

Groton Daily Independent

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

Wage Library awarded \$15,000 grant

The city was awarded a \$15,000 grant from the American Rescue Plan Act for the Wage Memorial Library. The funds will be used for laptops, iPads and an automatic book systems. Councilman Brian Bahr suggested contacting the zoo in Watertown to see if they can bring animals for a day at the library.

The council gave second reading to an ordinance pushing the deadline back to December to submit its annual appropriation. Kristie Flihs said she had attended a budget meeting with about 75 people in attendance and said that only two municipalities have taken advantage of this opportunity. "Thanks Hope (Block) for jumping on this and getting it done," she said.

A first reading regarding the issuance of local medical cannabis establishment permits and/or licenses to prevent licenses from being issued. Cities are awaiting for guidance from the state in this area and more formal regulations need to be in place by October.

Finance Officer Hope Block presented an update on the mitigation plan for Groton. There are several options that the city can apply for grants.

A & B Contracting submitted a pay request for \$28,808.78 which was approved.

An easement on the east side of North Sixth Street, north of US 12, was approved. The easement will be used to expand the water main project to that part of town.

Hope Block and Paul Kosel were given authority to attend the South Dakota Rick and Safety Conference in Pierre November 3-4.

The council approved to hire Todd Gay Richard as the electric superintendent. He will be paid \$50 an hour, will receive two weeks vacation for 2021 and four weeks vacation for 2022. In addition the electric department will be paid \$200 a week for on-call pay with on-call being split equally.

The assistant finance officer, Kellie Locke, has gone through her sixth month of employment and will receive a \$1 an hour raise.

Groton City awarded \$5,000 mosquito control grant

The City of Groton has been awarded a \$5,000 West Nile Grant. Other communities in the area receiving grants were Andover with \$500, Bristol \$863, Britton \$6,792, Brown County \$15,000, Aberdeen \$20,000, Claremont \$1,981, Columbia \$1,021, Conde \$1,000, Frederick \$1,662, Hecla \$1,982, Langford \$1,983, McPherson County \$3,444, Pierpont \$1,341, Redfield \$5,203, Roslyn \$1,000, Spink County \$6,000, Stratford \$1,821, Warner \$1,825, Webster \$3,759 and Westport \$2,141. The state awarded a total of \$500,423 in mosquito control grants.

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UpSkill Programs Offer Certificates in High-Demand Fields

PIERRE, S.D. – The Department of Labor and Regulation (DLR) and Board of Technical Education are partnering to provide eligible individuals occupational skills training through the state's four technical colleges. The deadline to apply is Aug. 2, 2021.

UpSkill certificate programs are available for people who have obstacles to overcome to secure employment. Eligibility criteria vary and can include being laid off from a job, being low income or having a disability.

"Eligible participants will earn credentials in a high-demand field at little to no cost," said state Labor and Regulation Secretary Marcia Hultman. "After completing the UpSkill program, the participant can enter a new career field, advance in their current field or continue their education."

Nineteen certificates are available and designed as primarily 18-credit programs to be completed by spring 2022. They are available online, in-person and via hybrid formats. Credits earned from certificate programs can integrate with associate and bachelor's degree programs at public institutions across the state.

"Enrollment in UpSkill also comes with DLR's excellent case management and our full array of services for job seekers," said Secretary Hultman.

All applications begin at the technical colleges. Individuals interested in participating should contact the technical college offering the certificate program of interest. For contact information, visit SDUpSkill.com.

UpSkill is funded through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief fund as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding.

**Full or Part time help
wanted. Must be able
to lift 50lbs. Usual
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**\$15/hr starting wage.
Contact Bob Wegner at
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SD.**

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**HELP
WANTED!**

(0711.0808)

Governor Noem Praises SkyWest's Continued Partnership in Pierre and Watertown Markets

PIERRE, S.D. – Yesterday, during a phone call between Governor Kristi Noem and SkyWest CEO Chip Childs, both parties discussed their strong partnership and SkyWest's continued commitment to service in the Pierre and Watertown markets.

"With fall pheasant season approaching, South Dakota appreciates SkyWest's commitment to the Pierre and Watertown markets for the foreseeable future. The high-quality air service they provide enhances our state's tourism numbers and economic growth," said Governor Kristi Noem. "We will continue urging the U.S. Department of Transportation to re-bid these routes and hope that SkyWest will be recognized for the excellent service that they provide."

"We appreciate the outpouring of support from customers and state and local officials, and we continue to look forward to a positive resolution from the DOT," said SkyWest President & CEO Chip Childs. "We have appreciated Governor Noem's personal engagement and today we are pleased to reaffirm our commitment to providing United Express flights to Pierre and Watertown for the foreseeable future."

Governor Noem previously urged U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg to re-bid the Essential Air Service contracts in both Pierre and Watertown. Governor Noem believes that the contract should be awarded to SkyWest based on a strong record of service and performance. You can read that letter [here](#).

Since July 1, 2021, when SkyWest's current Essential Air Service contract concluded, SkyWest has continued to outperform its competitors in enplanements at both the Pierre and Watertown airports.

"SkyWest makes it easier for South Dakotans to travel anywhere in the world, and they bring visitors here to our beautiful state. I am proud to work with their team to continue serving our great state," Gov. Noem said.

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Groton City June 2021 Financial Report

June 2021

Dacotah Bank Checking Acct	\$ 2,774,606.38
General Cash	\$ 300.00
SD FIT Acct	\$ 1,452,251.43
Dacotah Bank Water CD	\$ 84,912.52
SD FIT CD	\$ 102,514.21
Cemetery Perp Care CD	\$ 32,876.69
Total	\$ 4,447,461.23

Invested In		
Cash	\$ 300.00	0.01%
Dacotah Bank	\$ 2,892,395.59	65.03%
SD Fit	\$ 1,554,765.64	34.96%
Total	\$ 4,447,461.23	100.00%

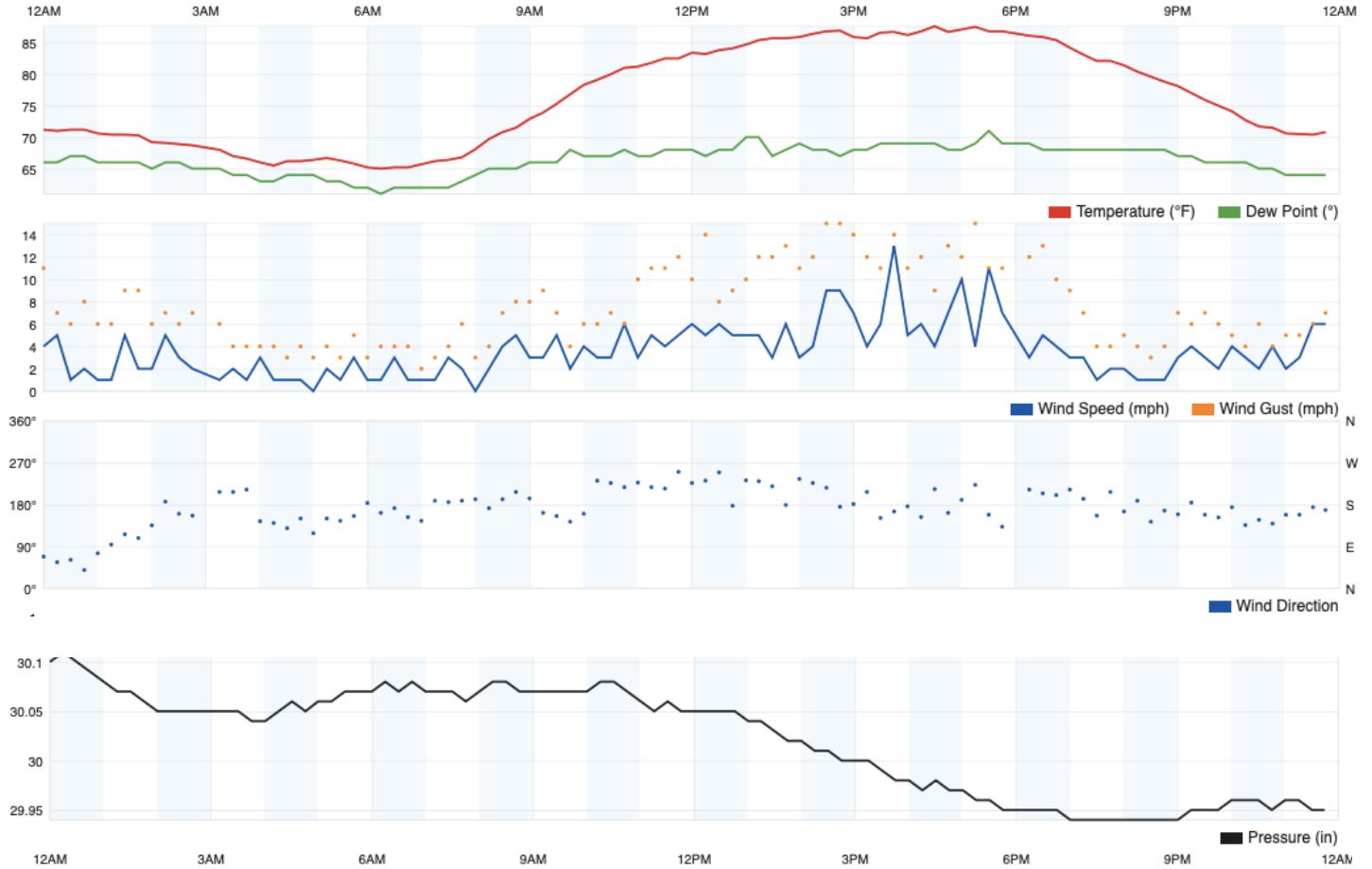
	Beginning	Receipts	Expenditures	Transfers	Ending
	Cash Balance				Cash Balance
General	\$ 711,513.56	\$ 105,680.42	\$ 67,332.89		\$ 749,861.09
Bed, Board, Booze Tax	\$ 94,323.32	\$ 2,503.80			\$ 96,827.12
Baseball Uniforms	\$ 1,710.20				\$ 1,710.20
Airport	\$ 12,143.91		\$ 10,518.67		\$ 1,625.24
**Debt Service	\$ 146,762.52	\$ -	\$ 40,212.50		\$ 106,550.02
Cemetery Perpetual Care	\$ 34,756.69	\$ -			\$ 34,756.69
Water Tower	\$ 180,000.00				\$ 180,000.00
Water	\$ 289,495.10	\$ 35,320.44	\$ 44,231.22		\$ 280,584.32
Electric	\$ 2,303,981.48	\$ 126,854.22	\$ 51,670.25		\$ 2,379,165.45
Wastewater	\$ 377,909.85	\$ 17,356.54	\$ 272.04		\$ 394,994.35
Solid Waste	\$ 37,129.14	\$ 9,949.94	\$ 8,343.73		\$ 38,735.35
Family Crisis	\$ 8,341.31	\$ 102.59			\$ 8,443.90
Sales Tax	\$ 19,861.52	\$ 10,139.95	\$ 9,934.71		\$ 20,066.76
Employment	\$ (8,655.40)	\$ -	\$ 79.45		\$ (8,734.85)
Utility Prepayments	\$ 80,002.77	\$ 270.85	\$ 455.65		\$ 79,817.97
Utility Deposits	\$ 82,778.01	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 925.00		\$ 82,853.01
Other	\$ 204.61	\$ -			\$ 204.61
Totals	\$ 4,372,258.59	\$ 309,178.75	\$ 233,976.11	\$ -	\$ 4,447,461.23

**Debt to be Paid		
**2015 Refinance	\$ 2,377,849.99	by 12/1/2035
**West Sewer	\$ 58,581.35	by 10/15/2022
**RR Sewer Crossing	\$ 32,042.81	by 7/15/22
Total Debt	\$ 2,468,474.15	

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Partly Sunny
then Mostly
Sunny and
Breezy

High: 90 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 69 °F

Thursday



Hot

High: 97 °F

Thursday
Night



Increasing
Clouds

Low: 71 °F

Friday



Mostly Sunny
then Chance
T-storms

High: 93 °F

National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Today

- *Breezy & Hazy with Elevated Smoke*
- *Highs: 85 to 97°*

Tonight

- *Partly Cloudy & Elevated Smoke*
- *Lows: 67 to 71°*

Thursday

- *Elevated Smoke*
- *Highs: 92 to 102°*

Graphic Created 7/21/2021 5:17 AM

Hot and mostly dry conditions along with elevated smoke will continue through Thursday. Temperatures will rise near 100 degrees on Thursday west of the James Valley leading to more high fire danger.

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Drought By The Numbers through July 19th, 2021



Location	Precipitation Since Jan 1, 2021		Precipitation Since Jan 1, 2020	
	Totals	Departures	Totals	Departures
Aberdeen	7.13"	-5.97"	22.33"	-12.59"
Watertown	9.20"	-3.75"	28.68"	-6.98"
Sisseton	8.20"	-4.82"	21.79"	-14.17"
Wheaton	8.43"	-5.90"	27.23"	-12.40"
Pierre	6.16"	-6.38"	20.34"	-12.40"
Mobridge	5.16"	-5.57"	18.48"	-10.24"
Kennebec	8.92"	-3.88"	25.94"	-7.65"
Timber Lake	8.55"	-3.77"	24.47"	-7.26"

Below average precipitation in 2020 has carried over into the first half of 2021, leading to deficits of about 7 to 14 inches in total as of July 19th, 2021. Find the latest drought information at <https://www.drought.gov/drought-information-statements>

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Today in Weather History

July 21, 1940: From near Miller, an estimated F2 tornado moved southeast, destroying a barn, garage, and two windmills.

July 21, 2000: 3.25-inch hail was reported near Okreek in northeastern Todd County.

1911 - The temperature at Painter, WY, dipped to 10 degrees to equal the record low for July for the continental U.S. (The Weather Channel)

1934 - The temperature reached 109 degrees at Cincinnati, OH, to cap their hottest summer of record. The state record for Ohio was established that day with a reading of 113 degrees near the town of Galipolis. (David Ludlum)

1975 - Six inches of rain fell across Mercer County, NJ, in just ten hours causing the worst flooding in twenty years. Assunpink Creek crested eleven feet above flood stage at Hamilton and Trenton, the highest level of record. Traffic was brought to a standstill, and railway service between New York City and Washington D.C. was cut off for two days. Flooding left 1000 persons homeless, and caused an estimated 25 million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1983: At Vostok Station in Antarctica, the temperature dropped to 128.6 degrees below zero. This reading is the coldest temperature ever recorded.

1987: An F4 tornado ravages the Teton Wilderness and Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. The tornado's violent winds destroy millions of trees on a 24.3-mile track that traverses the Continental Divide at an elevation of 10,170 feet.

