social media companies over misinformation for years, and White House chief of staff Ron Klain has raised the issue in conversations with Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg, according to an official. Biden himself has not spoken with the executive since taking office.

Last week, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy declared misinformation about the vaccines a deadly threat to public health.

“Misinformation poses an imminent and insidious threat to our nation’s health,” Murthy said during remarks Thursday at the White House. “We must confront misinformation as a nation. Lives are depending on it.”

Murthy said technology companies and social media platforms must make meaningful changes to their products and software to reduce the spread of false information while increasing access to authoritative, fact-based sources.

Too often, he said, the platforms are built in ways that encourage the spread of misinformation.

“We are asking them to step up,” Murthy said. “We can’t wait longer for them to take aggressive action.”

Facebook on Friday responded to Biden’s attack, with spokesperson Kevin McAlister saying, “The facts

show that Facebook is helping save lives. Period.”

The company also released a blog post saying its internal research showed it was not responsible for Biden’s missed vaccination goal. “The data shows that 85% of Facebook users in the US have been or want to be vaccinated against COVID-19. President Biden’s goal was for 70% of Americans to be vaccinated by July 4. Facebook is not the reason this goal was missed.”

Brendan Nyhan, a professor of government at Dartmouth College who focuses on politics and health care, said Facebook “should absolutely be held accountable for allowing vaccine misinformation to spread.”

“With that said, we should be careful about assuming that the circulation of misinformation online is a cause of hesitancy rather than a consequence,” he added.

“It’s very difficult to show the relationship between misinformation on social media and vaccine hesitancy directly,” Nyhan said. “We don’t have good measures of what people see on social media or any ability to link it to their vaccination behavior. And even if we see correlations in the data, these could be spurious rather than causal — people who aren’t going to get vaccinated are presumably more likely to be exposed to negative and false information about the vaccine.”

That said, Nyhan added that there is some evidence that exposure to misinformation can reduce a person’s intention to vaccinate immediately after viewing the misinformation.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki insisted Monday. “We’re not in a war or battle against Facebook — we’re in a battle with the virus.” But she ramped up pressure on the companies to share information on how many Americans are exposed to misinformation on their platforms and how their secretive and powerful algorithms promote false content to users.

“Do you have access to information from these platforms as to who is receiving misinformation?” she asked. “I don’t think that information has been released. Do you know how the algorithms are working at any of these platforms? I don’t think that information has been released.”

McCarthy proposes 5 Republicans to sit on Jan. 6 panel

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy has picked five Republicans to sit on the new select committee to investigate the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol, signaling that Republicans will participate in the investigation that they have staunchly opposed.

McCarthy said Monday that he has selected Indiana Rep. Jim Banks, who recently visited former President Donald Trump on trips to the U.S.-Mexico border and Trump’s New Jersey golf club, to be the top Republican on the panel. The Republican leader also tapped Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan, Illinois Rep. Rodney Davis, North Dakota Rep. Kelly Armstrong and Texas Rep. Troy Nehls to serve on the committee.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi must approve the names before they are final, per committee rules. An aide to Pelosi said she has received notification from McCarthy, but it is unclear when or if she will approve the GOP members. The aide was granted anonymity to discuss the Republican picks ahead of an official announcement.

The five Republican men selected by McCarthy have all backed Trump, whose supporters laid siege to the Capitol building on Jan. 6 and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden’s victory. Banks, Jordan and Nehls all voted to overturn Biden’s win that day, even after the rioting. Davis and Armstrong were among the minority of Republicans who voted to certify Biden’s win.

McCarthy’s picks come after all but two Republicans opposed the creation of the 13-person select committee in a House vote last month, with most in the GOP arguing that the majority-Democratic panel would conduct a partisan probe. House Democrats originally attempted to create an evenly split, independent commission to investigate the insurrection, but that effort fell short when it was blocked by Senate Republicans.

House Republicans have largely remained loyal to Trump despite the violent insurrection of his supporters that sent many of them running for their lives. Banks made clear in a statement Monday evening that he would take a politically combative approach to his leadership on the panel, sharply criticizing the Democrats who had set it up.

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"Make no mistake, Nancy Pelosi created this committee solely to malign conservatives and to justify the Left's authoritarian agenda," Banks said.

Jordan, one of Trump's staunchest defenders through his two impeachments and the top Republican on the House Judiciary Committee, said after the House vote to form the panel that he believed the investigation is "impeachment three" against the former president. Trump was impeached by the House and acquitted by the Senate both times.

The members selected by McCarthy had mixed reactions to the insurrection as it happened on Jan. 6. While Jordan led the effort to overturn election results, others tweeted to the rioters to end the violence or condemned it.

"Thank you to the Capitol police and all law enforcement," Armstrong tweeted shortly after the House was evacuated that afternoon. "Rioting is not protesting. This needs to stop. Now."

Around the same time, Davis tweeted: "This is a sad day for our country. The lawlessness has got to stop. Protestors must leave the Capitol so Congress can resume the process of confirming the Electoral College vote."

Nehls, a former sheriff, was one of several members who helped barricade the House doors as rioters tried to beat them down. He tweeted an Associated Press photo of himself holding the door alongside Capitol Police — face to face with rioters who had broken the glass in the entryway.

"I was proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with Capitol police barricading entrance to our sacred House chamber, while trying to calm the situation talking to protestors," Nehls tweeted. "What I'm witnessing is a disgrace. We're better than this. Violence is NEVER the answer. Law and order!"

A week later, all five members voted against the impeachment of Trump, who had told his supporters gathered in Washington on Jan. 6 to "fight like hell" to overturn his election defeat.

The Democratic chair of the select committee, Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson, said Monday evening that he hadn't seen the GOP names but referred the matter to Pelosi. "It's up to her," he said.

Pelosi named eight members of the committee earlier this month — seven Democrats and Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, who has strongly criticized Trump and has been the most outspoken member of her caucus against the insurrection. Cheney, who was demoted from GOP leadership in May over her comments, was one of the two Republicans who voted in favor of forming the committee, along with Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger.

As McCarthy stayed quiet for weeks on Republican participation on the panel, Thompson has said that the committee will have a quorum to conduct business whether GOP members are present or not.

The new members will be put to the test at the panel's first hearing next week, with at least four rank-and-file police officers who battled rioters that day testifying about their experiences. Dozens of police officers were injured as the crowd pushed past them and broke into the Capitol building.

Seven people died during and after the rioting, including a woman who was shot by police as she tried to break into the House chamber and three other Trump supporters who suffered medical emergencies. Two police officers died by suicide in the days that followed, and a third officer, Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, collapsed and later died after engaging with the protesters. A medical examiner determined he died of natural causes.