1987 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from Utah to North Dakota, spawning a dozen tornadoes in North Dakota. Thunderstorms in North Dakota also produced baseball size hail at Clifford which caused four million dollars damage, and high winds which toppled a couple of eighty foot towers cutting off power to the town of Blanchard. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - While cool air invaded the central U.S., unseasonably hot weather continued over the western states. The temperature at Spring Valley, NV, soared from a morning low of 35 degrees to an afternoon high of 95 degrees. Fallon, NV, reported an all-time record high of 108 degrees, and Death Valley, CA, reported their sixth straight day of 120 degree heat. (The Weather Channel) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Afternoon thunderstorms over Florida produced wind gusts to 92 mph at Jacksonville, damaging thirteen light planes at Herlong Field. Five cities in Texas reported record low temperatures for the date. Corpus Christi, TX, equalled their record low for the date with a reading of 71 degrees, and then tied their record high for the date that afternoon with a reading of 97 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 87.6 °F at 4:30 PM

Low Temp: 65.0 °F at 6:15 AM

Wind: 15 mph at 3:45 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

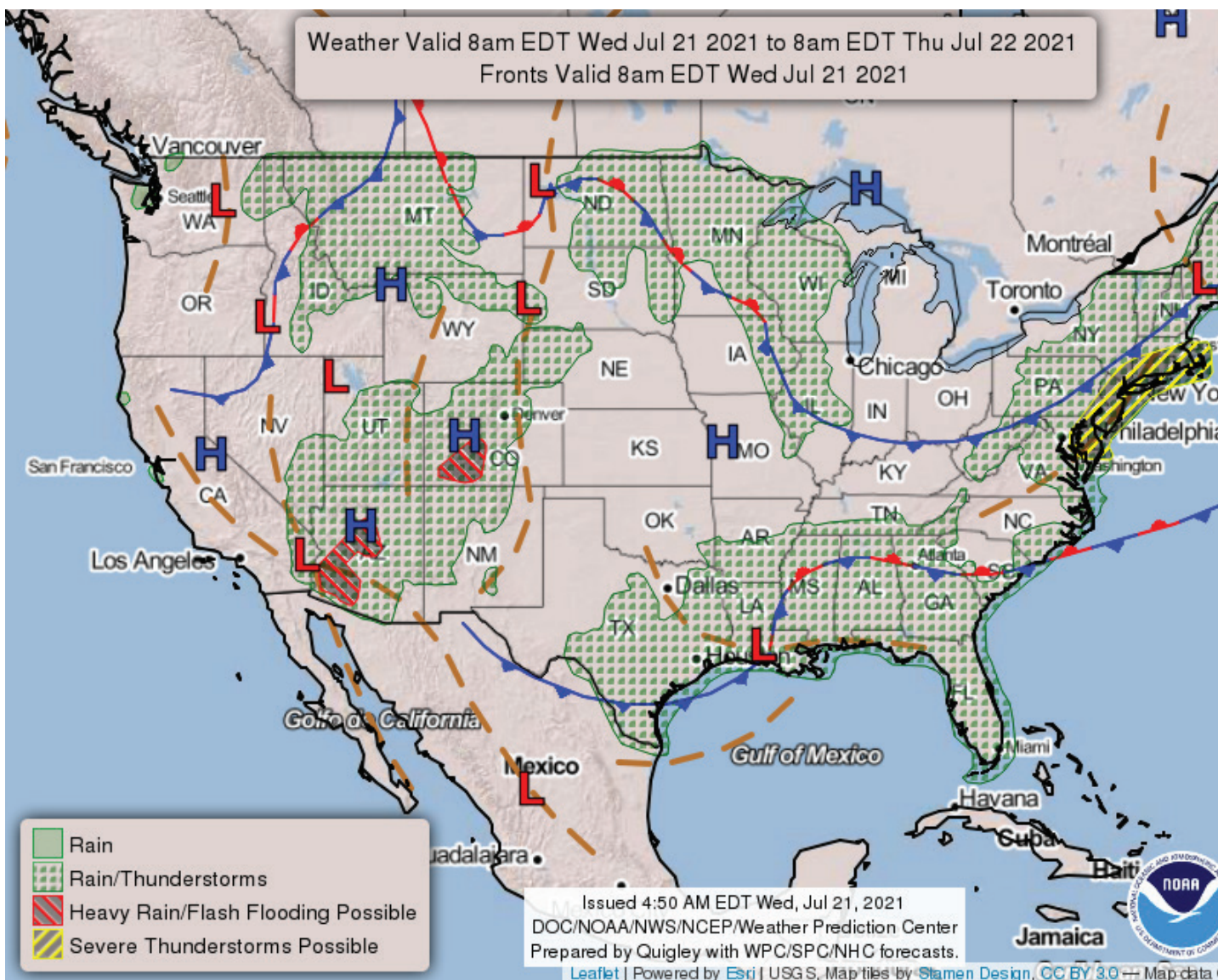
Precip to date in July.: 1.73

Average Precip to date: 13.10

Precip Year to Date: 6.48

Sunset Tonight: 9:15 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:06 a.m.





HEART TRANSPLANTS

Following a horrible accident, one of the victims who was in critical condition was medivacked to the emergency department of a hospital in a large metropolitan city. As the staff was removing his shirt, they noticed the name "Jesus" tattooed across his chest in large red letters. Quite amazed the ER nurse said to the attending physician, "From the way he looks and how he's dressed and his lack of cleanliness, I would assume that the name 'Jesus' on his chest is only skin deep."

If we who are Christ's disciples are to be worthwhile witnesses of God's Message, His name on us must be more than skin deep. It must be heart deep. Not only is His name to be on our lips but must penetrate every area of our lives. Not only should it come out of our mouths, but it should be obvious in everything we do. The psalmist said, "But they would flatter Him with their mouths, lying to Him with their tongues, their hearts were not loyal to His covenant."

Perhaps we can understand what the psalmist was talking about when we think of those who sing, "I Love to Tell the Story" but never witness to anyone. Or, someone who sings, "Have Thine Own Way Lord" with everyone but me. Or, "Take My Life and Let It Be" – yes, let it be right where it is – please don't bother me. I'm too busy.

Unfortunately, the church has far too many members who say one thing with their lips and another thing with their lives.

We need to "transplant" His heart into our hearts.

Prayer: Grant us, Father, a heart like Jesus, the mind of Christ, and the desire to live a life that is controlled by Your Spirit. May we do what we say we are. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues. Psalm 78:36

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2021 Community Events

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

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

10-26-30-52-57, Mega Ball: 10, Megaplier: 2

(ten, twenty-six, thirty, fifty-two, fifty-seven; Mega Ball: ten; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$128 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$161 million

Proud Boys withdraw from sponsoring dance in Scotland, S.D.

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A fraternity of the far-right extremist group Proud Boys has withdrawn its sponsorship of a street dance in the small town of Scotland in September.

David Finnell applied on behalf of the group to have the street dance from noon until midnight Sept. 18 in the Bon Homme County community of about 700 people. The City Council approved the request to close a section of the city street as required for alcohol consumption and food vendors.

Finnell, in a Facebook message to KELO-TV Monday, said that the Proud Boys were dropping sponsorship of the event out of concerns for safety. He did not elaborate.

The Southern Poverty Law Center identifies the Proud Boys as a hate group citing the group's views about women, Muslims and others, as well as appearing with other extremist groups.

Scotland's city attorney Kent Lehr said while the Proud Boys have gained some negative national attention, there have not been any problems locally. It's his understanding that several local or area residents are associated with the Proud Boys, Lehr said.

"I'm not saying the city is condoning or agreeing with what the group says," Lehr said. The council had to evaluate the street dance request from the Proud Boys as it evaluates any other request, he said.

"It has to consider the benefit to the community, any potential disruption (to closing street and caused by the event), the benefit to businesses on Main Street," Lehr said.

Finnell said the Proud Boys planned to raise money for local non-profits before deciding on Monday to withdraw from the event.

Prison official fired by governor says she was not told why

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A former South Dakota prison official who was recently fired by Gov. Kristi Noem said Tuesday that she wasn't told why she was dismissed.

Jennifer Dreiske, the former deputy warden at the State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls, had worked at the Department of Corrections for 19 years until Noem announced Thursday that she was being fired along with the prison's warden, Darin Young. The Department of Human Services had been investigating an anonymous complaint that alleged that supervising corrections officers regularly sexually harassed their colleagues, that employee morale was low and that promotions were plagued by nepotism.

Dreiske said in a statement on Facebook that she "never wavered" in her duties but that she was fired without an explanation.

"My priorities have always been to promote the safety of our staff and the rehabilitation of our incarcerated population," she wrote.

Noem also suspended her Cabinet secretary who oversees the state's prisons and the director of a prison work program. The governor has declined to comment on the investigation beyond issuing two statements

and releasing the anonymous complaint.

The complaint alleges that attempts to report sexual harassment from supervising corrections officers were ignored and that schedules at the prison were adjusted so the officers could “work in the same vicinities” as the victims. It further alleges that employee morale was low, with wages that lag behind those in other industries, that corrections officers don’t have tactical equipment that is “up to standards,” and that promotions have been based on personal connections.

The organization representing state employees, the South Dakota State Employees Organization, has said that many complaints surfaced in the spring about low morale and high employee turnover.

Dreisike said, “I hope attention shifts to improving conditions for the staff and those who are incarcerated.”

The Latest: USA Basketball awaits final three NBA players

TOKYO (AP) — The Latest on the Tokyo Olympics, which are taking place under heavy restrictions after a year’s delay because of the coronavirus pandemic:

USA Basketball expects to have its full 12-man roster available for Sunday’s matchup against France, the first game for both teams in the Tokyo Olympics.

Zach LaVine has been cleared to exit the health and safety protocols that stemmed from a coronavirus testing-related issue and will fly to Japan and rejoin the team on Thursday. And the plan is that the three players from the NBA Finals — Khris Middleton and Jrue Holiday from the newly crowned champion Milwaukee Bucks and Devin Booker from the Phoenix Suns — will be in place on Saturday.

The rest of the American roster worked out in Japan for the first time on Wednesday, a day after its flight from Las Vegas. The likelihood remains that the team — which has already seen JaVale McGee and Keldon Johnson added in place of Kevin Love and Bradley Beal — will have just one full practice together before its games start to count.

Mexican Olympic baseball players Héctor Velázquez and Sammy Solís have tested positive for COVID-19 and been isolated at their rooms in the team hotel in Mexico City.

The Mexican Baseball Federation and the Mexican Baseball League issued a joint statement saying that the two had positive PCR tests when reporting on Sunday but are asymptomatic.

The federation canceled Monday night’s training session at Alfredo Harp Helú Stadium, and PCR tests were given to all players and team coaching staff.

Velázquez, a 32-year-old right-hander, pitched for the Boston Red Sox from 2017-19 and Solis, a 32-year-old left-hander, pitched for the Washington Nationals from 2015-18.

Sweden has once again stunned the United States at the Olympics, this time with a 3-0 victory in the women’s soccer tournament.

The Americans, ranked No. 1 in the world and the favorites to win in Tokyo, were riding a 44-match unbeaten streak.

But Sweden, ranked No. 5, has been the U.S. team’s nemesis of sorts in recent years. The Swedes bounced the Americans from the 2016 Brazil Games in the quarterfinals, for the earliest U.S. Olympic exit ever.

Then in April, Sweden played the United States to a 1-1 draw in Stockholm, which snapped a winning streak dating back to January 2019, when the United States lost to France in the run-up to the World Cup.

The United States came out stale, with its best chance of the opening half coming in the final moments when Rose Lavelle’s shot hit the post. Coach Vlatko Andonovski made changes for the second half, subbing in Carli Lloyd for Alex Morgan and Julie Ertz for Sam Mewis.

Britain has opened the Olympic women’s soccer tournament with a 2-0 victory over Chile.

Lauren Hemp’s header put the ball in front of Ellen White for a close-in goal in the 18th minute. White’s second goal was a volley to the far post in the 75th.

Chile, ranked No. 37 in the world, was making its Olympic debut. Known as La Roja, Chile qualified for

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Tokyo by beating Cameroon 2-1 in an intercontinental playoff.

Britain's roster for Tokyo is composed mostly of English players, but Kim Little and Caroline Weir are from Scotland and Sophia Ingle is from Wales.

Because British Olympic teams include Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland, all four must be in agreement to participate. The only other Olympics that has included a British team was London in 2012.

England, ranked No. 6, was among the top three UEFA finishers at the 2019 World Cup, which earned Britain its spot.

Britain faces Japan and Chile plays Canada on Saturday in Sapporo as group play continues.

Sweden has surprised the top-ranked United States with a goal in the 25th minute to lead 1-0 at halftime of the Olympic women's soccer tournament on Wednesday.

Sweden famously knocked out the Americans in the quarterfinals of the Brazil Games, for the earliest U.S. Olympic exit ever.

The Swedes dominated the U.S. in the opening half at Tokyo Stadium, going ahead on Stina Blackstenius' header into the far corner off a cross from Sofia Jakobsson. The United States looked stale, with its best chance coming on a Rose Lavelle shot that hit the post.

The United States is unbeaten in 44 straight games, and was vying to become the first team to win Olympic gold after a World Cup victory.

Sweden won the silver in Brazil, falling to Germany in the gold medal match.

Brisbane will host the 2032 Olympics, the inevitable winner of a one-city race steered by the International Olympic Committee to avoid rival bids.

The Games will go back to Australia 32 years after the popular 2000 Sydney Olympics. Melbourne hosted in 1956.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison told International Olympic Committee voters in an 11-minute live video link from his office that Australia knows what it takes to deliver a successful Games.

Brisbane follows 2028 host Los Angeles in getting 11 years to prepare for hosting the Games. Paris will host in 2024.

The 2032 deal for the Australian east coast city looked done even months before the formal decision by IOC members at their meeting ahead of the Tokyo Games, which open Friday.

A Chilean taekwondo athlete and a Dutch skateboarder are the latest Olympians to test positive for coronavirus at the Tokyo Games.

Chilean athlete Fernanda Aguirre says in an Instagram post she is "devastated" and says "I feel so much sadness, anguish, frustration."

She adds "it's something that angers me a lot and I feel it's just unfair that my dream is crushed after so much sacrifice."

Aguirre was training in Uzbekistan prior to coming to Tokyo. The Chilean Olympic Committee says she tested negative before her flight but then positive at the airport in Japan. She's asymptomatic but won't be able to compete because she will have to spend at least 10 days in quarantine.

Dutch Olympic skateboarder Candy Jacobs likewise says she is "heartbroken" after being sent into quarantine. She won't get to compete in the street discipline in skateboarding.

Jacobs revealed the positive test in an Instagram post Wednesday. The Dutch team says she will quarantine for 10 days. Dutch broadcaster NOS reports she was removed from the Olympic village.

Looking to the future, the 31-year-old Jacobs says "I will need some time to let my broken heart heal and recover from this. Let's go Paris 2024."

An American beach volleyball player is in quarantine after testing positive for COVID-19 upon arrival in Japan, USA Volleyball said on Wednesday, three days before the start of play at the Tokyo Olympics.

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The national federation did not identify the athlete, citing privacy concerns. But another player told The Associated Press that Taylor Crabb was in quarantine. The other player spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to disclose the information.

NBC4 News in Los Angeles first reported late Tuesday night, Wednesday in Japan, that Crabb tested positive and quoted his brother, fellow beach volleyball pro Trevor Crabb, as saying the first-time Olympian is "fine and healthy and should be allowed to play in my personal opinion."

Taylor Crabb's would-be teammate, four-time Olympian Jake Gibb, did not immediately respond to a message from the AP seeking comment. The Orange County Register reported that Tri Bourne would replace Taylor Crabb and join Gibb in Tokyo for their first match on Sunday.

Although beach volleyball teams go through the qualifying process as pairs, international volleyball federation rules allow a player to be replaced up until Thursday evening. Gibb and Crabb had been scheduled to play their first match on Sunday night.

British and Chilean soccer players have taken a knee before kickoff in their opening match at the Tokyo Olympics.

The British women kneeled first, followed by their Chilean counterparts at the Sapporo Dome on Wednesday.

They were the first soccer players at the Olympics to perform the anti-racism gesture after the International Olympic Committee relaxed the rules on protests being allowed by the IOC.

FIFA has approved players taking a knee since some teams started doing it last year, particularly in England, where most of the British players are from.

The United States has begun its quest to regain the Olympic softball gold medal with a dominating performance from Cat Osterman, who lost the championship game 13 years ago.

She pitched one-hit ball over six innings and struck out nine to beat Italy 2-0 Wednesday.

Michelle Moultrie singled in a run in the fourth inning for the top-ranked U.S., which lost the title to Japan 3-1 at the 2008 Beijing Games. Janie Reed, the wife of Los Angeles Dodgers reliever Jake Reed, added a sacrifice fly.

Osterman, a 38-year-old left-hander, walked none on a humid afternoon with a 94-degree temperature that was even more steamy on the artificial turf. The last remaining player from the 2004 gold medalists, she improved to 6-1 in Olympic play with 66 strikeouts in 38 innings.

Softball and baseball were dropped for 2012 and 2016 and restored for these Olympics.

American swimmer Becca Meyers has pulled out of the Paralympics because she says the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee won't let her bring her mother to Tokyo as her personal care assistant.

Meyers, who is deaf and blind as the result of a rare genetic disorder, won three gold medals at the last Paralympics. She says in a statement that the USOPC had approved her mother to act as her assistant at all international meets since 2017.

The USOPC says that because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are increased restrictions on delegation size at the Tokyo Games. That's left the federation only one slot for a PCA who will have to assist 34 Paralympic swimmers. The USOPC says the PCA has more than 27 years of coaching experience and 11 years with para swimmers.

Meyers, 26, says she made the decision to drop out because she is "speaking up for future generations of Paralympic athletes in hope that they never have to experience the pain I've been through."

Equestrian Australia says it has provisionally suspended a member of the Olympic show jumping team over a positive test for cocaine.

The governing body says Jamie Kermond returned a positive A-sample for a metabolite of cocaine following a test conducted by Sport Integrity Australia on June 26.

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It says Kermond was banned from competing at the Tokyo Olympics but had the right to have his B-sample analyzed.

The 36-year-old Kermond was expected to make his Olympic debut at Tokyo.

The Australian Olympic Committee says in a statement that it's aware of Kermond's provisional suspension and that its selection committee will meet to consider his status on the team.

The head of the World Health Organization says the Tokyo Olympics should not be judged by how many COVID-19 cases arise because eliminating risk is impossible.

WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told an International Olympic Committee meeting that how infections are handled is what matters most.