Leftist rural teacher declared president-elect in Peru

By FRANKLIN BRICEÑO and REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Rural teacher-turned-political novice Pedro Castillo on Monday became the winner of Peru's presidential election after the country's longest electoral count in 40 years.

Castillo, whose supporters included Peru's poor and rural citizens, defeated right-wing politician Keiko Fujimori by just 44,000 votes. Electoral authorities released the final official results more than a month after the runoff election took place in the South American nation.

Wielding a pencil the size of a cane, symbol of his Peru Libre party, Castillo popularized the phrase "No more poor in a rich country." The economy of Peru, the world's second-largest copper producer, has been crushed by the coronavirus pandemic, increasing the poverty level to almost one-third of the population

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and eliminating the gains of a decade.

The shortfalls of Peru's public health services have contributed to the country's poor pandemic outcomes, leaving it with the highest global per capita death rate. Castillo has promised to use the revenues from the mining sector to improve public services, including education and health, whose inadequacies were highlighted by the pandemic.

"Those who do not have a car should have at least one bicycle," Castillo, 51, told The Associated Press in mid-April at his adobe house in Anguía, Peru's third poorest district.

Since surprising Peruvians and observers by advancing to the presidential runoff election, Castillo has softened his first proposals on nationalizing multinational mining and natural gas companies. Instead, his campaign has said he is considering raising taxes on profits due to high copper prices, which exceed \$10,000 per ton.

Historians say he is the first peasant to become president of Peru, where until now, Indigenous people almost always have received the worst of the deficient public services even though the nation boasted of being the economic star of Latin America in the first two decades of the century.

"There are no cases of a person unrelated to the professional, military or economic elites who reaches the presidency," Cecilia Méndez, a Peruvian historian and professor at the University of California-Santa Barbara, told a radio station.

Fujimori, a former congresswoman, ran for a third time for president with the support of the business elites. She is the daughter of imprisoned former President Alberto Fujimori.

Hundreds of Peruvians from various regions camped out for more than a month in front of the Electoral Tribunal in Lima, Peru's capital, to await Castillo's proclamation. Many do not belong to Castillo's party, but they trust the professor because "he will not be like the other politicians who have not kept their promises and do not defend the poor," said Maruja Inquilla, an environmental activist who arrived from a town near Titicaca, the mythical lake of the Incas.

Castillo's meteoric rise from unknown to president elect has divided the Andean nation deeply.

Author Mario Vargas Llosa, a holder of a Nobel Prize for literature, has said Castillo "represents the disappearance of democracy and freedom in Peru." Meanwhile, retired soldiers sent a letter to the commander of the armed forces asking him not to respect Castillo's victory.

Fujimori said Monday that she will accept Castillo's victory, after accusing him for a month of electoral fraud without offering any evidence. The accusation delayed his appointment as president-elect as she asked electoral authorities to annul thousands of votes, many in Indigenous and poor communities in the Andes.

"Let's not put the obstacles to move this country forward," Castillo asked Fujimori in his first remarks in front of hundreds of followers in Lima.

The United States, European Union and 14 electoral missions determined that the voting was fair. The U.S. called the election a "model of democracy" for the region.

Steven Levitsky, a political scientist at Harvard University, told a radio station that Castillo is arriving to the presidency "very weak," and in some sense in a "very similar" position to Salvador Allende when he came to power in Chile in 1970 and to Joao Goulart, who became president of Brazil in 1962.

"He has almost the entire establishment of Lima against him," said Levitsky, an expert on Latin American politics.

He added that if Castillo tried to change the constitution of Peru — enacted in 1993 during the tenure of Alberto Fujimori — "without building a consensus, (without) alliances with center games, it would be very dangerous because it would be a justification for a coup."

The president-elect has never held office. He worked as an elementary school teacher for the last 25 years in his native San Luis de Puna, a remote village in Cajamarca, a northern region. He campaigned wearing rubber sandals and a wide-brimmed hat, like the peasants in his community, where 40% of children are chronically malnourished.

In 2017, he led the largest teacher strike in 30 years in search of better pay and, although he did not

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achieve substantial improvements, he sat down to talk with Cabinet ministers, legislators and bureaucrats.

Over the past two decades, Peruvians have seen that the previous political experience and university degrees of their five former presidents did not help fight corruption. All former Peruvian presidents who governed since 1985 have been ensnared in corruption allegations, some imprisoned or arrested in their mansions. One died by suicide before police could take him into custody. The South American country cycled through three presidents last November.

Castillo recalled that the first turn in his life occurred one night as a child when his teacher persuaded his father to allow him to finish his primary education at a school two hours from home. It happened while both adults chewed coca leaves, an Andean custom to reduce fatigue.

"He suffered a lot in his childhood," his wife, teacher Lilia Paredes, told AP while doing dishes at home. The couple has two children.

He got used to long walks. He would arrive at the classroom with his peasant sandals, with a woolen satchel on his shoulder, a notebook and his lunch, which consisted of sweet potatoes or tamales that cooled with the hours.

Castillo said his life was marked by the work he did as a child with his eight siblings, but also by the memory of the treatment that his illiterate parents received from the owner of the land where they lived. He cried when he remembered that if the rent was not paid, the landowner kept the best crops.

"You kept looking at what you had sown, you clutched your stomach, and I will not forget that, I will not forgive it either," he said.

Size of Oregon wildfire underscores vastness of the US West

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The monstrous wildfire burning in Oregon has grown to a third the size of Rhode Island and spreads miles each day, but evacuations and property losses have been minimal compared with much smaller blazes in densely populated areas of California.

The fire's jaw-dropping size contrasted with its relatively small impact on people underscores the vastness of the American West and offers a reminder that Oregon, which is larger than Britain, is still a largely rural state, despite being known mostly for its largest city, Portland.

The 476-square-mile (1,210-square-kilometer) Bootleg Fire is burning 300 miles (483 kilometers) south-east of Portland in and around the Fremont-Winema National Forest, a vast expanse of old-growth forest, lakes and wildlife refuges.

If the fire were in densely populated parts of California, "it would have destroyed thousands of homes by now," said James Johnston, a researcher with Oregon State University's College of Forestry who studies historical wildfires. "But it is burning in one of the more remote areas of the lower 48 states. It's not the Bay Area out there."

At least 2,000 homes have been evacuated at some point during the fire and another 5,000 threatened. At least 70 homes and more than 100 outbuildings have gone up in flames. Thick smoke chokes the area where residents and wildlife alike have already been dealing with months of drought and extreme heat. No one has died.

Pushed by strong winds from the southwest, the fire is spreading rapidly to the north and east, advancing toward an area that's increasingly remote.