"The mark of success is making sure that any cases are identified, isolated, traced and cared for as quickly as possible and onward transmission is interrupted," he said.

The number of Games-linked COVID-19 cases in Japan this month was 79 on Wednesday, with more international athletes testing positive at home and unable to travel.

Teammates classed as close contacts of infected athletes can continue training and preparing for events under a regime of isolation and extra monitoring.

Host Japan is off to a winning start as the Tokyo Olympics get underway, beating Australia 8-1 Wednesday in softball behind 39-year-old pitcher Yukiko Ueno, who won the 2008 gold medal game against the United States.

The game was played in a nearly empty stadium. Fans were barred because of the coronavirus pandemic. Many in Japan have questioned whether the Olympics should take place at all with low levels of vaccination in the nation.

Ueno allowed two hits over 4 1/3 innings and struck out seven, throwing 85 pitches for the win.

Minori Naito and Saki Yamazaki hit two-run homers off loser Kaia Parnaby. Yu Yamamoto, who had three RBIs, added a two-run drive against Tarni Stepto in the fifth that ended the game under a rout rule.

Japan is defending softball gold medalist after upsetting the U.S. in the 2008 final. Softball and baseball were dropped for 2012 and 2016 and restored for these Olympics. They already have been dropped for the 2024 Paris Games but are likely to be restored for 2028 in Los Angeles.

Biden's 3rd trip to reddish Ohio pushes his economic agenda

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden just can't quit Ohio — even if it rejected him in last year's election.

The Democrat travels to Cincinnati on Wednesday to push his economic policies. It's the third visit of his presidency to Ohio, the only state he lost that he has visited multiple times.

Ohio was once an electoral prize that could decide who occupied the White House, but its embrace of Republicans has tightened over the past decade. The visit is a testament to Biden's belief that going straight to voters will help cross a barbed political divide.

"Half of life is showing up, and Joe Biden shows up," said John Anzalone, Biden's presidential campaign pollster. "He's going to be a president for people who voted for him and people who voted against him."

Ohio Republicans, for their part, see the presidential attention as a chance to make the case against Democrats. The state faces a heated Senate election next year with the retirement of Republican Rob Portman, who helped negotiate a \$973 billion infrastructure plan with Biden that now faces an uncertain future in the evenly split Senate.

The president's visit will take him near the dangerously outdated Brent Spence Bridge — a chokepoint for trucks and emergency vehicles between Ohio and Kentucky that the past two presidents promised without success to replace. But Republicans are more focused on the increase in shootings and crime in Cincinnati, which they blame on Democrats, although there are a host of factors, including the coronavirus pandemic.

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"President Joe Biden will visit a great city suffering from devastating levels of violent crime caused by the failed leadership of Democrat Mayor John Cranley," said Ohio Republican Party Chair Bob Paduchik, adding that he believes Biden also failed "to protect Americans and our southern border."

Violent crime, particularly shootings and homicides, have been on the rise nationwide. But overall, far fewer crimes are committed than 10 years ago. Cincinnati, for example, saw a high number of shootings and record homicides in 2020 as the pandemic raged, according to the city's data. Homicides are slightly lower this year, with 49 homicides as of July 10 compared with 53 during the same period last year.

Before a town hall in Cincinnati to be shown on CNN, Biden will visit a training center for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers to discuss policies to create union jobs. The president can already say he's delivered results for the area with \$280 million in local relief funds for Cincinnati and \$159 million for the surrounding Hamilton County from his coronavirus aid package.

The president's time is one of the administration's most valuable commodities. With presidential visits to the Ohio cities of Columbus, Cleveland and now Cincinnati, the White House is betting that Biden's policies are popular with independent voters and that the electorate will reward a president and party that are trying to solve their problems.

Democratic wins have been few and far between outside Ohio's cities. The state is a microcosm of the national challenge for a party whose voters are clustered around large metro areas. Winning Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Toledo and Akron is not enough to overcome Republican advantages in the state's more rural counties. Former President Donald Trump may have energized Ohio voters, but the GOP's track record of success predates him.

"Ohio is not exactly trending well for Dems the past couple cycles, but it is deeper than just Trump," said Republican strategist Michael Hartley. "It is something that is almost at a fundamental level and has to do as much with the quality of candidates and the status of the Ohio Dem Party. They just don't know how to connect with the majority of Ohio voters."

Democrat Sherrod Brown has safely held onto his Senate seat since 2006. That election was the last big set of victories statewide by Democrats, a wave made possible after a political scandal for Republicans that involved state funds being invested in rare coins. However, next year might be a chance for Democrats to take Portman's seat.

"A brutal Republican primary gives them their best shot to rebuild," said Robert Alexander, a political science professor at Ohio Northern University. "In essence, what happens in 2022 is a last stand of sorts for Democrats to avoid the state moving from reddish purple to blood red."

The most notable Republican candidates in a crowded field are courting Trump. There's former party chair Jane Timken, "Hillbilly Elegy" author J.D. Vance, banker Mike Gibbons, former Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel and car dealer turned tech executive Bernie Moreno. So far, the most prominent Democrat seeking the seat is U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan, whose northeastern district includes the city of Youngstown.

The race is as much about Biden as the staying power of Trump. Turnout might decline without Trump on the ballot in 2022, giving a boost to Democrats who can appeal to working-class voters, Alexander said.

"There is no doubt that Republicans in the state are doing their best to mimic Trump both online and in their public events," he said. "Whether that actually translates to voter turnout is an open question."

German Cabinet approves some \$472 million in first flood aid

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Germany's Cabinet on Wednesday approved a roughly 400 million-euro (\$472 million) package of immediate aid for victims of last week's floods and vowed to get started quickly on rebuilding the devastated areas — a task whose cost isn't yet clear but is expected to run well into the billions.

Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said that the package, financed half by the federal government and half by Germany's state governments, to help people deal with the immediate aftermath of the flooding will end up being bigger if more money is needed.

"We will do what is necessary to help everyone as quickly as possible," he said. Authorities in the two

affected states are responsible for details of who receives how much and how, but Scholz said they have indicated that there will no means-testing and it will be "a very unbureaucratic process."

"It's necessary to send a message quickly that there is a future, that we are taking care of it together, that this is a matter for us as the whole country to help with," he added. Chancellor Angela Merkel said during a visit to a badly damaged town on Tuesday that she hopes getting money to people "is a question of days."

Germany has recent experience with major floods that hit swaths of the country, particularly the east, in 2002 and 2013. They caused extensive and costly damage. However, the death tolls were particularly high in last week's floods, which were the worst in living memory in the areas they hit.

At least 171 people were killed in Germany when small rivers swelled quickly into raging torrents after persistent downpours last week — well over half of them in Ahrweiler county, near Bonn. Another 31 died in neighboring Belgium, bringing the death toll in both countries to 202.

Scholz said that government aid for rebuilding after the 2013 floods has totaled around 6 billion euros so far and it could end up being more this time.

"There is nothing we need to delay," he told reporters in Berlin. "The pledge we want to give now is that this help with rebuilding can begin straight away ... so that everything necessary can be done to restore infrastructure, damaged houses, damaged schools, hospitals, put in order anything that was destroyed there."

Interior Minister Horst Seehofer said he hopes for a rough assessment of the damage by the end of the month, after which federal officials and state governors will have to meet to discuss the way forward.

He and Scholz indicated that people can expect reconstruction aid whether or not they were insured for "elementary damage" such as floods, which many in Germany are not, though insurance likely will be taken into account in determining details. Merkel has expressed skepticism about making such insurance obligatory, arguing that it could produce unaffordable premiums, but some other German officials advocate it.

Seehofer said there will have to be "a broad debate about safeguard systems" for the future given that natural disasters are likely to become more frequent and more destructive.

Scholz concurred, adding: "in terms of what's going on now, we have to help. I would argue against being cynical and being heartless — this is a big disaster, we have to help and that has to be the first priority, rather than any principles."

Antetokounmpo caps extraordinary postseason as Finals MVP

By STEVE MEGARGEE AP Sports Writer

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Three weeks ago, a knee injury left Giannis Antetokounmpo looking 50/50 to return for the rest of the Bucks' playoff run.

Look at him now.

The Greek Freak delivered perhaps the best performance of his career at the best possible moment and can now add an NBA Finals MVP award to his two regular-season MVP trophies. Antetokounmpo scored 50 points in a series-clinching 105-98 Game 6 victory that ended the Bucks' 50-year title drought.

A half century ago, it was Lew Alcindor — before he was Kareem Abdul-Jabbar — earning the MVP honors for the Bucks by averaging 27 points and 18.5 rebounds in a four-game sweep of Baltimore. This time, it was another big man leading the way as Antetokounmpo became the first player to average 35.2 points, 13.2 rebounds and 5.0 assists per game while shooting 61.8%.

He followed that up by saying how his improbable rise to stardom should serve as an inspiration to others.

"Believe in your dreams," Antetokounmpo said. "Whatever you feel, when you feel down, when things don't look like it's going to happen for you or you might not make it in your career — it might be basketball, it might be anything. Just believe in what you're doing and keep working. Don't let nobody tell you who you can't be or what you can't do."

Antetokounmpo was an easy choice for the MVP honor after also adding 14 rebounds and five blocks in Game 6. He had at least 40 points and 10 rebounds in three of the six games in this series.

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He did all that while dealing with a hyperextended left knee that prevented him from playing in the last two games of the Eastern Conference finals against the Atlanta Hawks.

"It's just completely awe-inspiring, his performance tonight, this whole series, this whole year," Bucks center Brook Lopez said.

Antetokounmpo initially feared the injury was more serious and would keep him out of action for an entire year. He instead was back on the floor a week later for the start of the NBA Finals.

He collected 20 points and 17 rebounds in a Game 1 loss. He followed that up with at least 41 points and 12 rebounds in each of the next two games.

Then he played major roles in the two signature plays of this series.

First he blocked Deandre Ayton's dunk attempt to prevent Phoenix from tying Game 4 with just over a minute left. And after Jrue Holiday made a steal with the Bucks protecting a one-point lead in the final minute of Game 5, the 6-foot-11 Antetokounmpo raced down the court and was on the receiving end of Holiday's alley-oop that helped clinch the game.

He saved his finest outing for the championship clincher, scoring nearly half the Bucks' points.

Antetokounmpo collected 20 points in the third quarter alone to help Milwaukee rally from a 47-42 half-time deficit, though the game was still tied 77-all heading into the final period.

He had 27 of the Bucks' 48 total points through the game's middle two quarters. And after making just 55.6% of his free throws in his first 20 games of this postseason, Antetokounmpo went 17 of 19 from the line Tuesday night.

"It's hard to find more words to describe what Giannis does," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. "But the way he made his free throws, the way he did everything, stepped up, the poise, the confidence, the leadership. He has been working on it. We say we want Giannis to get to the free throw line. We believe. We talked about it this past summer. To win a championship, you've got to make free throws and you've got to make shots."

Antetokounmpo's rapid recovery to lead Milwaukee to its first title since 1971 represents the crowning achievement in Antetokounmpo's remarkable rise to NBA stardom.

The 26-year-old Antetokounmpo noted this week he hadn't even started playing basketball in 2007, when LeBron James made his first finals appearance. His rare blend of size and athleticism made him the No. 15 overall pick in the 2013 draft, and he made his first All-Star appearance four years later.

He earned back-to-back MVP honors in 2019 and 2020 while leading the Bucks to the league's best regular-season record each of those years, but they kept falling short in the playoffs. The Bucks blew a 2-0 lead to Toronto in the 2019 Eastern Conference finals, then lost to Miami in the second round.

Antetokounmpo kept his faith in the Bucks by signing a supermax extension in December.

"There was a job that had to be finished," Antetokounmpo said.

Antetokounmpo also decided to take a different mental approach.

He acknowledged getting too caught up in the emotional swings of each win and loss earlier in his career. He stayed more level-headed this year while also emerging as a more vocal leader.

That strategy allowed the Bucks to erase 2-0 deficits in the second round against Brooklyn and again in these finals. It helped Antetokounmpo deal with the uncertainty in the immediate aftermath of his injury.

And now it has him on the highest of highs as the MVP of a league championship series.

Brisbane picked to host 2032 Olympics without a rival bid

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Brisbane was picked Wednesday to host the 2032 Olympics, the inevitable winner of a one-city race steered by the IOC to avoid rival bids.

The Games will go back to Australia 32 years after the popular 2000 Sydney Olympics. Melbourne hosted in 1956.

"We know what it takes to deliver a successful Games in Australia," Prime Minister Scott Morrison told International Olympic Committee members in an 11-minute live video link from his office.

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When the award was later confirmed, with Brisbane winning the vote 72-5, Morrison raised both arms in the air and gave two thumbs up.

The victory led to a fireworks display in Brisbane that was broadcast to IOC members in their five-star hotel in Tokyo.

Brisbane follows 2028 host Los Angeles in getting 11 years to prepare for hosting the Games. Paris will host in 2024.

The 2032 deal looked done months before the formal decision at the IOC meeting, which was held ahead of Friday's opening ceremony of the Tokyo Games.

The IOC gave Brisbane exclusive negotiating rights in February. That decision left Olympic officials in Qatar, Hungary and Germany looking blindsided with their own stalled bidding plans.

Though the result was expected, a high-level Australian delegation went to Tokyo amid the COVID-19 pandemic to present speeches, films and promises on stage.

The city of Brisbane sent Mayor Adrian Schrinner, the state of Queensland sent Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk and Australia's federal government sent sports minister Richard Colbeck to woo Olympic voters.

They were joined by long-time Australian Olympic official John Coates, now an IOC vice president who shaped the fast-track selection process two years ago that now rewarded his Brisbane bid.

The first-time format was designed to cut campaign costs, give the IOC more control in dealing discreetly with preferred candidates and removed the risk of vote-buying.

The project was described by the IOC as "a passion-driven, athlete-centric offer from a sports-loving nation." Events will be staged across Queensland, including in Gold Coast, which hosted the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

Brisbane's renowned cricket stadium, known as the Gabba, will be upgraded and may host the sport at the Games. Cricket was played once at the Olympics, at the 1900 Paris Games.

The next three Summer Games hosts — starting with Paris in 2024 — are now secured in wealthy and traditional Olympic nations without any of the trio facing a contested vote.

The IOC and its hands-on president, Thomas Bach, have torn up the template of traditional bidding campaigns and hosting votes to lock down preferred cities with the minimum risk.

Paris and LA were competing for 2024 until Bach and Coates oversaw including the 2028 rights in an unprecedented double award four years ago.

The future hosts offer stability for the IOC which was stung by the two previous Summer Games contests being tainted by allegations of vote-buying when multiple cities were on the ballot.

The 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics and the postponed 2020 Tokyo Olympics are still under investigation by French prosecutors. They have implicated officials who then lost their place in the IOC family as active or honorary members.

A low-risk future beckons for the IOC following the often-troubled Tokyo Olympics and the 2022 Beijing Winter Games in February, which will throw scrutiny on China's human rights record.

Key partners have also been secured through 2032. The IOC's signature broadcasting deal with NBC and top-tier sponsors Coca-Cola, Visa and Omega are tied down for the decade ahead.

With only major cities staging the Summer Games from Beijing in 2008 through Los Angeles, Brisbane positioned itself as a new kind of project.

"We want to show the world that mid-sized cities and regions can host the Games without financial distress or missed deadlines," Palaszczuk told voters.

Brisbane said it already has 84% of stadiums and event venues in place to fit the IOC's modern demand of avoiding excessive spending and potential white-elephant projects.

A new swimming arena is planned and billions of dollars will be spent on transport projects — not because of the Olympics but in time for them, Brisbane officials said.

The Latest: Australia wants to change AstraZeneca advice

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By The Associated Press undefined

CANBERRA, Australia — Australia's prime minister says he's urging the government's adviser on vaccines to change its advice against adults under age 60 taking the AstraZeneca shot.

More than half the nation is locked down because of growing COVID-19 clusters.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunization last month lifted the minimum recommended age for taking AstraZeneca from 50 to 60 because of the greater risk of rare blood clots associated with the vaccine in younger people.

The change followed the death in Australia of a 52-year-old. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said he was appealing to ATAGI to change its age advice due to the escalating risk from the more contagious delta variant. The only alternative to AstraZeneca in Australia is Pfizer which is in short supply.

MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:

- France requires COVID pass for Eiffel Tower, tourist venues
- US life expectancy in 2020 saw biggest drop since WWII
- WHO leader says virus risk inevitable at Tokyo Olympics

Find more AP coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic> and <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccine>

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

PARIS — Visitors now need a special COVID-19 pass to ride up the Eiffel Tower or visit French museums or movie theaters.

It's the first step in a new campaign against what the government calls a "stratospheric" rise in delta variant infections.

People must be fully vaccinated or have a negative virus test or proof they recently recovered from an infection to get the pass. The requirement went into effect Wednesday at cultural and tourist sites.

Lawmakers are starting debate on a bill that would expand the pass requirement to restaurants and many other areas of public life, and require all health workers to get vaccinated. It has prompted protests.

TOKYO — The head of the World Health Organization says the Tokyo Olympics shouldn't be judged by the tally of COVID-19 cases that arise because zero risk is impossible.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus tells the International Olympic Committee what matters more is how infections are handled.

Tedros wants Tokyo's success to be judged by how "cases are identified, isolated, traced and cared for as quickly as possible and onward transmission is interrupted."

The number of games-linked COVID-19 cases in Japan this month is now 79. More international athletes have tested positive at home and can't travel.

NEW YORK — U.S. life expectancy fell by a year and a half in 2020. That's the largest one-year decline since World War II.

The decrease for both Black Americans and Hispanic Americans was even worse. The figure is three years.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released the calculations for 2020 early Wednesday.

The drop is due mainly to the COVID-19 pandemic. Health officials say it's responsible for close to 74% of the overall life expectancy decline.

Killers other than COVID-19 played a role. Drug overdoses pushed life expectancy down. And rising homicides were a small but significant reason for the decline for Black Americans.

Olympics, pandemic and politics: There's no separating them

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

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TOKYO (AP) — Over and over, year after year, the stewards of the Olympics say it: The Games aren't supposed to be political. But how do you avoid politics when you're trying to pull off an event of this complexity during a lethal and protracted pandemic?

Consider:

— The Japanese medical community largely opposes these Olympics; the government's main medical adviser, Dr. Shigeru Omi, has said it's "abnormal" to hold them during a pandemic.

— Medical journals The Lancet and The New England Journal of Medicine have raised questions about the risks, with the former criticizing the World Health Organization for not taking a clear stand and the latter saying the IOC's decision to proceed "is not informed by the best scientific evidence."

— The second-largest selling newspaper in Japan, the Asahi Shimbun, has called for the Olympics to be canceled. So have other regional newspapers.

— There's the risk of the Olympics spreading variant strains, particularly after two members of the Ugandan delegation were detected with the delta variant.

Still, they are going ahead; the opening ceremony is Friday. So how have the International Olympic Committee and the Japanese government of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga been able to surmount strong opposition?

At the core: the "host city contract" that gives the IOC sole authority to cancel. If Japan cancels, it would have to compensate the IOC. And there are billions at stake. Japan has officially spent \$15.4 billion but government audits suggest it's twice that much. Japanese advertising giant Dentsu Inc., a key player in landing the corruption-tainted bid in 2013, has raised more than \$3 billion from local sponsors.

Estimates suggest a cancellation — highly unlikely at this point, less than 48 hours before the opening — could cost the IOC up to \$4 billion in broadcast rights income. Broadcasting and sponsors account for 91% of the IOC income, and American network NBCUniversal provides about 40% of the IOC's total income.

The Associated Press sought perspectives from inside and outside Japan on the politics of putting this on.

KOICHI NAKANO, political scientist, Sophia University:

"It's a bit like a gambler who already has lost too much. Pulling out of it now will only confirm the huge losses made, but carrying on you can still cling to the hope of winning big and taking it all back. (Suga) might as well take the chance and hope for the best by going ahead with it. At least there is some chance that he can claim the games to be a success — just by doing it — and saturating the media with pride and glory might help him turn the negative opinion around."

MARK CONRAD, lawyer, Gabelli School of Business, Fordham University:

"The IOC carries a brand that is powerful. Athletes from around the world coming together to compete in peace is a heart-tugging draw. It takes an entertainment event and infuses it with a certain level of piety and awe. Who is against peace? With this "Olympism" as a goal, it has snagged corporate sponsors willing to pay lots of money. Therefore, the IOC has the leverage to exact contract terms very favorable to it and it certainly has done that in this case. The fact that only the IOC can formally decide to pull the plug on the games — even in the case of unforeseeable health events -- is testament to this."

HELEN JEFFERSON LENSKEYI, sociologist, author, "The Olympic Games: A Critical Approach":

"The host city contract hands over all the power to the IOC. The Olympic industry has had 120-plus years to win hearts and minds around the globe, with obvious success. In the age of the internet, their PR controls the message and protects the brand 24/7. The IOC is also beyond the reach of any oversight agency, including the governments of host countries. It can violate a country's human rights protections with immunity, including athletes' right to access domestic courts of law."

AKI TONAMI, political scientist, University of Tsukuba:

"Based on what I am hearing, people within the government have been given their instructions to make

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the Games happen, and that is their singular focus right now — for better or for worse. Their hope is to get through the Games with as few missteps as possible. Politicians may well be aware of the risk they are taking but hope that once the games begin the Japanese public will persevere 'for the good of Japan' and forget how we got there."

JOHN HORNE, sociologist, Waseda University, co-author with Garry Whannel of "Understanding the Olympics":

"The IOC is an elitist club that garners support from other elites and people — and countries — that aspire to joining the elite. From a sports perspective, the IOC represents the custodian of the exclusive medals that athletes in numerous sports aspire to, acts as the chief promoter of the mythology of the healing power of sport, and the organization that most international sports federations and national Olympic committees are reliant on for funding."

GILL STEEL, political scientist, Doshisha University:

"Politically, the opposition is so weak, the government can do pretty much anything it wants. Although a disastrous Olympics would damage the LDP's credibility, the party likely feels safe because a majority of the public doubts the capability of the opposition to govern. The government may be hoping that once the games start, public opinion will turn — at the very least, producing a distraction, and at most, perhaps a rally round the flag effect."

ROBERT WHITING, author of several books on Japan including the latest, "Tokyo Junkie":

"You notice how nobody seems to be in charge. You have all these different entities: the Tokyo organizing committee; the Japanese Olympic Committee; the prime minister's office; the governor of Tokyo, Yuriko Koike; the Japan Sports Agency; the Foreign Ministry; the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Suga is asked in the Diet (Japanese parliament) about canceling the games and says it's not his responsibility. Nobody wants to lose face."

DAVID LEHENY, political scientist, Waseda University:

"A lot of the opposition is shallow and movable, though of course that's contingent on the Olympics actually working out. There will be a lot of people (broadcasters, etc.) invested in trying to make it look like a good show, so I think they'll have the winds at their back if there's not an appreciable spike in COVID deaths or any heat-related tragedies for the athletes."

RYU HOMMA, author and former advertising agency executive:

"If it turns out there is a surge in coronavirus patients and it becomes a catastrophe, that's not the responsibility of the IOC. It's the Japanese government that will be stuck with the responsibility."

Japan tops Australia in softball as delayed Tokyo Games open

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (AP) — Yukiko Ueno had waited 4,718 days for this moment, 13 long years that included an extra delay caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Finally, after all the doubts the Tokyo Olympics would ever take place, she was back on the mound trying to start her country to another softball gold medal.

"Before the game I was actually trying to calm down and not let myself overly feel excited about this opportunity to go back to the mound for the Olympics," she said through a translator. "I was overly thinking."

The 39-year-old pitcher settled down from a shaky start to allow two hits over 4 1/3 innings in a nearly empty stadium, and host Japan got off to a winning start when the Olympics got underway, beating Australia 8-1 Wednesday. The U.S. defeated Italy 2-0 in the second game of a tripleheader.

Playing about 150 miles north of the main Olympic sites in Tokyo, the teams lined up for the national

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anthems in a stadium with a listed capacity of 30,000 that had about 50 spectators, presumably team and Olympic officials, plus media.

The first two days of the softball tournament are being played about 40 miles from the site of a 2011 nuclear power plant disaster. The rest of the tournament will be in Yokohama, near Tokyo.

"It's kind of a disappointment," Ueno said. "We wanted to demonstrate our play in front of people of Fukushima, who have made a lot of efforts to reconstruct Fukushima."

Fans were barred from the Olympics because of the coronavirus pandemic. Many in Japan have questioned whether the Olympics should take place at all with low levels of vaccination in the nation.

"Australia can create its own excitement," third baseman Stacey Porter said.

Ueno, who won the 2008 gold medal game, struck out seven and threw 85 pitches for the win.

Minori Naito and Saki Yamazaki hit two-run homers off loser Kaia Parnaby and Yu Yamamoto, who had three RBIs, added a two-run drive against Tarni Stepto in the fifth that ended the game under a rout rule.

Ueno started Australia's Michelle Cox off with a ball at 9:02 a.m. at Fukushima Azuma Baseball Stadium, beginning an Olympics whose viability has been repeatedly questioned.

It was 88 degrees with 60% humidity for the morning start, which had the sun in the eyes of left-handed batters. The artificial turf made it seem even warmer, and Stepto pitched without a cap.

Ueno forced in a run in the first by hitting Chelsea Forkin with a pitch, her second straight hit batter.

Yamamoto singled in a run in the bottom half and Japan took a 3-1 lead in the third when Naito fouled off a 1-2 changeup, and drove a hanging changeup over the left-center field fence.

Yamazaki reached on a grounder leading off the fourth when Forkin dropped the throw at first, and Fujita drove a 1-0 pitch over the 220-foot fence in left center. Nodoka Harada added a sacrifice fly off Stepto for a 6-1 lead.

Japan is the defending softball gold medalist after upsetting the U.S. in the 2008 final. Softball and baseball were dropped for 2012 and 2016 and restored for this year's Olympics. They already have been dropped for the 2024 Paris Games and are likely to be restored for 2028 in Los Angeles.

Japan coach Reika Utsugi had thought Ueno would be especially ready for the opener.

"She was the reason we that became so strong a team," Utsugi said, "and we were able to dream about winning the gold."

Tokyo's drinkers drown frustrations over virus limits, Games

By KANTARO KOMIYA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — On the eve of the Tokyo Olympics, the government's attempt to curb a coronavirus surge by targeting drinkers is drowning in liquor, frustration and indifference.

Japan has asked the city's restaurants and bars to close by 8 p.m., if not entirely, to keep people from socializing in close contact with strangers and spreading the virus, but the state of emergency hasn't deterred many. Instead, drinkers moved outdoors, and many bars in Tokyo's famed nightlife districts are bustling with defiant customers.

"Nobody is convinced when (the government) victimizes people who are drinking alcohol without showing decent scientific evidence, even while going ahead with the Olympics," said Mio Maruyama, a 28-year-old real estate industry worker who was chatting with her colleagues on the street in Tokyo's Shinjuku district.

She says she's interested in watching the Games, especially new sports like skateboarding and Japan's Rui Hachimura, an NBA star, "but when I think of how politicians are playing around with this, I'm not quite rooting for this event from my heart."

"It's not that we are breaking the rules just because we're against the inconsistency between politicians' words and actions," she said, referring to a 40-person reception for International Olympic Committee members on Sunday that included the prime minister and the governor of Tokyo. "But when you see such things, you might think that rulebreakers were right in doing what they're doing."

The IOC reception happened at a time when the public is barred from going to parties or even attending most Olympic events. Many Japanese are frustrated by that contrast — but are hardly staying home.

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At around 9:30 p.m. in Shinjuku, people crisscrossed in front of the world's busiest train terminal. Night-time turnout was modest compared to before the pandemic, but bar districts like Kabukicho were still illuminated with neon lights from a few food establishments that were still open after 8 p.m.

Exempted from the emergency state mandate, 24/7-open convenience stores were busy with shoppers. Near one of the shops, some drinkers were talking with city workers wearing green Tokyo Metropolitan Government vests who were asking people to refrain from drinking and chatting outside.

On a quiet street in east Shinjuku, Naoto Suga picked up a can of lemon-flavored liquor that his friend had just brought him. They sat on a curbside, along with around a dozen others who were also drinking on the street.

"We've been here every night for the past three days or so," said Suga, 25, who works in a nearby apparel shop.

"I don't think the Olympics itself made this (situation), but even before the Games, things like the state of emergency have remained half measures, and I think that's making things worse," he said. "People are all used to the state of emergency, so it's getting less meaningful now."

Suga, who hasn't received the COVID-19 vaccine yet, also lamented the slower rollout in Japan, especially for younger people. Everyone 12 and older is eligible to be vaccinated, but younger people are last in line. Only 22% of Japan's population has been fully vaccinated so far.

"To be honest, I'm for hosting the Olympics; it's better than not doing so given the debt of venue buildings," he said. "But I don't quite have a particular sport I want to watch. I've lost interest."

50-year war on drugs imprisoned millions of Black Americans

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

Landscaping was hardly his lifelong dream.

As a teenager, Alton Lucas believed basketball or music would pluck him out of North Carolina and take him around the world. In the late 1980s, he was the right-hand man to his musical best friend, Youtha Anthony Fowler, who many hip hop and R&B heads know as DJ Nabs.

But rather than jet-setting with Fowler, Lucas discovered drugs and the drug trade at arguably the worst time in U.S. history — at the height of the so-called war on drugs. Addicted to crack cocaine and convicted of trafficking the drug, he faced 58 years imprisonment at a time when drug abuse and violence plaguing major cities and working class Black communities were not seen as the public health issue that opioids are today.

By chance, Lucas received a rare bit of mercy. He got the kind of help that many Black and Latino Americans struggling through the crack epidemic did not: treatment, early release and what many would consider a fresh start.

"I started the landscaping company, to be honest with you, because nobody would hire me because I have a felony," said Lucas. His Sunflower Landscaping got a boost in 2019 with the help of Inmates to Entrepreneurs, a national nonprofit assisting people with criminal backgrounds by providing practical entrepreneurship education.

Lucas was caught up in a system that limits him and a virtually unknowable number of people with criminal drug records, with little thought given to their ability to rehabilitate. In addition to employment, those with criminal records can be limited in their access to business and educational loans, housing, child custody rights, voting rights and gun rights.

It's a system that was born when Lucas was barely out of diapers.

Fifty years ago this summer, President Richard Nixon declared a war on drugs. Today, with the U.S. mired in a deadly opioid epidemic that did not abate during the coronavirus pandemic's worst days, it is questionable whether anyone won the war.

Yet the loser is clear: Black and Latino Americans, their families and their communities. A key weapon of the war was the imposition of mandatory minimums in prison sentencing. Decades later those harsh penalties at the federal level and the accompanying changes at the state level led to an increase in the

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prison industrial complex that saw millions of people, primarily of color, locked up and shut out of the American dream.

An Associated Press review of federal and state incarceration data showed that, between 1975 and 2019, the U.S. prison population jumped from 240,593 to 1.43 million Americans. Among them, about 1 in 5 people were incarcerated with a drug offense listed as their most serious crime.

The racial disparities reveal the uneven toll of the war on drugs. Following the passage of stiffer penalties for crack cocaine and other drugs, the Black incarceration rate in America exploded from about 600 per 100,000 people in 1970 to 1,808 in 2000. In the same timespan, the rate for the Latino population grew from 208 per 100,000 people to 615, while the white incarceration rate grew from 103 per 100,000 people to 242.

Gilberto Gonzalez, a retired special agent for the Drug Enforcement Administration who worked for more than 20 years taking down drug dealers and traffickers in the U.S., Mexico and in South America, said he'll never forget being cheered on by residents in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood near Los Angeles as he led away drug traffickers in handcuffs.

"That gave me a sense of the reality of the people that live in these neighborhoods, that are powerless because they're afraid that the drug dealers that control the street, that control the neighborhood are going to do them and their children harm," said Gonzalez, 64, who detailed his field experiences in the recently released memoir "Narco Legenda."

"We realized then that, along with dismantling (drug trafficking) organizations, there was also a real need to clean up communities, to go to where the crime was and help people that are helpless," he said.

Still, the law enforcement approach has led to many long-lasting consequences for people who have since reformed. Lucas still wonders what would happen for him and his family if he no longer carried the weight of a drug-related conviction on his record.

Even with his sunny disposition and close to 30 years of sober living, Lucas, at age 54, cannot pass most criminal background checks. His wife, whom he'd met two decades ago at a fatherhood counseling conference, said his past had barred him from doing something as innocuous as chaperoning their children on school field trips.

"It's almost like a life sentence," he said.

Although Nixon declared the war on drugs on June 17, 1971, the U.S. already had lots of practice imposing drug prohibitions that had racially skewed impacts. The arrival of Chinese migrants in the 1800s saw the rise of criminalizing opium that migrants brought with them. Cannabis went from being called "reefer" to "marijuana," as a way to associate the plant with Mexican migrants arriving in the U.S. in the 1930s.

By the time Nixon sought reelection amid the anti-Vietnam war and Black power movements, criminalizing heroin was a way to target activists and hippies. One of Nixon's domestic policy aides, John Ehrlichman, admitted as much about the war on drugs in a 22-year-old interview published by Harper's Magazine in 2016.