Evacuation orders on the fire's southern edge, closer to more populous areas like Klamath Falls and Bly, have been lifted or relaxed as crews gain control. Now it's small, unincorporated communities like Paisley and Long Creek — both with fewer than 250 people — and scattered homesteads that are in the crosshairs.

"The Bootleg Fire is threatening ranch houses that are in pretty far-flung areas," Johnston said. "There are no suburbs in that area."

But as big as the Bootleg Fire is, it's not the biggest Oregon has seen. The fire's current size puts it fourth on the list of the state's largest blazes in modern times, including rangeland fires, and second on the list of infernos specifically burning in forest.

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These megafires usually burn until the late fall or even early winter, when rain finally puts them out.

The largest forest fire in modern history was the Biscuit Fire, which torched nearly 780 square miles (2,000 square kilometers) in 2002 in the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest in southern Oregon and northern California. The largest fire of any type was the Long Draw Fire in 2012, which incinerated 872 square miles (2,260 square kilometers) of mostly sagebrush and rangeland in the endless expanses of southeastern Oregon, where almost no one lives.

By the time the Bootleg Fire is extinguished months from now, it will likely be as big or bigger than those fires, but research shows that Oregon once experienced megafires much larger than these fairly often, Johnston said.

"I think it's important for us to take the long view of wildfire. In the context of the last couple hundreds years, the Bootleg Fire is not large," he said. "One of the things my lab group does is reconstruct historical fires, and fires that were burning in that area in the 1600s and 1700s were just as big as the Bootleg Fire or bigger."

That's little reassurance for fire crews battling the current blaze, which is 25% contained.

On Monday, flames forced the evacuation of a wildlife research station as firefighters had to retreat from the flames for the ninth consecutive day due to erratic and dangerous fire behavior. Sycan Marsh hosts thousands of migrating and nesting birds and is a key research station on wetland restoration in the upper reaches of the Klamath Basin.

Fire pushed by winds and fueled by bone-dry conditions jumped fire-retardant containment lines and pushed up to 4 miles into new territory, authorities said.

Fire crews were also rushing to corral multiple "slop fires" — patches of flames that escaped fire lines meant to contain the blaze — before they grew in size. One of those smaller fires was already nearly 4 square miles (10 square kilometers) in size. Thunderstorms with dry lightning were possible Monday as well, heightening the dangers.

"We are running firefighting operations through the day and all through the night," said Joe Hessel, incident commander. "This fire is a real challenge, and we are looking at sustained battle for the foreseeable future."

The Bootleg Fire was one of many fires burning in a dozen states, most of them in the U.S. West. Sixteen large uncontained fires burned in Oregon and Washington state alone on Monday, affecting a total of 767 square miles (1,986 square kilometers), the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center said.

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

At the other end of Oregon, a fire in the northeast mountains grew to nearly 26 square miles (49 square kilometers).

The Elbow Creek Fire that started Thursday has prompted evacuations in several small, rural 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.

A complex of fires where the states of Oregon, Washington and Idaho meet also grew, reaching 167 square miles (433 square kilometers). The Snake River Complex was 44% contained. The complex was made up of three fires started by lightning on July 7. Flames were chewing through a mix of grass and timber in an extremely remote area of steep terrain about 20 miles (32 kilometers) south of Lewiston, Idaho.

And in Northern California, authorities expanded evacuations on the Tamarack Fire in Alpine County in the Sierra Nevada to include the mountain town of Mesa Vista. That fire, which exploded over the weekend and forced the cancellation of an extreme bike ride, was 36 square miles (93 square kilometers) with no containment.

Thunderstorms expected to roll through Monday night could bring winds to fan the flames and lightning

that could spark new ones, the National Weather Service said.

Microsoft Exchange hack caused by China, US and allies say

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration and Western allies formally blamed China on Monday for a massive hack of Microsoft Exchange email server software and asserted that criminal hackers associated with the Chinese government have carried out ransomware and other illicit cyber operations.

The announcements, though not accompanied by sanctions against the Chinese government, were intended as a forceful condemnation of activities a senior Biden administration official described as part of a "pattern of irresponsible behavior in cyberspace." They highlighted the ongoing threat from Chinese hackers even as the administration remains consumed with trying to curb ransomware attacks from Russia-based syndicates that have targeted critical infrastructure.

The broad range of cyberthreats from Beijing disclosed on Monday included a ransomware attack from government-affiliated hackers that targeted victims — including in the U.S. — with demands for millions of dollars. U.S. officials also alleged that criminal contract hackers associated with China's Ministry of State Security have engaged in cyber extortion schemes and theft for their own profit.

Meanwhile, the Justice Department on Monday announced charges against four Chinese nationals who prosecutors said were working with the MSS in a hacking campaign that targeted dozens of computer systems, including companies, universities and government entities. The defendants are accused of targeting trade secrets and confidential business information, including scientific technologies and infectious-disease research.

Unlike in April, when public finger-pointing of Russian hacking was paired with a raft of sanctions against Moscow, the Biden administration did not announce any actions against Beijing. Nonetheless, a senior administration official who briefed reporters said that the U.S. has confronted senior Chinese officials and that the White House regards the multination shaming as sending an important message, even if no single action can change behavior.

President Joe Biden told reporters "the investigation's not finished," and White House press secretary Jen Psaki did not rule out future consequences for China, saying, "This is not the conclusion of our efforts as it relates to cyber activities with China or Russia."

Even without fresh sanctions, Monday's actions are likely to exacerbate tensions with China at a delicate time. Just last week, the U.S. issued separate stark warnings against transactions with entities that operate in China's western Xinjiang region, where China is accused of repressing Uyghur Muslims and other minorities.

The administration also advised American firms of the deteriorating investment and commercial environment in Hong Kong, where China has been cracking down on democratic freedoms it had pledged to respect in the former British colony.

The European Union and Britain were among the allies who called out 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.

NATO, in its first public condemnation of China for hacking activities, called on Beijing to uphold its international commitments and obligations "and to act responsibly in the international system, including in cyberspace." The alliance said it was determined to "actively deter, defend against and counter the full spectrum of cyber threats."

That hackers affiliated with the Ministry of State Security were engaged in ransomware 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."

A spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in Washington, Liu Pengyu, said in a statement that the "U.S. has repeatedly made groundless attacks and malicious smear against China on cybersecurity. Now this is just another old trick, with nothing new in it." The statement called China "a severe victim of the US cyber theft, eavesdropping and surveillance."

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 unsanctioned cyber operations globally is distinct," the official said.

Dmitri Alperovitch, the former chief technology officer of the cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike, said the announcement makes clear that MSS contractors who for years have worked for the government and conducted operations on its behalf have over time decided — either with the approval or the "blind eye of their bosses" — to "start moonlighting and engaging in other activities that could put money in their pockets."