Experts say Nixon's successors, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, leveraged drug war policies in the following decades to their own political advantage, cementing the drug war's legacy. The explosion of the U.S. incarceration rate, the expansion of public and private prison systems and the militarization of local police forces are all outgrowths of the drug war.

Federal policies, such as mandatory minimum sentencing for drug offenses, were mirrored in state legislatures. Lawmakers also adopted felony disenfranchisement, while also imposing employment and other social barriers for people caught in drug sweeps.

The domestic anti-drug policies were widely accepted, mostly because the use of illicit drugs, including crack cocaine in the late 1980s, was accompanied by an alarming spike in homicides and other violent crimes nationwide. Those policies had the backing of Black clergy and the Congressional Black Caucus, the group of African-American lawmakers whose constituents demanded solutions and resources to stem the violent crack scourge.

"I think people often flatten this conversation," said Cassandra Frederique, executive director of the Drug

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Policy Alliance, a New York-based nonprofit organization pushing decriminalization and safe drug use policies.

"If you're a Black leader 30 years ago, you're grabbing for the first (solution) in front of you," said Fredrique, who is Black. "A lot of folks in our community said, 'OK, get these drug dealers out of our communities, get this crack out of our neighborhood. But also give us treatment so we can help folks.'"

The heavy hand of law enforcement came without addiction prevention resources, she said.

Use of crack rose sharply in 1985, and peaked in 1989, before quickly declining in the early 1990s, according to a Harvard study.

Drug sales and use were concentrated in cities, particularly those with large Black and Latino populations, although there were spikes in use among white populations, too. Between 1984 and 1989, crack was associated with a doubling of homicide victimizations of Black males aged 14 to 17. The increases tapered off among Black men in older age groups. By the year 2000, the correlation between crack cocaine and violence faded amid waning profits from street sales.

Roland Fryer, an author of the Harvard study and a professor of economics, said the effects of the crack epidemic on a generation of Black families and Black children still haven't been thoroughly documented. A lack of accountability for the war on drugs bred mistrust of government and law enforcement in the community, he said.

"People ask why Black people don't trust (public) institutions," said Fryer, who is Black. "It's because we have watched how we've treated opioids — it's a public health concern. But crack (cocaine) was, 'lock them up and throw away the key, what we need is tougher sentencing.'"

Another major player in creating hysteria around drug use during the crack: the media. On June 17, 1986, 15 years to the day after Nixon declared the drug war, NBA draftee Len Bias died of a cocaine-induced heart attack on the University of Maryland campus.

Coverage was frenzied and coupled with racist depictions of crack addiction in mostly Black and Latino communities. Within weeks of Bias's death, the U.S. House of Representatives drafted the Anti-Abuse Act of 1986.

The law, passed and signed by Reagan that October, imposed a mandatory minimum federal prison sentence of 20 years, and a maximum life imprisonment, for violation of drug laws. The law also made possession and sale of crack rocks harsher than that of powder cocaine.

The death of Len Bias could have been one of the off-ramps in Lucas's spiral into crack addiction and dealing. By then, he could make \$10,000 in four to five hours dealing the drug.

"One of the things that I thought would help me, that I thought would be my rehab, was when Len Bias died," Lucas said. "I thought, if they showed me evidence (he) died from an overdose of smoking crack cocaine, as much as I loved Len Bias, that I would give it up."

"I did not quit," he said.

He was first introduced to crack cocaine in 1986, but kept his drug use largely hidden from his friends and family.

"What I didn't know at the time was that this was a different type of chemical entering my brain and it was going to change me forever," Lucas said. "Here I am on the verge of being the right-hand man to DJ Nabs, to literally travel the world. That's how bad the drug did me."

By 1988, Fowler's music career had outgrown Durham. He and Lucas moved to Atlanta and, a few years later, Fowler signed a deal to become the official touring DJ for the hip hop group Kris Kross under famed music producer Jermaine Dupri's So So Def record label. Fowler and the group went on to open for pop music icon Michael Jackson on the European leg of the "Dangerous" tour.

Lucas, who began trafficking crack cocaine between Georgia and North Carolina, never joined his best friend on the road. Instead, he slipped further into his addiction and returned to Durham, where he took a short-lived job as a preschool instructor.

When he lacked the money to procure drugs to sell or to use, Lucas resorted to robbing businesses for quick cash. He claims that he was never armed when he robbed "soft targets," like fast food restaurants and convenience stores.

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Lucas spent four and a half years in state prison for larceny after robbing nine businesses to feed his addiction. Because his crimes were considered nonviolent, Lucas learned in prison that he was eligible for an addiction treatment program that would let him out early. But if he violated the terms of his release or failed to complete the treatment, Lucas would serve 12 years in prison on separate drug trafficking charges under a deal with the court.

He accepted the deal.

After his release from prison and his graduation from the treatment program, Fowler paid out of his pocket to have his friend's fines and fees cleared. That's how Lucas regained his voting rights.

On a recent Saturday, the two best friends met up to talk in depth about what had largely been a secret that Lucas intentionally kept from Fowler. The DJ learned of his friend's addiction after seeing a Durham newspaper clipping that detailed the string of robberies.

Sitting in Fowler's home, Lucas told his friend that he doesn't regret not being on the road or missing out on the fringe benefits from touring.

"All I needed was to be around you," Lucas said.

"Right," Fowler replied, choking up and wiping tears from his eyes.

Lucas continued: "You know, when I was around you, when there was a party or whatnot, my job, just out of instinct, was to watch your back."

In a separate interview, Fowler, who is two years younger than Lucas, said, "I just wanted my brother on the road with me. To help protect me. To help me be strong. And I had to do it by my damn self. And I didn't like that. That's what it was."

Not everyone was as lucky as Lucas. Often, a drug offense conviction in combination with a violent gun offense carried much steeper penalties. At the heights of the war on drugs, federal law allowed violent drug offenders to be prosecuted in gang conspiracy cases, which often pinned murders on groups of defendants, sometimes irrespective of who pulled the trigger.

These cases resulted in sentences of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, a punishment disproportionately doled out to Black and Latino gang defendants.

That's the case for Bill Underwood, who was a successful R&B and hip hop music promoter in New York City in the late '70s through the '80s, before his 33-year incarceration. A judge granted him compassionate release from federal custody in January, noting his lauded reputation as a mentor to young men in prison and his high-risk exposure to COVID-19 at age 67.

As the AP reported in 1990, Underwood was found guilty and sentenced to life without parole for racketeering, racketeering conspiracy and narcotics conspiracy, as part of a prosecution that accused his gang of committing six murders and of controlling street-level drug distribution.

"I actually short-changed myself, and my family and my people, by doing what I did," said Underwood, who acknowledges playing a large part in the multimillion-dollar heroin trade, as a leader of a violent Harlem gang from the 1970s through the 1980s.

Underwood, who now is a senior fellow with The Sentencing Project, a nonprofit pushing for an end to life imprisonment, testified to Congress in June that his punishment was excessive.

"As human beings, we are capable of painful yet transformative self reflection, maturity, and growth, and to deny a person this opportunity is to deny them their humanity," he said in the testimony.

Sympathy for people like Underwood can be hard to come by. Brett Roman Williams, a Philadelphia-based independent filmmaker and anti-gun violence advocate, grew up watching his older brother, Derrick, serve time in prison for a serious drug offense. But in 2016, his brother was only a month out on parole when he was killed by gunfire in Philadelphia.

"The laws are in place for people to obey, whether you like it or not," Williams said. "We do need reform, we do need opportunities and equity within our system of economics. But we all have choices."

Rep. Cori Bush of St. Louis, following similar action by several members of Congress before her, last month introduced legislation to decriminalize all drugs and invest in substance abuse treatment.

"Growing up in St. Louis, the War on Drugs disappeared Black people, not drug use," Bush, who is Black,

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wrote in a statement sent to the AP. "Over the course of 2 years, I lost 40 to 50 friends to incarceration or death because of the War on Drugs. We became so accustomed to loss and trauma that it was our normal."

The deleterious impacts of the drug war have, for years, drawn calls for reform and abolition from mostly left-leaning elected officials and social justice advocates. Many of them say that in order to begin to unwind or undo the war on drugs, all narcotics must be decriminalized or legalized, with science-based regulation.

Drug abuse prevention advocates, however, claim that broad drug legalization poses more risks to Americans than it would any benefits.

Provisional data released in December from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show overdose deaths from illicit drug use continued to rise amid the global COVID-19 pandemic. And according to the latest Drug Enforcement Administration narcotics threat assessment released in March, the availability of drugs such as fentanyl, heroin and cocaine remained high or plateaued last year. Domestic and transnational drug trade organizations generate tens of billions of dollars in illicit proceeds from sales annually in the U.S., the DEA said.

"Many people think drug prevention is 'just say no,' like Nancy Reagan did in the '80s— and we know that did not work," said Becky Vance, CEO of the Texas-based agency Drug Prevention Resources, which has advocated for evidenced-based anti-drug and alcohol abuse education for more than 85 years.

"As a person in long-term recovery, I know firsthand the harms of addiction," said Vance, who opposes blanket recreational legalization of illicit drugs. "I believe there has to be another way, without legalizing drugs, to reform the criminal justice system and get rid of the inequities."

Frederique, of the Drug Policy Alliance, said reckoning with the war on drugs must start with reparations for the generations needlessly swept up and destabilized by racially biased policing.

"This was an intentional policy choice," Frederique said. "We don't want to end the war on drugs, and then in 50 years be working on something else that does the same thing. That is the cycle that we're in."

"It has always been about control," Frederique added.

As much as the legacy of the war on drugs is a tragedy, it is also a story about the resilience of people disproportionately targeted by drug policies, said Donovan Ramsey, a journalist and author of the forthcoming book, "When Crack Was King."

"Even with all of that, it's still important to recognize and to celebrate that we (Black people) survived the crack epidemic and we survived it with very little help from the federal government and local governments," Ramsey told the AP.

Fowler thinks the war on drugs didn't ruin Lucas' life. "I think he went through it at the right time, truth be told, because he was young enough. Luke's got more good behind him than bad," the DJ said.

Lucas sees beauty in making things better, including in his business. But he still dreams of the day when his past isn't held against him.

"It was the beautification of doing the landscaping that kind of attracted me, because it was like the affirmation that my soul needed," he said.

"I liked to do something and look back at it and say, 'Wow, that looks good.' It's not just going to wash away in a couple of days. It takes nourishment and upkeep."

Bucks' 50-year wait ends with a title behind 50 from Giannis

By BRIAN MAHONEY AP Basketball Writer

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Giannis Antetokounmpo had the Larry O'Brien Trophy in one arm, the NBA Finals MVP trophy in the other and there was a cigar on the table in front of him.

All the work it took to lift the Milwaukee Bucks from a team that won 15 games when he was a rookie to one with 16 wins this postseason was finally finished.

"This is time to celebrate," Antetokounmpo said.

Milwaukee waited 50 years for that.

Antetokounmpo ended one of the greatest NBA Finals ever with 50 points, 14 rebounds and five blocked

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shots as the Bucks beat the Phoenix Suns 105-98 on Tuesday night to win an entertaining series 4-2 and cap off a joyous return to a fan-filled postseason after last year's NBA bubble.

It was the third game this series with at least 40 points and 10 rebounds for Antetokounmpo, a dominant debut finals performance that takes its place among some of the game's greatest. Antetokounmpo finished with 35.2 points, 13.2 rebounds and 5.0 assists per game while shooting 61.8%, the first player in finals history to reach those numbers.

He shot 16 for 25 from the field and made an unbelievable 17-of-19 free throws — a spectacular showing for any shooter, let alone one who was hitting just 55.6% in the postseason and was ridiculed for it at times.

"People told me I can't make free throws and I made them tonight. And I'm a freaking champion," Antetokounmpo said.

He hopped around the court waving his arms with 20 seconds remaining to encourage fans to cheer, but there was no need. Their voices had been booming inside and outside for hours by then, having waited 50 years to celebrate a winner after Lew Alcindor — before becoming Kareem Abdul-Jabbar — and Oscar Robertson led the Bucks to their first championship in 1971.

"For the city, I'm sure it means everything," said Khris Middleton, the other player left from that 15-67 team in 2013-14. "They've seen the work that we put in over the years for them to get to this point."

In a season played largely without fans, the Bucks had 65,000 of them packed into the Deer District outside, a wild party that figured to last deep into the Midwestern night. The party wasn't bad inside, either: Confetti rained down inside as fans chanted "Bucks in 6! Bucks in 6!" — a hopeful boast by former player that turned out to be a prophetic rallying cry.

"I hope they enjoyed it just like we are now," Middleton added.

The Bucks became the fifth team to win the NBA Finals after trailing 2-0 and the first to do it by winning the next four games since Miami against Dallas in 2006.

Chris Paul scored 26 points to end his first NBA Finals appearance in his 16th season. Devin Booker added 19 points but shot just 8 for 22 and missed all seven 3-pointers after scoring 40 points in each of the last two games.

"There's just a pain that goes with your season being over," Suns coach Monty Williams said. "But I've never dealt with this and so I'm grateful, like I said, but I know this is going to hurt for a while."

The teams that came into the NBA together as expansion clubs in 1968 delivered a fine finals, with the last three games all in the balance deep into the fourth quarter.

The Bucks won them largely because of Antetokounmpo, a two-time MVP in the regular season who raised his game even higher in the finals and was voted the unanimous NBA Finals MVP.

He was the star of these finals in every way, from his powerful play on the court to his humble thoughts in interviews to taking time after Tuesday night's win to find children to high-five amid the celebrations. He teared up afterward talking about the sacrifices his family endured while he grew up in Greece.

He did all this after missing the final two games of the Eastern Conference finals with a hyperextended left knee, an injury he feared could be serious enough to end his season.

Just think what people would have missed.

What started as a gradual rise for Antetokounmpo and the Bucks sped up in the last few years and they thought they might be here the last two seasons. They had the NBA's best record in 2018-19 but blew a 2-0 lead against Toronto in the Eastern Conference finals.

They came back with the best record again last season but never regained their momentum after the season was suspended because of the coronavirus pandemic in March. They were eliminated in the second round by Miami in the bubble.

The Bucks traded for Jrue Holiday before this season and even though they weren't quite as strong in the regular season, they were finally NBA Finals ready.

And Milwaukee was ready for the moment.

Middleton scored 17 points and Bobby Portis came off the bench with 16. Holiday had 12 points, 11 assists and nine rebounds to go along with his usual sturdy defense that helped finally cool off Booker.

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"I think it's just a credit to the players," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. "We've been pushing. We've been trying to get better. The players embrace everything. They're amazingly coachable. They take it, soak it in and make the best of it."

Fans began filling the streets and restaurants in the afternoon on what felt like a holiday in Milwaukee. The Brewers moved up the start time of their home game against Kansas City to be played in the afternoon to accommodate Milwaukee fans — and Brewers star Christian Yelich, who was part of the crowd inside Fiserv Forum.

The game was tied at 77 after three quarters but Antetokoumpo had 13 points in the fourth to make sure Milwaukee wouldn't have to go back to Phoenix for Game 7 on Thursday.

The Suns returned to the postseason for the first time since 2010 but remain without a title and have never won more than two games in their three appearances in the NBA Finals.

"Nobody probably expected us to be where we are except for us," Paul said. "But it is what it is. Like I said all season long with our team, ain't no moral victories."

TIP-INS

Suns: The Suns scored their fewest points in a first quarter in this postseason when they had 16. ... Deandre Ayton, who was shooting 67.6% in the postseason, was 4 of 12 for 12 points.

Bucks: Brook Lopez had 10 points and eight rebounds. ... Milwaukee's only other NBA Finals appearance was a loss in 1974.

Jeff Bezos blasts into space on own rocket: 'Best day ever!'

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

VAN HORN, Texas (AP) — Jeff Bezos blasted into space Tuesday on his rocket company's first flight with people on board, becoming the second billionaire in just over a week to ride his own spacecraft.

The Amazon founder was accompanied by a hand-picked group: his brother, an 18-year-old from the Netherlands and an 82-year-old aviation pioneer from Texas — the youngest and oldest to ever fly in space.

"Best day ever!" Bezos said when the capsule touched down on the desert floor in remote West Texas after the 10-minute flight.

Named after America's first astronaut, Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket soared on the 52nd anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing, a date chosen by Bezos for its historical significance. He held fast to it, even as Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson pushed up his own flight from New Mexico and beat him to space by nine days.

The two private companies chasing space tourism dollars, though, have drawn criticism for catering to the rich while so many are struggling amid the pandemic.

During Tuesday's flight, Blue Origin's capsule reached an altitude of about 66 miles (106 kilometers), more than 10 miles (16 kilometers) higher than Branson's July 11 ride. The 60-foot (18-meter) booster accelerated to Mach 3 or three times the speed of sound to get the capsule high enough, before separating and landing upright.

Unlike Branson's piloted rocket plane, Bezos' capsule was completely automated and required no official staff on board for the up-and-down flight.

During their several minutes of weightlessness, video from inside the capsule showed the four floating, doing somersaults, tossing Skittles candies and throwing balls, with lots of cheering, whooping and exclamations of "Wow!" The Bezos brothers also joined their palms to display a "HI MOM" greeting written on their hands. The capsule landed under parachutes, with Bezos and his guests briefly experiencing nearly six times the force of gravity, or 6 G's, on the way back.

Led by Bezos, they climbed out of the capsule after touchdown with wide grins, embracing parents, partners and children, then popped open bottles of sparkling wine, spraying one another.

"My expectations were high and they were dramatically exceeded," Bezos said later.

Their flight lasted 10 minutes and 10 seconds — five minutes shy of Alan Shepard's Freedom 7 flight in 1961. Shepard's daughters, Laura and Julie, were introduced at a press event a few hours later.

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Sharing Bezos' dream-come-true adventure was Wally Funk, from the Dallas area, one of 13 female pilots who went through the same tests as NASA's all-male astronaut corps in the early 1960s but never made it into space.

"I've been waiting a long time to finally get it up there," Funk said.

"I want to go again — fast," she added.

Joining them on the ultimate joyride was the company's first paying customer, Oliver Daemen, a last-minute fill-in for the mystery winner of a \$28 million charity auction who opted for a later flight. The Dutch teen's father took part in the auction, and agreed on a lower undisclosed price last week when Blue Origin offered his son the vacated seat.

"It was so amazing," Daemen said. "Let's hope that many, many more people can do this."

Four hours after their flight, Bezos drove his crew over to see the rocket that carried them safely to space.

Among the items brought on the flight: A pair of aviator Amelia Earhart's goggles and a piece of fabric from the original Wright Flyer.

"I got goose bumps," said Angel Herrera of El Paso, who watched the launch from inside Van Horn High School, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) away. "The hair on the back of my neck stood up, just witnessing history."

No one is rushing to buy a ticket from this bleak and isolated town.

"This ride is only for the wealthy," pizza shop owner Jesus Ramirez said after watching the launch, adding that he hoped the venture would attract businesses to the town and provide opportunities for local companies.

Blue Origin — founded by Bezos in 2000 in Kent, Washington, near Amazon's Seattle headquarters — hasn't revealed its price for a ride to space but has lined up spots for other auction bidders. Ticket sales, including the auction, are approaching \$100 million, Bezos said. Two more flights are planned by year's end.

The recycled rocket and capsule used Tuesday flew on the last two space demos, according to company officials.

Virgin Galactic already has more than 600 reservations at \$250,000 apiece. Founded by Branson in 2004, the company has sent crew into space four times and plans two more test flights from New Mexico before launching customers next year.

Blue Origin's approach was slower and more deliberate. After 15 successful unoccupied test flights to space since 2015, Bezos finally declared it was time to put people on board. The Federal Aviation Administration agreed last week, approving the commercial space license.

Bezos, 57, who also owns The Washington Post, claimed the first seat. The next went to his 50-year-old brother, Mark Bezos, an investor and volunteer firefighter, then Funk and Daemen. They spent two days together in training.

University of Chicago space historian Jordan Bimm said the passenger makeup is truly remarkable. Imagine if the head of NASA decided he wanted to launch in 1961 instead of Shepard on the first U.S. spaceflight, he said in an email.

"That would have been unthinkable!" Bimm said. "'It shows just how much the idea of who and what space is for has changed in the last 60 years.'"

Bezos stepped down this month as Amazon's CEO and last week donated \$200 million to renovate the National Air and Space Museum.

Fewer than 600 people have reached the edge of space or beyond. Until Tuesday, the youngest was 25-year-old Soviet cosmonaut Gherman Titov and the oldest at 77 was Mercury-turned-shuttle astronaut John Glenn.

Both Bezos and Branson want to drastically increase those overall numbers, as does SpaceX's Elon Musk, who's skipping brief space hops and sending his private clients straight to orbit for tens of millions apiece, with the first flight coming up in September.

"We're going to build a road to space so our kids and their kids can build the future," Bezos said. "We need to do that to solve the problems here on Earth."

Despite appearances, Bezos and Branson insist they weren't trying to outdo each other by strapping

in themselves. Bezos noted this week that only one person can lay claim to being first in space: Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, who rocketed into orbit on April 12, 1961.

Branson sent a congratulatory tweet: "Impressive! Very best to all the crew from me and all the team" at Virgin Galactic.

Blue Origin is working on a massive rocket, New Glenn, to put payloads and people into orbit from Cape Canaveral, Florida. The company also wants to put astronauts back on the moon with its proposed lunar lander Blue Moon; it's challenging NASA's sole contract award to SpaceX.

Included in the many people that Bezos thanked Tuesday was "every Amazon employee and every Amazon customer. Because you guys paid for all this." Bezos has said he finances the rocket company by selling \$1 billion in Amazon stock each year.

Big infrastructure bill in peril as GOP threatens filibuster

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The bipartisan infrastructure deal senators brokered with President Joe Biden is hanging precariously ahead of a crucial Wednesday test vote as they struggle over how to pay for nearly \$1 trillion in public works spending.

Tensions were rising as Republicans prepared to mount a filibuster over what they see as a rushed and misguided process. With Biden preparing to hit the road to rally support for his big infrastructure ideas — including some \$3.5 trillion in a follow-up bill — restless Democrats say it's time to at least start debate on this first phase of his proposals.

"It is not a fish or cut bait moment," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Tuesday, describing the procedural vote as just a first step to "get the ball rolling" as bipartisan talks progress.

Six months after Biden took office, his signature "Build Back Better" campaign promise is at a key moment that will test the presidency and his hopes for a new era of bipartisan cooperation in Washington.

White House aides and the bipartisan group of senators have huddled privately since Sunday trying to wrap up the deal, which would be a first phase of an eventual \$4 trillion-plus package of domestic outlays — not just for roads and bridges, but foundations of everyday life including child care, family tax breaks, education and an expansion of Medicare for seniors.

Biden calls it a "blue-collar blueprint for building an American economy back." He asserted Tuesday that Americans are overwhelmingly in support of his plan and "that's the part that a lot of our friends on the other team kind of miss."

The other team begs to differ.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell and some outside groups decry what they call Biden's "spending spree," and McConnell has said big spending is "the last thing American families need."

A core group of Republicans are interested in pursuing a more modest package of traditional highway and public works projects, about \$600 billion in new funds, and say they just need more time to negotiate with their Democratic colleagues and the White House.

Senators from the bipartisan group emerged upbeat Tuesday from another late-night negotiating session with Biden aides at the Capitol, saying a deal was within reach and even a failed vote Wednesday would not be the end of the road.

Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana said the test vote Wednesday could be useful in helping to "advance and expedite" the process.

"We are so close," said Democratic Sen. Jon Tester of Montana.

Biden has been in touch with both Democrats and Republicans for several days, and his outreach will continue "until he has both pieces of legislation on his desk to sign them into law," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday.

While Biden proposes paying for his proposals with a tax hike on corporations and wealthy Americans who earn more than \$400,000 a year, the bipartisan group has been working almost around the clock to figure out a compromise way to pay for its package, having dashed ideas for boosting the gas tax drivers

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pay at the pump or strengthening the Internal Revenue Service to go after tax scofflaws.

Instead, senators in the bipartisan group were considering rolling back a Trump-era rule on pharmaceutical rebates that could bring in some \$170 billion to be used for infrastructure. They were also still haggling over public transit funds.

Ten Republicans would be needed in the evenly split Senate to join all 50 Democrats in reaching the 60-vote threshold required to advance the bill past a filibuster to formal consideration.

Republicans are reluctant to open debate as the bipartisan bill remains a work in progress.

At a private lunch meeting Tuesday, McConnell and others urged Republican senators to vote no, according to a person granted anonymity to discuss the session.

"We're not going to vote to proceed to a bill that doesn't exist yet," Sen. Roy Blunt of Missouri said afterward.

Some senators want to delay the vote to Monday. "We're making progress, but we need more time," said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, one of the members of the bipartisan group.

By setting the vote now, Schumer is trying to nudge negotiations along, a strategy both parties have used before. If it fails Wednesday he can set another vote to proceed to the bill later.

Many Republicans are wary of moving ahead with the first, relatively slim package, fearing it will pave the way for the broader \$3.5 trillion effort Democrats are preparing to pass on their own under special budget rules that only require 51 votes. Vice President Kamala Harris can break a tie.

Meanwhile, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has been working to keep restless Democrats in her chamber in line, as rank-and-file lawmakers grow impatient with the sluggish Senate pace.

Liberal Democrats, in particular, are eager to make gains on Biden's priorities — with or without Republicans.

"Time's a-wasting, I want to get this work done," Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., the chairwoman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, told reporters Tuesday.

Jayapal warned against giving Republicans too much time to negotiate the deal away. "We have all the history in the world to show that this is what Republicans do time and time and time again," she said.

Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., the chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, dismissed the Senate's bipartisan effort as inadequate. He wants more robust spending on the transportation elements and said, "We want an opportunity to actually negotiate."

Democrat John Yarmuth of Kentucky, the chairman of the House Budget Committee, said if the bipartisan effort fails in the Senate, Democrats will simply include some of the infrastructure spending in the broader package they are compiling with Biden's other priorities.

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.

Biden is making the case that America needs to make up for lost time with fresh federal outlays to shore up its aging infrastructure and households struggling to recoup from a shifting economy and the COVID-19 pandemic.

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 abate.

Massive wildfires in US West bring haze to East Coast

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Wildfires in the American West, including one burning in Oregon that's currently the largest in the U.S., are creating hazy skies as far away as New York as the massive infernos spew

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smoke and ash into the air in columns up to six miles high.

Skies over New York City were hazy Tuesday as strong winds blew smoke east from California, Oregon, Montana and other states. Oregon's Bootleg Fire grew to 606 square miles (1,569 square kilometers) — half the size of Rhode Island.

Fires also grew on both sides of California's Sierra Nevada. In Alpine County, the so-called California Alps, the Tamarack Fire caused evacuations of several communities and grew to 61 square miles (158 square kilometers) with no containment. The Dixie Fire, near the site of 2018's deadly Paradise Fire, was more than 90 square miles (163 square kilometers) and threatened tiny communities in the Feather River Valley region.

The smoke on the U.S. East Coast was reminiscent of last fall when multiple large fires burning in Oregon in the state's worst fire season in recent memory choked the local skies with pea-soup smoke but also impacted air quality several thousand miles away.

"We're seeing lots of fires producing a tremendous amount of smoke, and ... by the time that smoke gets to the eastern portion of the country where it's usually thinned out, there's just so much smoke in the atmosphere from all these fires that it's still pretty thick," said David Lawrence, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service. "Over the last two years we've seen this phenomenon."

Tony Galvez fled the Tamarack Fire in California on Tuesday with his daughter at the last minute and found out later that his home was gone.

"I lost my whole life, everything I've ever had. The kids are what's going to matter," he said as he fielded calls from relatives. "I got three teenagers. They're going to go home to a moonscape."

The Oregon fire has ravaged the southern part of the state and has been expanding by up to 4 miles (6 kilometers) a day, pushed by gusting winds and critically dry weather that's turned trees and undergrowth into a tinderbox.

Fire crews have had to retreat from the flames for 10 consecutive days as fireballs jump from treetop to treetop, trees explode, embers fly ahead of the fire to start new blazes and, in some cases, the inferno's heat creates its own weather of shifting winds and dry lightning. Monstrous clouds of smoke and ash have risen up to 6 miles into the sky and are visible for more than 100 air miles.

The fire in the Fremont-Winema National Forest merged with a smaller nearby blaze Tuesday, and it has repeatedly breached a perimeter of treeless dirt and fire retardant meant to stop its advance.

A red flag weather warning signifying dangerous fire conditions was in effect through Tuesday and possibly longer. The fire is 30% contained.

"We're in this for as long as it takes to safely confine this monster," Incident Commander Rob Allen said.

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.

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.

On Tuesday, officials temporarily closed all recreational and public access to state-managed lands in eastern Washington due to fire danger, starting Friday. The closure will affect about 2,260 square miles (5,853 square kilometers) of land.

The area on the northeastern flank of the Bootleg Fire is in the ancestral homeland of the Klamath Tribes, which have used intentional, managed fire to keep the fuel load low and prevent such explosive blazes. The tribe lost its hunting, fishing and gathering rights in a court case nearly 30 years ago but the area of lakes and marshes remains central to their culture and heritage.

The tribe, which regained its federal recognition from the U.S. government in 1986 after losing it in the 1950s, has worked alongside the nonprofit organization The Nature Conservancy to use planned fires on the landscape to thin forests in the Sycan Marsh. The area of wetland and high-elevation forest is part of the tribe's traditional homeland and burned in the blaze this week.

"It's so devastating. The fire burned through a lot of area where I've hunted with my father and brother and other folks who have since passed away," said Klamath Tribes Chairman Don Gentry. "It's all our aboriginal territory and it's certainly going to impact big game and cultural sites and resources."

War's trauma apparent in portraits of Gazan children

By AYA BATRAWY and FELIPE DANA Associated Press

SUZY ISKHONTANA, 7

Suzy Ishkontana clings to her new toys and clothes, but mostly to her dad.

For hours, they were separated under the rubble of their family's home. Now she cannot bear to be apart.

More than two months have passed since rescue workers pulled the 7-year-old from the ruins, her hair matted and dusty, her face bruised and swollen. The sole survivors of the family, she and her father heard the fading cries of her siblings buried nearby.

Suzy's mother, her two brothers and two sisters -- ages 9 to 2 -- died in the May 16 Israeli attack on the densely packed al-Wahda Street in Gaza City. Israeli authorities say the bombs' target was Hamas tunnels; 42 people died, including 16 women and 10 children.

Altogether, 66 children were killed in the fourth war on the Gaza Strip -- most from precision-guided Israeli bombs, though in one incident Israel alleges a family was killed by Hamas rockets that fell short of their target.

And then there are countless others, like Suzy, who bear the scars.

"My kids who died and my wife, they are now in a safe place and there is no worry about them, but my greater fear is for Suzy," says her father, Riad Ishkontana.

This story, part of a series on the costs of four wars in Gaza over 13 years, was produced in partnership with the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.

With schools shuttered due to the war, the coronavirus and the summer hiatus, Gaza's children have little to keep them occupied as they wade through the wreckage. Most are poor; more than half the population lived in poverty before the pandemic and war wiped out more jobs.

Some of them are irritable, their parents say. Some wet themselves at night, are afraid to be alone, suffer from night terrors -- all signs of trauma, says Dr. Yasser Abu Jamei, director general of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program.

But there is only one licensed child psychiatrist for Gaza's 1 million children, who make up just under 48 percent of the population, Abu Jamei says.

To recover, he says, children need to feel the traumatic event they've experienced is over and that life is returning to normal.

These children live in a place where the piercing whine of warplanes, the tremors of airstrikes and the humming buzz of armed drones are familiar sounds, even in times of cease-fire. Where when war erupts, there is no safe place -- and where four wars and a blockade have crippled life over the past 13 years.

In Gaza, Abu Jamei says, "life never goes back to normal."

In the hours he and his daughter spent trapped in the rubble, Riad Ishkontana recalls hearing his older daughter Dana, 9, and youngest son Zain, 2, calling for him: "Baba, baba." Later, Suzy would tell him that she could feel Zain under the wreckage.

Before the war, Suzy was an independent child, walking to school down the street with Dana, and picking up fruits and vegetables from a corner store for her mom.

Now, she struggles to speak with relatives or detach from the mobile phone, spending hours playing games, stopping to look at web pages related to the attack. "It's almost like in losing her mom, she lost her life and her ability to deal with life and people," Ishkontana says

When Ishkontana leaves to go on any errand, Suzy weeps and insists on going along -- she fears losing him, too. He took her to her mother's grave; she brought along a hand-written note.

"Mama," she wrote, "I want to see you."

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BATŪOL AL-MASRI, 14

QASIM AL-MASRI, 8

The blast blew the al-Masri family apart. And it left a young brother and sister shattered.

It all happened in an instant, around 6 p.m. on May 10. The al-Masri family were harvesting wheat in an open field in Beit Hanoun by their house overlooking Gaza's border with Israel. The children -- cousins, siblings, the neighbor's kids -- played as the adults prepared to break their daylong fast in the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

As usual, Batool al-Masri carried her cousin Yazan, a toddler barely 2 years old. "Twenty-four hours a day she was spoiling him," says Batool's father, Mohammed Atallah al-Masri.