The Microsoft Exchange hack that months ago compromised tens of thousands of computers around the world was swiftly attributed to Chinese cyber spies by Microsoft.

An administration official said the government's attribution to hackers affiliated with the 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.

Given the scope of the attack, Alperovitch said it was "puzzling" that the U.S. did not impose sanctions. "They certainly deserve it, and at this point, it's becoming a glaring standout that we have not," he said.

He added, in a reference to a large Russian cyberespionage operation discovered late last year, "There's no question that the Exchange hacks have been more reckless, more dangerous and more disruptive than anything the Russians have done in SolarWinds."

Capitol rioter who breached Senate gets 8 months for felony

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

A crane operator from Florida who breached the U.S. Senate chamber carrying a Trump campaign flag was sentenced Monday to eight months behind bars, the first punishment handed down for a felony charge in the Jan. 6 Capitol riot and one that could help determine the severity of other sentences in hundreds of pending cases.

In pronouncing the sentence on Paul Allard Hodgkins, U.S. District Judge Randolph Moss said the 38-year-old had played a role, if not as significant as others, in one of the worst episodes in American history. Thousands of rioters loyal to then-President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol and disrupted the certification of Joe Biden's election win, in a stunning display of public violence.

"That was not, by any stretch of the imagination, a protest," Moss said. "It was ... an assault on democracy." He added: "It left a stain that will remain on us ... on the country for years to come."

Moss acknowledged Hodgkins' sentence could set a benchmark for future cases. Deciding an appropriate punishment for Hodgkins, he said, was more challenging because the case is unique and the court couldn't look to previous sentencing as a guide.

Hodgkins was disappointed a prison term was imposed, his lawyer, Patrick Leduc, said in a phone interview after Monday's hearing. He said Hodgkins was heading back to his hometown of Tampa to organize his affairs — which will include speaking to his employer about whether imprisonment will cost him his job — before reporting to prison in several months.

"He's hurt. He's sad," Leduc said. "Life is coming at him at 100 mph."

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More than 500 people have been charged so far for their participation in the attack, and many like Hodgkins were accused of serious crimes but were not indicted, as some others were, for roles in larger conspiracies. They will have to decide whether to plead guilty or go to trial.

Moss interrupted Leduc, Hodgkins' attorney, to ask if granting the defense request to spare Hodgkins from prison could encourage others disgruntled by the results of a future election to besiege the Capitol. "If we allow people to storm the United States Capitol, what are we doing to preserve our democracy?" Moss asked.

But the judge said Hodgkins deserved a lesser sentence than the 18 months prosecutors had requested, in part because he didn't assault anyone, didn't damage government property and wasn't among the lead attackers.

Hodgkins apologized to the court and said he felt ashamed. Speaking calmly from a prepared text, he described being caught up in the euphoria as he walked down Washington's most famous avenue, then followed a crowd of hundreds into the Capitol.

"If I had any idea that the protest ... would escalate (the way) it did ... I would never have ventured farther than the sidewalk of Pennsylvania Avenue," he told the judge. He added, "This was a foolish decision on my part."

He pleaded guilty last month to obstructing an official proceeding by participating in an attack that forced lawmakers to run and hide in fear. Five people died, including a police officer and rioter shot by police. Two other police officers who faced Jan. 6 rioters died by suicide days later.

In requesting an 18-month prison sentence during the hearing in Washington, Assistant U.S. Attorney Mona Sedky likened the attack to "domestic terrorism."

Leduc, Hodgkins' lawyer, said the government's description of the Jan. 6 events was hyperbole.

"I think it is gaslighting the country," he said. What happened, he added, was "a protest that became a riot."

Moss interrupted Leduc again, noting that some of the Trump supporters seemed to be out to track down lawmakers, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

"There were people who were storming through the halls of the Capitol saying, 'Where's Nancy?'" the judge told the attorney. "That is more than a simple riot."

Sedky said that while Hodgkins didn't engage in violence himself, he walked among many who did — in what she called "the ransacking of the People's House." And as he walked by smashed police barriers, he could see the smoke of tear gas and the chaos ahead of him.

"What does he do?" she asked the court. "He walks toward it. He doesn't walk away."

Hodgkins, she added, was in the midst of a mob that forced lawmakers to seek shelter and some congressional staffers to hide in fear, locked in offices, as hundreds swept through the building. Those in fear for their lives that day will, she said, "bear emotional scars for many years — if not forever."

Under the June plea deal, Hodgkins agreed to plead guilty to the one count and pay \$2,000 in restitution to the Treasury Department. In exchange, prosecutors agreed to drop less serious charges, including entering a restricted building and disorderly conduct. They also said they would ask for a reduced sentence for acceptance of responsibility and for saving the government from a costly trial.

In earlier filings, 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 is 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.

But Judge Moss said Monday he didn't accept that there was no forethought by Hodgkins or that he had no ill intentions. He brought rope and protective goggles with him to Washington, the judge said, and that demonstrated he came "prepared to defend his position and engage in whatever needed to be done."

Video footage shows Hodgkins 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.

Separately on Monday, Enrique Tarrío, the leader of the Proud Boys who was arrested in Washington two days before the riot, pleaded guilty to burning a Black Lives Matter banner that was torn down from a historic Black church in December. He also pleaded guilty to attempted possession of a large-capacity ammunition feeding device after police found two high-capacity firearm magazines when he was arrested.

Female surfers overcome sexism's toll to earn Olympic berth

By SALLY HO Associated Press

LEMOORE, CALIF. (AP) — Johanne Defay of France was devastated when the mega sponsor Roxy dropped her right before she became a pro surfer in 2014, shattering her confidence and threatening her career altogether.

"They were just like 'Oh, you don't look this way, you know, for, like, pictures,'" Defay said. "And I just felt like I was never doing enough or I wasn't fitting in, in the way that they wanted for their brand."

Now, Defay is headed to the Tokyo Olympics for surfing's debut at the Summer Games, buoyed by an upset win against reigning world champion Carissa Moore at the high-intensity Surf Ranch competition last month.

Though there's much excitement and renewed enthusiasm for the women's game, years of objectification, pay disparities and an opportunity gap have taken their toll. Industry leaders from the professional World Surf League and the developmental USA Surfing say they're committed to righting the wrongs that have long held female surfers back in the male-dominated sport.

The mental, financial and logistical roadblocks for women in surfing date back centuries.

Hawaiians who invented the sport treated it as an egalitarian national pastime that all genders, ages and social classes enjoyed, according to Isaiah Helekunihi Walker, a Hawaii surfing historian. But Christian missionaries who arrived on the island tried to ban surfing in large part because of nudity — surfing naked was common at the sports' inception. Though locals largely defied the colonizers, female surfers saw their ranks shrink disproportionately.