Then, an explosion.

It's not clear whether the rocket was fired by Israel or Hamas. But in an instant, eight people were dead, including six children.

Yazan bled out in front of Batool. She tried to save him, ignoring injuries to her legs and pelvis.

Batool's 8-year-old brother, Qasim, was wounded in his head, as were other brothers, including 22-year-old Hammoudah, who lost an eye.

Qasim survived, but his best friend and cousin, Marwan, 7, did not. They'd been inseparable, even in school, al-Masri says. Marwan's only brother, Ibrahim, 11, also was killed.

Also killed were Batool and Qasim's sister Rahaf, 10 and their brother Ahmed, 21, who was just a week shy of his wedding.

The attack "completely changed" Qasim, his father says. The young boy talks to himself. At night, he's paralyzed by fear and does not get out of bed to use the bathroom.

Batool has become irritable, weeps often and in the evenings is terrified, waking every 20 or 30 minutes. She has little appetite.

"What they saw was terrifying," al-Masri said. "These were innocent kids."

MAYA ABU MUAWAD, 8

ODAY ABU MUAWAD, 6

It was the first day of the Muslim holiday of Eid in May. Instead of playing with their new toys, the Abu Muawad children were running for their lives.

The airstrikes hit without warning. Their mother -- eight months pregnant -- and the four children, ages 3 to 11, fled their home in northern Gaza just before it was destroyed.

In the chaos, Maya Abu Muawad was separated from her mother. Alone and afraid, she rode in an ambulance to safer ground. For 15 minutes, she was locked in the wailing vehicle with a dying person and a wounded boy, her neighbor.

It would be six hours before Maya would be reunited with her parents.

Her younger brother, Oday Abu Muawad, 6, had never experienced war before. He was stunned by the scenes of chaos and death, the sound of airstrikes.

Before the war, Maya was confident and independent. She liked having her hair brushed, couldn't stand it if her clothes became dirty and liked to wear rings.

Now, the family is sheltering in a U.N.-run school with other displaced families. Maya repeatedly asks when they'll return home, but her father Alaa Abu Muawad, who works as a driver, has no money to rebuild. She sits alone mostly, preferring to spend all her time on the phone, listening to songs or watching videos on TikTok -- anything to escape her reality, says her father.

"If she asks her brother for something and doesn't get it, she just cries and screams. Everything about her ... it's not my daughter before. It's not Maya," Abu Muawad says.

Before the war, Oday always smiled and loved to joke around with people. He preferred playing with older kids and sitting with adults, his father says.

"Now, he watches kids playing on the television and asks: 'Why can't we play like them?'" Abu Muawad

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says. "I don't know how to reply, what to tell him."
And in the night, he often wakes up screaming.

LAMA SIHWEIL, 14

When the 2014 war broke out, Lama Sihweil and her family fled their home in Beit Hanoun when the Israeli army invaded, joining some 3,300 Palestinians crammed into the U.N.-run Abu Hussein school in the Jabaliya refugee camp.

As they slept, Israeli shells pounded the school and the street. Three of 7-year-old Lama's cousins -- ages 14, 16 and 26 -- were among the 16 killed in that attack. The 2014 war claimed more than 2,100 Palestinian lives in Gaza.

Seven years later, she is afflicted by memories: of screams in the darkness; of frantic searches of loved ones; of the stench of blood and debris.

"Just sitting with her, she appears fine," says her father, Thaer Sihweil.

"But try to talk to her, she can't express herself. From the fear she has, she's unable to communicate what's in her heart," he says.

After the war, her grades dropped. She would walk out of class without the teacher's permission. She became forgetful. The fear and anxiety were constant.

Then, war came again this year. Lama, her mother, siblings, aunts and cousins were sleeping over at her grandmother's when more Israeli missiles hit. The walls of the house collapsed; the family ran screaming through the streets, stepping over shards of glass, twisted metal and electrical cables until they reached the nearest hospital.

Now, Lama is afraid to venture out on her own. Each night, she clings to her parents.

And there is no escape; Lama and her brothers would love to go the beach for a day, but the war cost their father his job. He does not have 40 shekels (\$12) to get to Gaza's coast.

YOUSSEF AL-MADHOUN, 11

When Youssef al-Madhoun hears the popping sound of firecrackers, or a metal door closing loudly, he is terrified. The war courses back.

Youssef, his brother and his parents fled their home in the late afternoon on the last day of Ramadan, as the first rounds of Israeli fire sounded. They'd be safer, they thought, at his great-grandfather's house in a more crowded neighborhood of Beit Lahia in northern Gaza Strip.

By nightfall, the neighborhood was engulfed in a barrage. A family of six was crushed under the weight of a building just steps from where the al-Madhoun family was staying. Their house and others nearby partially collapsed or crumbled around them. An uncle and his wife were killed.

The family fled again, to another grandparent's home.

Before the war, Youssef excelled in school and talked of one day becoming a doctor. Now, said his father, Ahmed Awad Selim al-Madhoun, he's afraid to sleep at night, afraid to step outside the house alone. He leaves the door open when he's in the bathroom.

This was the third war of Youssef's short life. It's left him feeling terrified, and unsafe.

ELIEN AL-MADHOUN, 6

Elien al-Madhoun was not yet born when her father lost his home in the 2014 Gaza War. Young as she is, she doesn't entirely understand life and death.

But in May, she screamed out at the sounds of airstrikes and shelling in Bait Lahia in northern Gaza, says her father, Ahmed Rabah al-Madhoun.

He tried to shield her from talk of war, tried to keep her busy with games. But older cousins, huddled around her, talked about "airstrikes, missiles, martyrs openly because nothing is really hidden from children."

Nine people died in the neighborhood, including relatives.

"When nine homes are completely destroyed next to one another and my daughter sees this, she can't

understand what happened," he says.

Her father says he doesn't know what the future holds for her.

"We envy the people who've been killed and have returned to God. We envy them because they know their future," he says. "But here, we're just waiting for our turn. Our kids, our mothers, our fathers, our siblings, we're here waiting our turn."

ABDULLAH SROUR, 16

For years, Abdullah Srour lived in a state of constant fear. He's survived four wars in Gaza, and with each war he grows more afraid, more insular.

When he was 9, the bedroom where he was sleeping in the Jabaliya refugee camp was hit by a missile, says his mother, Amal Srour. The family fled in their pajamas to a U.N.-run school to seek shelter, but when they reached the school it too was hit. They saw people killed and animals dead on the road.

Abdullah spent four years in therapy. With time, he began to enjoy being around friends and leaving the house more, his mother says.

Then came May, and the fourth war.

The family would stay up all night, crammed into one room, praying to survive. Except for Abdullah; he refused to stay in the family home located on an upper floor, sleeping instead on the ground floor in his grandmother's home until the ceasefire was announced.

Abdullah also saw a family of six -- a father, a pregnant mother and four children -- crushed to death under the rubble of a home that belonged to his grandfather during this last war. He stood amid the debris as rescue teams pulled their bodies out.

Now the smallest thing, including a needle prick at the doctor's office, sends him into a panic. He bites his nails constantly. He doesn't like to sit longer than 10 minutes in any one place, rarely smiles and sleeps next to his mother, by his much younger siblings.

"After this war," says his mother, "he's regressed to a child of 5 years old."

THAIM ABU ODA, 5

For so long, Thaim Abu Oda's childhood was sheltered, pleasant. There were trips with his father and younger brother to the nearby pool, to the beach and to the few play areas available in Gaza; his parents have steady incomes, and they live in the heart of Gaza City.

But for 11 days in May, the boy's life was devastated by war -- by the terrifying boom of fighter jets overhead and the bombs that shook his neighborhood.

He stopped eating. He lost more than 5 kilos (11 pounds). His face became gaunt and his ribs protruded. He lost sleep, too, especially after hearing his grandfather had survived an airstrike on his building and had been hospitalized for breathing problems.

When the war ended, Abu Oda's parents took him to see a therapist. After three sessions and weeks after the cease-fire held, his appetite returned and his weight began to climb.

He still fears sudden noises and has many questions about the sounds heard during the war, but his parents say he appears to be on a path to recovery. They worry, though, about the long-term effects of the war on his personality, and on his future in Gaza.

Teen with US ties again on the run from China with fiancée

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A teenager who says he's a U.S. permanent resident and his fiancée are once again on the run from the threat of extradition to their homeland, China, in a sign of Beijing's lengthening reach over perceived dissidents abroad.

Chinese officials had sought Wang Jingyu, a 19-year-old student, over his online comments about deadly border clashes between Chinese and Indian forces last year. He was arrested by plainclothes police in Dubai while transferring for a flight to the U.S. in early April and was held for weeks, in a case that the U.S. Department of State has described as a human rights concern. He said Chinese authorities in Dubai

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took away his green card.

Wang was freed May 27, just hours after The Associated Press asked about him. He fled first to Turkey and then to Ukraine, as a temporary safe place that was open to Chinese passport holders without COVID-19 entry restrictions.

But on Thursday, the AP has learned, Wang received a warning via email that Chinese officials knew he was hiding in Ukraine, and had escalated the charges against him to subversion of state power, a vaguely defined charge often used by Chinese authorities to imprison critics. The email claimed to be from the state security department of Chongqing city police, which has said they are looking for him.

"Your actions have completely changed from the simple charge of picking quarrels and stirring up trouble and demeaning our border martyrs to subversion of state power," the email read. "We in the public security organs and national security organs know exactly where you are. I want to remind you that China and Ukraine have an extradition agreement."

On Monday, Wang received another email from the same person, saying they had prepared measures if the couple fled again. The AP has seen screenshots of both emails.

"I was really scared, I couldn't sleep well at night," Wang said. "It was very clear from what they said that they would take action against me."

Terrified, Wang and his fiancée, Wu Huan, 26, flew to the Netherlands, which does not have an extradition treaty with China. They are seeking asylum or at least a temporary stay visa.

Upon arrival at the Amsterdam airport, the couple was informed by Dutch immigration authorities that their passports had been cancelled, said Bob Fu, president of ChinaAid, who helped organize their escape from Ukraine.

Bas Belder, a former member of the European Parliament, said he has been in contact with the Dutch Justice Ministry to bring the couple's plight to the minister's attention. He added that the case, including the cancellation of their passports, highlights "genuinely criminal behavior of the Chinese party state to pursue their citizens even beyond Chinese territory and try by all possible means to capture them." The Justice Ministry said it could not comment on individual cases.

Chinese authorities did not respond to multiple requests for comment, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chongqing police and the Chinese embassy in Washington.

The U.S. State Department declined to comment on Tuesday. It had acknowledged Wang's arrest in Dubai and told the AP it was "alarmed by human rights violations and abuses in China."

The case feeds into growing fears of extraterritorial reach on China's part, especially with concerns that Hong Kong's national security law, passed last year, could apply to people of any nationality even outside Hong Kong.

Formal extradition requests are far from the only tool China uses to exercise control over its citizens abroad, said Jerome Cohen, an adjunct senior fellow at the Council for Foreign Relations and an expert on Chinese law. More common are informal attempts, used by the U.S. as well, relying on deportations by foreign countries that are rarely made public and are much harder to track, he said.

"It's obvious this is a blatant effort to extend Chinese power abroad," Cohen said of the case. "There is certainly increasing long-arm attempts by China by one means or another — informal deportation, extradition..., coercion against their families in China, using every technique in the book, legal and illegal."

Wang has been fleeing from Chinese police and traveling with Wu abroad since July 2019, after he posted comments in support of mass demonstrations in Hong Kong on a Chinese social media website. His parents sent him abroad to wait out any potential trouble.

In February this year, China announced that it had lost four soldiers months ago in a brutal fight between Chinese and Indian forces in a border dispute in the Karakoram mountains. Wang questioned why the Chinese government had waited so long to announce the death toll and became a target of state media.

Six others were detained by police for their remarks about the Chinese-India border conflict this year, according to a report by the state-owned Global Times in February, based on local police statements. Wang was the only one of the seven abroad and out of reach. Chongqing police then said in a public statement

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that they were on the hunt for him for the all-encompassing charge of “picking quarrels and stirring up trouble,” often wielded against political targets.

The People’s Daily, the official paper of the Communist Party, started a hashtag, “Man staying abroad who slandered frontier heroes is now being hunted down online” on the social media platform Weibo. It has since been viewed 280 million times, and Wang said he has gotten threatening phone calls.

After Wang’s comments in February, his parents were detained by Chongqing police, he said. He gave interviews to Voice of America, Radio Free Asia and DW in Chinese to publicize what was happening to them.

He has been unable to reach his parents independently since. The Chongqing police sent him a recording of his father warning him not to take interviews with U.S. media outlets, which the AP has heard.

Authorities in Dubai did not respond to requests for comment Tuesday. A Dubai Public Prosecution charge sheet obtained by the AP after his arrest there described Wang as facing an investigation over allegedly “insulting one of the monotheistic religions,” a charge typically referring to insulting Islam. When shown the charge sheet, the Dubai Media Office said charges were dropped and Wang was let free.

“Chinese authorities have not inquired about Mr. Wang, nor did they request his deportation to China, nor has there been any contract between UAE and Chinese authorities with regards to Mr. Wang,” the Dubai Media Office said at the time.

Wu flew to Dubai in April shortly after her fiance was arrested. She hired a lawyer, while posting on social media and giving interviews to raise awareness about his case.

On May 27, Wu was abducted from her hotel in Dubai, the couple said. Guo Baosheng, a Chinese dissident who also runs a Youtube channel and had publicized Wang’s detention by UAE authorities, said he urged Wu to get out of the hotel right before she disappeared.

Wu said she was brought to a Dubai police station and interviewed by officials from the Chinese consulate. She was then taken into custody of Chinese officials, according to the couple. She went on a hunger strike for several days and her mental condition was close to collapse, so she was released on June 8, she said.

“This is a particularly painful recollection,” she said. “I don’t have a lot of political viewpoints. I really, really love China...I never thought I would experience this injustice in UAE.”

In the meantime, Wang is still posting criticism of the Chinese government on Twitter. He said he will continue to speak out in any way he can.

“I want to make my voice heard within the firewall through every possible method,” he said. “I still feel that only when the real Chinese people inside the firewall wake up, only then will the country have hope.”

US life expectancy in 2020 saw biggest drop since WWII

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. life expectancy fell by a year and a half in 2020, the largest one-year decline since World War II, public health officials said Wednesday. The decrease for both Black Americans and Hispanic Americans was even worse: three years.

The drop spelled out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is due mainly to the COVID-19 pandemic, which health officials said is responsible for close to 74% of the overall life expectancy decline. More than 3.3 million Americans died last year, far more than any other year in U.S. history, with COVID-19 accounting for about 11% of those deaths.

Black life expectancy has not fallen so much in one year since the mid-1930s, during the Great Depression. Health officials have not tracked Hispanic life expectancy for nearly as long, but the 2020 decline was the largest recorded one-year drop.

The abrupt fall is “basically catastrophic,” said Mark Hayward, a University of Texas sociology professor who studies changes in U.S. mortality.

Killers other than COVID-19 played a role. Drug overdoses pushed life expectancy down, particularly for whites. And rising homicides were a small but significant reason for the decline for Black Americans, said Elizabeth Arias, the report’s lead author.

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Other problems affected Black and Hispanic people, including lack of access to quality health care, more crowded living conditions, and a greater share of the population in lower-paying jobs that required them to keep working when the pandemic was at its worst, experts said.

Life expectancy is an estimate of the average number of years a baby born in a given year might expect to live. It's an important statistical snapshot of a country's health that can be influenced both by sustained trends such as obesity as well as more temporary threats like pandemics or war that might not endanger those newborns in their lifetimes.

For decades, U.S. life expectancy was on the upswing. But that trend stalled in 2015, for several years, before hitting 78 years, 10 months in 2019. Last year, the CDC said, it dropped to about 77 years, 4 months.

Other findings in the new CDC report:

—Hispanic Americans have longer life expectancy than white or Black Americans, but had the largest decline in 2020. The three-year drop was the largest since the CDC started tracking Hispanic life expectancy 15 years ago.

—Black life expectancy dropped nearly three years, to 71 years, 10 months. It has not been that low since 2000.

—White life expectancy fell by roughly 14 months to about 77 years, 7 months. That was the lowest the lowest life expectancy for that population since 2002.

—COVID-19's role varied by race and ethnicity. The coronavirus was responsible for 90% of the decline in life expectancy among Hispanics, 68% among white people and 59% among Black Americans.

—Life expectancy fell nearly two years for men, but about one year for women, widening a longstanding gap. The CDC estimated life expectancy of 74 years, 6 months for boys vs. 80 years, 2 months for girls.