"When it comes to controlling nudity, it's about controlling female bodies," said Walker, also a BYU-Hawaii history professor.

Even for Moore, the child prodigy who could beat the boys before growing up to be — at 18 years old — the youngest World Surf League champion in history, she's said she's also struggled with her body image. Moore is 28 now and has spoken openly about starving herself as a teenager, only to binge eat later, and once even trying to force herself to throw up.

"Everyone had this idea of what a surfer girl should look like. And there were a lot of 'hot lists' or the 'cutest surfer girl list,'" Moore said. "I never made them, but then you see who actually made them and you feel like: 'Oh, I guess, like, that's what I should look like.'"

Modern day professional surfing in a previous iteration had a decentralized approach that left brand sponsors in charge of many of the competition logistics, which would vary widely from one event to another, said Greg Cruse, USA Surfing CEO. And though it wasn't an official rule or standard, there was clearly a preference for the men's game.

Surfing schedules are determined in the morning based on what the ocean waves are like, and it was no secret that the boys' and men's competitions would be given the best surf conditions, usually in the morning. Female surfers took the scraps, if they were invited at all.

"There'd be the event directors and they would kind of schedule things the way they wanted to schedule and there would be bias from the outdated patriarchy. It's changed immensely," Cruse said. "It took a while for the women to complain about it."

A turning point came in 2013, when new ownership took over the professional league and the rebranded WSL began to prioritize standardizing the competitions and rebuilding the women's events, said Jessi Miley-Dyer, a retired pro surfer who now runs the WSL's competition as senior vice president.

In 2019, the WSL as the leaders of the \$10 billion surfing industry also began offering equal prize money for all its events, making it one of the few professional sports leagues to achieve pay equity.

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"It was an important statement to make around the value of our athletes. More than anything, it speaks to the emphasis on women's surfing. We believe men and women are valued the same," Miley-Dyer said. "It's the right thing to do."

The announcement was emotional for many, including Miley-Dyer. Back in 2006 when she won a pro event, she earned just \$10,000 — a third of what the top male surfer took home.

"I cried because it means so much," Miley-Dyer said. "I had also retired, so it wasn't something for me, but it felt something to me and so many people like me."

Next year will be the first time the WSL will include its women surfers at the famous Pipe Masters competition, allowing them the chance to ride the Banzai Pipeline in Oahu, Hawaii, considered by many the best waves in the world.

The WSL has also committed to hosting the same number of events and in the same locations for both the men and women, though the competition at the highest level today still has twice as many male competitor spots — 36 — compared to the women's game.

In terms of skill and experience, the damage caused by decades of sexism has not yet been fully reversed.

It used to be that girls could begin competitive surfing training at about 11 years old while boys began as early as 4, Cruse said, adding that USA Surfing has closed this experience gap.

And surfboard makers, like many male leaders in the sport, used to believe that girls and women weren't strong enough to paddle or ride powerfully enough to pull off airs, or aerial maneuvers, so they were given bigger surfboards that are physically easier to ride, but limited their ability to progress into more explosive moves.

So while airs have for years become the gold standard in the men's competition, it is rarely done by the top female surfers today. Moore, the U.S. surfer to beat at the Olympics, is among the first women to land an air during competition, a milestone she achieved just recently but has no doubt electrified the women's game and its future.

"They started demanding getting the same type of equipment that allows you to generate more speed and turn sharper and harder," Cruse said. "Right now, there's a group of girls coming up. The girls under 16 are better at airs than any of the women in the WSL. They already have the air game and it's next level and there's going to be a changing of the guard."

For Defay, she persevered during her first year without corporate backing. She remembers feeling humiliated hearing others take for granted their private car services arranged by their sponsors after Defay arrived on a two-hour bus ride in order to save money.

She's thankful fellow pro surfer Jeremy Flores helped sponsor her "insane" rookie season, as a nine-month season can cost as much as \$80,000 in travel costs alone.

Now, they're equals, teammates in Japan on the French Olympic surfing team.

The 27-year-old Defay's journey to the pros has made her hungrier than ever to prove her talents and worth at the world's most elite sporting event. And she'll do it with the body she has learned to appreciate, regardless of how any sponsor may have judged her before.

Though Roxy didn't respond to requests for comment on Defay's past sponsorship deal, the surfer declares this:

"I like my shoulders now and my butt," Defay said with a smirk. "It's just what it is and what makes me surf this way, so I try to celebrate it."

Blue Origin brings space tourism to tiny Texas town

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

VAN HORN, Texas (AP) — For years, the official letterhead for the small town of Van Horn, tucked neatly among the foothills of the Guadalupe Mountains, read simply: "Farming, ranching, mining."

And while there is still some farming and ranching in this far West Texas community, and a talc mine still operates near the edge of town, there's another booming business in its midst: space tourism.

The sprawling spaceport of Blue Origin, the company founded by business magnate Jeff Bezos in 2000,

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is located about 25 miles outside of the town of about 1,800 residents on what was once desolate desert ranchland. On Tuesday, the company plans to launch four people on a 10-minute trip into space, including Bezos, his brother, Mark, female aviation pioneer Wally Funk, and Oliver Daemen, an 18-year-old Dutchman and last-minute fill-in for the winner of a \$28 million charity auction who had a scheduling conflict. Funk, at age 82, and Daemen will become the oldest and youngest people in space.

"That's the big buzz in this little town," said Valentina Muro as she rang up a customer at the Broadway Café along Van Horn's main strip. "It's kind of put Van Horn on the map a little more than it was."

The town, which sprouted up in the late 1800s during the construction of the Texas and Pacific Railway, now is mostly an overnight stop for travelers along Interstate 10, which runs parallel to the town's main road, dotted with hotels, restaurants, truck stops and convenience stores.

"Our biggest driving force is the tourism dollar," said Van Horn Mayor Becky Brewster.

The town's proximity to Big Bend National Park, the Guadalupe Mountains, an ancient barrier reef that includes the four highest peaks in Texas, and New Mexico's Carlsbad Caverns also makes it an ideal pit stop for tourists.

"We often plug ourselves as the crossroads of the Texas Mountain Trail," Brewster said. "We're right here in the center and this can be your hub for all your adventures in far West Texas."

As for the impact that Blue Origin's operations have had on the town, the reaction among locals is mixed. While employees and contractors have been working at the facility since about 2005, Brewster said it's just been in the last five years or so that workers for Blue Origin have started integrating themselves into the community.

"When they were in the development stages, Blue Origin was so secretive about what was going on, their people couldn't really socialize because they couldn't talk about their work and things like that," Brewster said. "And it was like, here are the Blue Origin people and here are the Van Horn people. But that's starting to change for the better."

One of the roadblocks to connecting locals and the scientists and engineers who work at Blue Origin is one that plagues many rural American communities — a lack of available housing. A local developer constructed about a dozen two-bedroom homes and a small apartment complex, and all of those were quickly rented out for Blue Origin employees. Of the roughly 250 employees and contractors that work at the facility, Brewster said only about 40% live in Van Horn.

Krissy Lerdal, whose husband is an engineer for the company, said he lived in a local hotel for more than four years before finally relocating his family to Van Horn from New Mexico.

"When we looked to buy here, there were five houses on the market, none of which passed inspection, and so we had to bring in a modular home," Lerdal said. "It's not my dream home, but housing is lacking."

Still, in the three-and-a-half years that she has lived here, Lerdal said she has worked hard to integrate herself into the community. Her children attend the local school system, and she joined the Women's Service League, which raises money for scholarships. She also has a seat on the city's zoning board.

"I know the people who are living here and bought homes here have been trying hard to be involved," she said. "It's hard when most of the community is all related. We're the outsiders and we don't want to step on toes, but we want to be involved, and it's a hard line to walk."

"I'm glad that I feel like I'm part of the community, but some people don't feel that way."

Linda McDonald, a longtime Van Horn resident and the district clerk for the seat of Culberson County, said that while she's amazed at the prospect of people being launched into space from practically her back yard, she bristles at the suggestion that Blue Origin put Van Horn on the map.

"We are already on the map," she told a group of about 100 graduates of Van Horn High School during a recent pep rally and reunion that was part of the town's annual jubilee. "You have helped put us on the map, and we should be proud of that."

New Haiti leader with international backing to take charge

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By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — A new prime minister supported by key international diplomats will take charge of Haiti, an official said Monday — a move that appeared aimed at averting a leadership struggle following the assassination of President Jovenal Moïse.

Ariel Henry, who was designated prime minister by Moïse before he was slain but never sworn in, will replace the country's interim prime minister, Haiti Elections Minister Mathias Pierre told The Associated Press.

It wasn't immediately clear how quickly Claude Joseph, who has been leading Haiti with the backing of police and the military since the July 7 assassination of Moïse, would step down.

"Negotiations are still in course," Pierre said, adding that Joseph would go back to being minister of foreign affairs. There was no immediate comment from Joseph.

In an audio recording, Henry referred to himself as prime minister and called for unity, saying he would soon announce the members of what he called a provisional consensus government to lead the country until elections are held.

"I present my compliments to the Haitian people who have shown political maturity in the face of what can be considered a coup. ... Our Haitian brothers gave peace a chance, while leaving the possibility that the truth could one day be restored," Henry said.

"Now it is up to all the national leaders to walk together in unity, towards the same goal, to show that they are responsible."

The political turnover followed a statement Saturday from a key group of international diplomats that appeared to snub Joseph as it called for the creation of "a consensual and inclusive government."

"To this end, it strongly encourages the designated Prime Minister Ariel Henry to continue the mission entrusted to him to form such a government," the statement from the Core Group said.

The Core Group is 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.

On Monday, the U.N. issued a statement calling on Joseph, Henry and other national stakeholders "to set aside differences and engage in constructive dialogue on ways to end the current impasse."

The U.N. added that Joseph and Henry made significant progress in the past week and that it supports dialogue to find "minimal consensus" for holding fair legislative and presidential elections.

Monique Clesca, a Haitian writer, activist and former U.N. official, said she doesn't anticipate any changes under Henry, whom she expects to carry on Moïse's legacy. But she warned Henry might be viewed as tainted because of the international backing that preceded his taking power.

"There is not only a perception, but the reality that he has been put there by the international community, and I think that's his burden to carry," she said.

"What we're calling for is for Haitians to really say this is unacceptable. We do not want the international community stating who ought to be in power and what ought to be done. It is up to us."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday that the Biden administration "welcomes reports that Haitian political actors are working together to determine a path forward in the country."

"We have been encouraging, for several days now, Haitian political actors to work together and find a political way forward," she said.

Earlier, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price had said the U.S. would continue to work with Joseph after noting he was the incumbent in the position and was serving as acting prime minister before the assassination.

On Monday, Price urged all political actors in Haiti as well as the civil society and private sector to work together in the interest of the people, adding that the U.S. is standing with them.

"We have always said, and we continue to believe, that the decision of who should lead Haiti belongs to the Haitian people," he said. "Political gridlock has taken a tremendous toll on the nation of Haiti, and it's vital for the country's leaders to finally come together to chart a united, inclusive path forward."

The Core Group statement was issued hours after Moïse's wife, Martine, arrived in Haiti on Saturday aboard a private jet clad in black and wearing a bulletproof vest after being released from a hospital in

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Miami. She has not issued a statement or spoken publicly since her return to Haiti as the government prepares for the July 23 funeral that will be held in the northern city of Cap-Haitien. Other events to honor Moïse are planned this week in the capital of Port-au-Prince ahead of the funeral.

Moïse designated Henry as prime minister shortly before he was killed, but he had not been sworn in. The neurosurgeon was previously minister of social affairs and interior minister. He has belonged to several political parties including Inite, which was founded by former President René Prével.

The upcoming change in leadership comes as authorities continue to investigate the July 7 attack at Moïse's private home with high-powered rifles that seriously wounded his wife.

Authorities say more than 20 suspects directly involved in the killing have been arrested. The majority of them are former Colombian soldiers, most of whom Colombian officials say were duped. Another three suspects were killed, with police still seeking additional ones, including an ex-Haitian rebel leader and a former Haitian senator.

Ben & Jerry's to stop sales in West Bank, east Jerusalem

By WILSON RING and JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — Ben & Jerry's said Monday it was going to stop selling its ice cream in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and contested east Jerusalem, saying the sales in the territories sought by the Palestinians are "inconsistent with our values."

The announcement was one of the strongest and highest-profile rebukes by a well-known company of Israel's policy of settling its citizens on war-won lands. The settlements are widely seen by the international community as illegal and obstacles to peace.

The move by the Vermont-based ice cream company drew swift reproach from Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, a former leader of the West Bank settlement movement who called it "an immoral decision and I believe that it will turn out to be a business mistake, too."

The company informed its longstanding licensee — responsible for manufacturing and distributing the ice cream in Israel — that it will not renew the license agreement when it expires at the end of next year, according to a statement posted on the Vermont-based company's website.

The Ben & Jerry's statement cited "the concerns shared with us by our fans and trusted partners."

The company did not explicitly identify those concerns, but last month, a group called Vermonters for Justice in Palestine called on Ben & Jerry's to "end complicity in Israel's occupation and abuses of Palestinian human rights."

"How much longer will Ben & Jerry's permit its Israeli-manufactured ice cream to be sold in Jewish-only settlements while Palestinian land is being confiscated, Palestinian homes are being destroyed, and Palestinian families in neighborhoods like Sheik Jarrah are facing eviction to make way for Jewish settlers?" the organization's Ian Stokes said in a June 10 news release.

In a Monday statement, the organization said Ben & Jerry's actions did not go far enough.

"By maintaining a presence in Israel, Ben & Jerry's continues to be complicit in the killing, imprisonment and dispossession of Palestinian people and the flaunting of international law," said the Vermont group's Kathy Shapiro.

The Israeli foreign ministry called Ben & Jerry's decision "a surrender to ongoing and aggressive pressure from extreme anti-Israel groups" and the company was cooperating with "economic terrorism."

"The decision is immoral and discriminatory, as it singles out Israel, harms both Israelis and Palestinians and encourages extremist groups who use bullying tactics," the ministry said in a statement. It also called on Ben & Jerry's to withdraw its decision.

While Ben & Jerry's products will not be sold in the settlements, the company said it will stay in Israel through a different arrangement. But doing so will be difficult. Major Israeli supermarket chains, the primary distribution channel for the ice cream maker, all operate in the settlements.

Founded in Vermont in 1978, but currently owned by consumer goods conglomerate Unilever, Ben & Jerry's has not shied away from social causes. While many businesses tread lightly in politics for fear of

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alienating customers, the ice cream maker has taken the opposite approach, often espousing progressive causes.

Ben & Jerry's took a stand against what it called the Trump administration's regressive policies by re-branding one of its flavors Pecan Resist in 2018, ahead of midterm elections.

The company said Pecan Resist celebrated activists who were resisting oppression, harmful environmental practices and injustice. As part of the campaign, Ben & Jerry's said it was giving \$25,000 each to four activist entities.

Aida Touma-Sliman, an Israeli lawmaker with the Joint List of Arab parties, wrote on Twitter that Ben and Jerry's decision Monday was "appropriate and moral." She added that the "occupied territories are not part of Israel" and that the move is an important step to help pressure the Israeli government to end the occupation.

The West Bank and east Jerusalem were captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war. Some 700,000 Israeli settlers now live in the two territories — roughly 500,000 in the occupied West Bank and 200,000 in east Jerusalem.

Israel treats the two areas separately, considering east Jerusalem as part of its capital. Meanwhile, Israel considers the West Bank as disputed territory whose fate should be resolved in negotiations. However the international community considers both areas to be occupied territory. The Palestinians seek the West Bank as part of a future independent state, with east Jerusalem as their capital.

Israel in recent years has become a partisan issue in Washington, with many Democrats — particularly of the party's progressive wing — growing increasingly critical over a number of Israeli policies, including settlement construction, and former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's close ties with former President Trump. Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders has been an outspoken critic of Israel.

The BDS movement — shorthand for a grassroots, Palestinian-led movement that advocates boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israeli institutions and businesses — applauded Ben & Jerry's decision as "a decisive step towards ending the company's complicity in Israel's occupation and violations of Palestinian rights," but called upon the company to do more.

"We hope that Ben & Jerry's has understood that, in harmony with its social justice commitments, there can be no business as usual with apartheid Israel," a statement read.

The Israeli government says the BDS movement masks a deeper aim of delegitimizing or even destroying the entire country.

The Yesha Council, an umbrella group representing the roughly 500,000 Israelis living in West Bank settlements, said "there's no need to buy products from companies that boycott hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens because of the place they choose to live." It said Ben & Jerry's decision "brought a bad spirit to such a sweet industry" and called on Israelis to buy locally produced ice cream this summer.

Ben & Jerry's move on Monday may not be the final chapter in the saga. Airbnb announced in 2018 that it would stop advertising properties in Israeli settlements. Several months later, after coming under harsh criticism from Israel and a federal lawsuit by Israeli Americans who owned property in the settlements, the company reversed its decision.

Canada to let vaccinated US citizens enter country on Aug. 9

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Canada announced Monday it will begin letting fully vaccinated U.S. citizens into Canada on Aug. 9, and those from the rest of the world on Sept. 7.

Officials said the 14-day quarantine requirement will be waived as of Aug. 9 for eligible travelers who are currently residing in the United States and have received a full course of a COVID-19 vaccine approved for use in Canada.

Public Safety Minister Bill Blair, who said he spoke with U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas on Friday, said the U.S. has not yet indicated any plan to change current restrictions at the land border. Canadians are able to fly into the United States with a negative COVID-19 test.

Asked in Washington if the U.S. would reciprocate, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said, "We

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are continuing to review our travel restrictions. Any decisions about resuming travel will be guided by our public health and medical experts. ... I wouldn't look at it through a reciprocal intention."

U.S. Democratic Congressman Brian Higgins, whose district includes Buffalo and Niagara Falls, said the U.S. has "neglected to give reopening the northern border the serious attention it deserves, and there is no excuse."

Canadian officials also announced that children who aren't vaccinated but are travelling with vaccinated parents won't have to quarantine, but will have to avoid group activities including schools and daycare centers.

Transport Minister Omar Alghabra also said a ban on direct flights from India will be extended to Aug. 21 because of the delta variant. "The situation in India is still very serious," he said.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said last week that Canada could start allowing fully vaccinated Americans into the country as of mid-August for nonessential travel and should be in a position to welcome fully vaccinated travelers from all countries by early September.

Canada leads G20 countries in vaccination rates, with approximately 80% of eligible Canadians vaccinated with their first dose and over 50% of those eligible fully vaccinated.

"This weekend, we even passed the U.S. in terms of fully vaccinated people," Trudeau said. "Thanks to the rising vaccination rates and declining COVID-19 cases, we are able to move forward with adjusted border measures."

Reopening to the U.S. first is a "recognition of our unique bond, especially between border communities," Trudeau said.

In the early days of the pandemic, the U.S. and Canadian governments closed the more than 5,500-mile (8,800-kilometer) border to nonessential traffic. With increasing vaccination rates and dropping infection rates, some were annoyed the two governments hadn't laid out plans to fully reopen the border.

Canada began easing its restrictions earlier this month, allowing fully vaccinated Canadians or permanent legal residents to return Canada without quarantining. But among the requirements are a negative test for the virus before returning, and another once they get back.

Pressure has been mounting on Canada to continue to ease the restrictions at the border, which have been in effect since March 2020. Providing exemptions for travel into Canada amid the pandemic is politically sensitive and Trudeau is expected to call a federal election next month.

Canadian officials have said they would like 75% of eligible Canadian residents to be fully vaccinated before loosening border restrictions for tourists and business travelers. The Canadian government expects to have enough vaccine delivered for 80% of eligible Canadians to be fully vaccinated by the end of July. The U.S. only allowed for exports of vaccines into Canada in early May.

Commercial traffic has gone back and forth normally between the two countries since the start of the pandemic.

The U.S. Travel Association estimates that each month the border is closed costs \$1.5 billion. Canadian officials say Canada had about 22 million foreign visitors in 2019 — about 15 million of them from the United States.

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

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performances or big events.

Nightclubs were allowed to open for the first time 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."

At The Piano Works in London, patrons packed the area around the cordoned-off dance floor on Sunday 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.

But while entertainment businesses and ravers are jubilant, many others are deeply worried about scrapping restrictions at a time when COVID-19 cases are on a rapid upswing because of the highly infectious delta variant first identified in India. Cases topped 50,000 per day last week for the first time since January. Deaths remain far lower than in the winter thanks to vaccines, but have risen from less than 10 a day in June to about 40 a day in the past week.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who has dialed down talk of freedom in recent weeks, urged the public to "proceed cautiously" and "recognize that this pandemic is far from over."

Or, as Deputy Chief Medical Officer Jonathan Van-Tam put it at a televised news conference: "Don't tear the pants out of this."

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 has tested positive for COVID-19.

Johnson initially said he would take daily tests instead of self-isolating — an option not offered to most people — but U-turned amid 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 trying to decide what to do as cases rise again.

British officials have repeatedly expressed confidence that the U.K.'s vaccine rollout — 68.5% of adults, or more than half the total population, has received two doses — will keep the threat to public health at bay. But 1,200 scientists from around the world backed a letter to British medical journal *The Lancet* criticizing 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 hasn't 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.

"I don't want to have to close nightclubs again, as they have elsewhere, but it does mean nightclubs need to do the socially responsible thing," Johnson said.

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 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."

Soon they may have no choice. Johnson said that from the end of September, full vaccination will become a condition of entry to nightclubs and other venues with big crowds. He said by that time, everyone 18 and over will have had the chance to get both doses of a vaccine.

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.

Some retailers said they would encourage customers to keep their masks on, and London Mayor Sadiq Khan said they remain mandatory on the capital's subways and buses — though police can no longer be called in to enforce the rule.

Khan said Monday that more than 90% of passengers appeared to be wearing masks, "and what I think that shows is that people are carrying on their great habits."

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.

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."

At London's Egg nightclub, 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."

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.

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

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 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.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, July 20, the 201st day of 2021. There are 164 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 20, 1969, astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin became the first men to walk on

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the moon after reaching the surface in their Apollo 11 lunar module.

On this date:

In 1917, America's World War I draft lottery began as Secretary of War Newton Baker, wearing a blindfold, reached into a glass bowl and pulled out a capsule containing the number 258 during a ceremony inside the Senate office building.

In 1942, the first detachment of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps — later known as WACs — began basic training at Fort Des Moines, Iowa.

In 1944, an attempt by a group of German officials to assassinate Adolf Hitler with a bomb failed as the explosion only wounded the Nazi leader. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was nominated for a fourth term of office at the Democratic convention in Chicago.

In 1951, Jordan's King Abdullah I was assassinated in Jerusalem by a Palestinian gunman who was shot dead on the spot by security.

In 1976, America's Viking 1 robot spacecraft made a successful, first-ever landing on Mars.

In 1977, a flash flood hit Johnstown, Pennsylvania, killing more than 80 people and causing \$350 million worth of damage. The U.N. Security Council voted to admit Vietnam to the world body.

In 1990, Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan, one of the court's most liberal voices, announced he was stepping down.

In 2002, 29 people died in a blaze started by bartenders who were doing tricks with fire at an unlicensed night club in Lima, Peru.

In 2007, President George W. Bush signed an executive order prohibiting cruel and inhuman treatment, including humiliation or denigration of religious beliefs, in the detention and interrogation of terrorism suspects.

In 2010, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted almost totally along party lines, 13-6, to approve Elena Kagan to be the Supreme Court's fourth female justice.

In 2012, gunman James Holmes opened fire inside a crowded movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, during a midnight showing of "The Dark Knight Rises," killing 12 people and wounding 70 others. (Holmes was later convicted of murder and attempted murder, and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.)

In 2015, the United States and Cuba restored full diplomatic relations after more than five decades of frosty relations rooted in the Cold War. The U.N. Security Council unanimously endorsed a landmark deal to rein in Iran's nuclear program.

Ten years ago: Six Republican presidential hopefuls traded tweets in the first presidential debate conducted through Twitter, outlining their agendas across the popular social media service. NBA star Yao Ming announced his retirement in his hometown of Shanghai.

Five years ago: Undercutting calls for Republican unity, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz stubbornly refused to endorse Donald Trump as he addressed the GOP convention in Cleveland, igniting thunderous boos from furious delegates as he encouraged Americans to simply "vote your conscience" in November. A federal appeals court ruled that Texas' strict voter ID law discriminated against minorities and the poor and had to be weakened before the November elections. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (REH'-jehp TY'-ihp UR'-doh-wahn) declared a three-month state of emergency following a botched coup attempt.

One year ago: Scientists at Oxford University said their experimental coronavirus vaccine had been shown in an early trial to prompt a protective immune response in hundreds of people who got the shot.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-singer Sally Ann Howes is 91. Author Cormac McCarthy is 88. Former Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski, D-Md., is 85. Artist Judy Chicago is 82. Rock musician John Lodge (The Moody Blues) is 78. Country singer T.G. Sheppard is 77. Singer Kim Carnes is 76. Rock musician Carlos Santana is 74. Rock musician Jay Jay French (Twisted Sister) is 69. Rock musician Paul Cook (The Sex Pistols, Man Raze) is 65. Actor Donna Dixon is 64. Rock musician Mick MacNeil (Simple Minds) is 63. Country singer Rodney Foster is 62. Actor Frank Whaley is 58. Actor Dean Cain is 57. Rock musician Stone Gossard (Pearl Jam) is 55. Actor Reed Diamond is 54. Actor Josh Holloway is 52. Singer Vitamin C is 52. Actor Sandra Oh

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is 50. Actor Omar Epps is 48. Actor Simon Rex is 47. Actor Judy Greer is 46. Actor Charlie Korsmo is 43. Singer Elliott Yamin (yah-MEEN') (American Idol) is 43. Supermodel Gisele Bundchen is 41. Rock musician Mike Kennerty (The All-American Rejects) is 41. Actor Percy Daggs III is 39. Actor John Francis Daley is 36. Dancer-singer-actor Julianne Hough is 33. Washington Nationals pitcher Stephen Strasburg is 33.