More than 80% of last year's COVID deaths were people 65 and older, CDC data shows. That actually diminished the pandemic's toll on life expectancy at birth, which is swayed more by deaths of younger adults and children than those among seniors.

That's why last year's decline was just half as much as the three-year drop between 1942 and 1943, when young soldiers were dying in World War II. And it was just a fraction of the drop between 1917 and 1918, when World War I and a Spanish flu pandemic devastated younger generations.

Life expectancy bounced back after those drops, and experts believe it will this time, too. But some said it could take years.

Too many people have already died from COVID-19 this year, while variants of the coronavirus are spreading among unvaccinated Americans — many of them younger adults, some experts said.

"We can't. In 2021, we can't get back to pre-pandemic" life expectancy, said Noreen Goldman, a Princeton University researcher.

Big infrastructure bill in peril; GOP threatens filibuster

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The bipartisan infrastructure deal senators brokered with President Joe Biden is hanging precariously ahead of a crucial Wednesday test vote as they struggle over how to pay for nearly \$1 trillion in public works spending.

Tensions were rising as Republicans prepared to mount a filibuster over what they see as a rushed and misguided process. With Biden preparing to hit the road to rally support for his big infrastructure ideas — including some \$3.5 trillion in a follow-up bill — restless Democrats say it's time to at least start debate on this first phase of his proposals.

"It is not a fish or cut bait moment," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Tuesday, describing the procedural vote as just a first step to "get the ball rolling" as bipartisan talks progress.

Six months after Biden took office, his signature "Build Back Better" campaign promise is at a key moment that will test the presidency and his hopes for a new era of bipartisan cooperation in Washington.

White House aides and the bipartisan group of senators have huddled privately since Sunday trying to wrap up the deal, which would be a first phase of an eventual \$4 trillion-plus package of domestic

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outlays — not just for roads and bridges, but foundations of everyday life including child care, family tax breaks, education and an expansion of Medicare for seniors.

Biden calls it a “blue-collar blueprint for building an American economy back.” He asserted Tuesday that Americans are overwhelmingly in support of his plan and “that’s the part that a lot of our friends on the other team kind of miss.”

The other team begs to differ.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell and some outside groups decry what they call Biden’s “spending spree,” and McConnell has said big spending is “the last thing American families need.”

A core group of Republicans are interested in pursuing a more modest package of traditional highway and public works projects, about \$600 billion in new funds, and say they just need more time to negotiate with their Democratic colleagues and the White House.

Senators from the bipartisan group emerged upbeat Tuesday from another late-night negotiating session with Biden aides at the Capitol, saying a deal was within reach and even a failed vote Wednesday would not be the end of the road.

Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana said the test vote Wednesday afternoon could be useful in helping to “advance and expedite” the process.

“We are so close,” said Democratic Sen. Jon Tester of Montana.

Biden has been in touch with both Democrats and Republicans for several days, and his outreach will continue “until he has both pieces of legislation on his desk to sign them into law,” White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday.

While Biden proposes paying for his proposals with a tax hike on corporations and wealthy Americans who earn more than \$400,000 a year, the bipartisan group has been working almost around the clock to figure out a compromise way to pay for its package, having dashed ideas for boosting the gas tax drivers pay at the pump or strengthening the Internal Revenue Service to go after tax scofflaws.

Instead, senators in the bipartisan group were considering rolling back a Trump-era rule on pharmaceutical rebates that could bring in some \$170 billion to be used for infrastructure. They were also still haggling over public transit funds.

Ten Republicans would be needed in the evenly split Senate to join all 50 Democrats in reaching the 60-vote threshold required to advance the bill past a filibuster to formal consideration.

Republicans are reluctant to open debate as the bipartisan bill remains a work in progress.

At a private lunch meeting Tuesday, McConnell and others urged Republican senators to vote no, according to a person granted anonymity to discuss the session.

“We’re not going to vote to proceed to a bill that doesn’t exist yet,” Sen. Roy Blunt of Missouri said afterward.

Some senators want to delay the vote to Monday. “We’re making progress, but we need more time,” said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, one of the members of the bipartisan group.

By setting the vote now, Schumer is trying to nudge negotiations along, a strategy both parties have used before. If it fails Wednesday he can set another vote to proceed to the bill later.

Many Republicans are wary of moving ahead with the first, relatively slim package, fearing it will pave the way for the broader \$3.5 trillion effort Democrats are preparing to pass on their own under special budget rules that only require 51 votes. Vice President Kamala Harris can break a tie.

Meanwhile, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has been working to keep restless Democrats in her chamber in line, as rank-and-file lawmakers grow impatient with the sluggish Senate pace.

Liberal Democrats, in particular, are eager to make gains on Biden’s priorities — with or without Republicans.

“Time’s a-wasting, I want to get this work done,” Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., the chairwoman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, told reporters Tuesday.

Jayapal warned against giving Republicans too much time to negotiate the deal away. “We have all the history in the world to show that this is what Republicans do time and time and time again,” she said.

Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., the chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, dismissed the Senate's bipartisan effort as inadequate. He wants more robust spending on the transportation elements and said, "We want an opportunity to actually negotiate."

Democrat John Yarmuth of Kentucky, the chairman of the House Budget Committee, said if the bipartisan effort fails in the Senate, Democrats will simply include some of the infrastructure spending in the broader package they are compiling with Biden's other priorities.

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.

Biden is making the case that America needs to make up for lost time with fresh federal outlays to shore up its aging infrastructure and households struggling to recoup from a shifting economy and the COVID-19 pandemic.

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 abate.

Trump inaugural committee head accused of being UAE agent

By BRIAN MELLEY and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The chair of former President Donald Trump's 2017 inaugural committee was arrested Tuesday on charges alleging he secretly conspired to influence U.S. policy to benefit the United Arab Emirates, even while he was seeking a position as an American diplomat.

Tom Barrack, 74, of Santa Monica, California, was among three men charged in federal court in Brooklyn, New York, with acting as unregistered foreign agents as they tried to influence U.S. policy on the UAE's behalf while Trump was running in 2016 and later while he was president.

The indictment goes to the heart of the U.S.' longtime close relationship with the UAE and directly ties its de facto ruler, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, to Barrack's charges.

Besides conspiracy, Barrack was charged with obstruction of justice and making multiple false statements during a June 2019 interview with federal agents. Also charged in a seven-count indictment were Matthew Grimes, 27, of Aspen, Colorado, who is a former executive at Barrack's company, and Rashid al Malik, 43, a businessman from the United Arab Emirates who prosecutors said acted as a conduit to that nation's rulers.

One of Trump's close personal friends for decades, Barrack is the latest in a long line of the former president's associates to face criminal charges, including his former campaign chair, his former deputy campaign chair, his former chief strategist, his former national security adviser, his former personal lawyer and his company's longtime chief financial officer.

Barrack and Grimes were arrested in Southern California while al Malik was at large, believed to be living somewhere in the Middle East, authorities said. In court papers, prosecutors said al Malik was living in Los Angeles for years before fleeing the U.S. three days after an April 2018 interview by law enforcement. The UAE, which hosts thousands of U.S. troops and aircraft on the Arabian Peninsula, did not respond to requests for comment Wednesday on the indictment.

At an initial hearing in Los Angeles federal court, Barrack's lawyer, Ronak D. Desai, agreed that his client could remain detained until a hearing next Monday after prosecutors submitted written arguments saying he should be denied bail as a risk to flee.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Patricia Donahue called Grimes a "serious risk of flight" and also ordered him detained pending a hearing Monday.

Attorney Michael Freedman, representing Grimes, said his client had no criminal history, no longer worked for Barrack's company and doesn't have the access investigators allege he once had.

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"He is a fairly low-level individual in all of this," Freedman said.

Neither man entered a plea.

Barrack raised \$107 million for Trump's inaugural celebration, which was scrutinized both for its lavish spending and for attracting numerous foreign officials and businesspeople looking to lobby the new administration.

While the indictment made no allegations of wrongdoing by the inaugural committee, or by Trump — who was referenced only as "the Candidate," the "President-Elect" and "the President" — it said Barrack boasted that he had been a 30-year partner of Trump and could help the UAE gain U.S. influence.

"The defendants repeatedly capitalized on Barrack's friendships and access to a candidate who was eventually elected President, high-ranking campaign and government officials, and the American media to advance the policy goals of a foreign government without disclosing their true allegiances," Acting Assistant Attorney General Mark Lesko said.

Barrack has denied wrongdoing.

"Mr. Barrack has made himself voluntarily available to investigators from the outset. He is not guilty and will be pleading not guilty," a spokesperson said.

Emirati officials were not identified by name either, though details in the indictment link back to Sheikh Mohammed. The crown prince also found himself entangled in special counsel Robert Mueller's report on Russian interference in America's 2016 election.

Prosecutors said Barrack also provided UAE government officials with sensitive information about developments within the Trump administration — including how senior U.S. officials felt about a yearslong boycott of Qatar conducted by the UAE and other Middle Eastern countries.

"Worse, in his communications with Al Malik, the defendant framed his efforts to obtain an official position within the Administration as one that would enable him to further advance the interests of the UAE, rather than the interests of the United States," prosecutors wrote in a letter seeking his detention. They noted that he has citizenship in the U.S. and Lebanon, a country with no extradition treaty with the U.S.

When Barrack tried to get Trump to appoint him as either the U.S. ambassador to the UAE or as special envoy to the Middle East, he wrote al Malik "that any such appointment 'would give ABU DHABI more power!'" prosecutors wrote.

Barrack served as an informal adviser to Trump's campaign in 2016 before becoming the inaugural committee chair. Beginning in January 2017, he informally advised senior U.S. government officials on Middle East foreign policy, prosecutors said.

Bill Coffield, an attorney for al Malik — who was not in custody Tuesday — said his client had cooperated extensively with Mueller and that there was "nothing new here." He said al Malik had simply tried to foster a good relationship between the country where he was born and the U.S., where he lived and worked for years, "both of which he loves."

Noting that Forbes estimated Barrack's net worth at \$1 billion in March 2013 and his access to a private plane, prosecutors called him "an extremely wealthy and powerful individual with substantial ties to Lebanon, the UAE, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" who poses a serious flight risk in a letter filed prior to his appearance.

They said the evidence against him was "overwhelming" and his risk of fleeing was higher because he'd traveled extensively, taking more than 75 international trips in the last five years, and regularly used private jets.

Authorities cited several specific instances when Barrack or others allegedly sought to influence U.S. policies, noting that, in May 2016, Barrack inserted language praising the UAE into a campaign speech Trump delivered about U.S. energy policy and arranged for senior UAE officials to receive an advanced draft.

They said he also agreed to arrange meetings and phone calls between senior UAE officials and Trump, reviewed a PowerPoint presentation to be delivered to senior UAE officials on how to boost their influence in the U.S. with his help and repeatedly tried to conceal his conduct, even denying he'd ever been asked by al Malik to help the UAE.

Throughout 2016 and 2017, Barrack and Grimes received talking points and feedback from senior UAE

officials in connection with Barrack's national press appearances and communicated on a dedicated cellular telephone which had a secure messaging application to facilitate communications with senior UAE officials, prosecutors said.

They said that after one appearance in which Barrack repeatedly praised the United Arab Emirates, Barrack emailed al Malik, saying: "I nailed it ... for the home team," referring to the UAE.

Prosecutors also asked that Grimes be held without bail, citing the seriousness of the crimes, overwhelming evidence of guilt, his access to Barrack's fortune and significant ties to countries without extradition treaties with the United States.

In his statement, Lesko characterized the alleged conduct as "nothing short of a betrayal of those officials in the United States, including the former President."

Flooding in central China turns streets to rivers, kills 12

BEIJING (AP) — At least 12 people died in severe flooding Tuesday in a Chinese provincial capital that trapped people in subways and schools, washed away vehicles and stranded people in their workplaces overnight.

The already drenched city of Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan province, was hit by 20 centimeters (8 inches) of rain from 4 to 5 p.m., the official Xinhua News Agency said, citing the Henan weather agency.

The torrent of rain turned streets into rapidly flowing rivers and inundated subway stations and cars. Videos posted online showed entire neighborhoods covered in waist-deep water and vehicles floating in the muddy mire.

To the north of Zhengzhou, the famed Shaolin Temple known for its Buddhist monks' mastery of martial arts was badly hit. Henan province is home to many cultural sites and a major base for industry and agriculture.

Xinhua said 12 people had died and 100,000 people had been moved to safer places.

Stranded people were spending the night in their workplaces or checked into hotels.

Wang Guirong, a 56-year-old restaurant manager, said she planned to sleep on the couch in her restaurant after being told there was no power in her neighborhood. The State Grid Zhengzhou Power Supply Co. said a downtown substation was forced to shut down because of the rain.

"I have lived in Zhengzhou all my life and have never seen such a heavy rainstorm as today," Wang said.

China experiences regular flooding during the summer, but the growth of cities and conversion of farmland into subdivisions has raised the impact of such events.

WHO leader says virus risk inevitable at Tokyo Olympics

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — The Tokyo Olympics should not be judged by the tally of COVID-19 cases that arise because eliminating risk is impossible, the head of the World Health Organization told sports officials Wednesday as events began in Japan.

How infections are handled is what matters most, WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a speech to an International Olympic Committee meeting.

"The mark of success is making sure that any cases are identified, isolated, traced and cared for as quickly as possible and onward transmission is interrupted," he said.

The number of Games-linked COVID-19 cases in Japan this month was 79 on Wednesday, with more international athletes testing positive at home and unable to travel.

"The mark of success in the coming fortnight is not zero cases," Tedros said, noting the athletes who already tested positive in Japan, including at the athletes village in Tokyo Bay, where most of the 11,000 competitors will stay.

Teammates classed as close contacts of infected athletes can continue training and preparing for events under a regime of isolation and extra monitoring.

Health experts in Japan have warned of the Olympics becoming a "super-spreader" event bringing tens

of thousands of athletes, officials and workers during a local state of emergency.

"There is no zero risk in life," said Tedros, who began his keynote speech minutes after the first softball game began in Fukushima, and added Japan was "giving courage to the whole world."

The WHO leader also had a more critical message and a challenge for leaders of richer countries about sharing vaccines more fairly in the world.

"The pandemic is a test and the world is failing," Tedros said, predicting more than 100,000 deaths from COVID-19 worldwide before the Olympic flame goes out in Tokyo on Aug. 8.

It was a "horrifying injustice," he said, that 75% of the vaccine shots delivered globally so far were in only 10 countries.

Tedros warned anyone who believed the pandemic was over because it was under control in their part of the world lived in "a fool's paradise."

The world needs to produce 11 billion doses next year and the WHO wanted governments to help reach a target of vaccinating 70% of people in every country by the middle of next year.

"The pandemic will end when the world chooses to end it," Tedros said. "It is in our hands."

McConnell urges Americans: 'Get vaccinated' as cases spike

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell implored unvaccinated Americans Tuesday to take the COVID-19 shot, issuing a stark and grave warning of a repeat of last year's rising caseloads and shutdowns if people refuse to protect themselves from the coronavirus.

McConnell urged Americans to ignore the "demonstrably bad advice" coming from pundits and others against the vaccines. As cases skyrocket, he noted that nearly all the new virus hospitalizations in the U.S. are among people who have not been vaccinated.

"If there is anybody out there willing to listen: Get vaccinated," McConnell, R-Ky., said at his weekly press conference at the Capitol.

"These shots need to get in everybody's arms as rapidly as possible or we're going to be back in a situation in the fall that we don't yearn for — that we went through last year," he said. "This is not complicated."

McConnell has been one of the most outspoken members of his party in urging vaccinations to stop the virus spread, speaking often in his home state of Kentucky of the need for people to get the shot.

Without criticizing prominent Republicans who refuse the vaccine or mock the severity of the virus, including members of Congress, he has expressed dismay at those who choose to go unvaccinated.

As a survivor of childhood polio, McConnell often draws on his own experience of having endured that disease and he has spoken publicly of the relief that eventually came with the development of vaccines.

On Tuesday he said "it never occurred to me" that after the COVID-19 vaccines that were quickly developed for use in the U.S., "we'd have difficulty getting Americans to get the shot."

US opioid lawsuits on verge of settlements with 4 companies

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

The yearslong effort by state and local governments in the U.S. to force the pharmaceutical industry to help pay to fix a nationwide opioid addiction and overdose crisis took a major step forward Tuesday when lawyers for local governments announced they were on the verge of a \$26 billion settlement with the nation's three biggest drug distribution companies and the drugmaker Johnson & Johnson.

Under the deal, Johnson & Johnson would not produce any opioids for at least a decade. And Ameri-sourceBergen, Cardinal Health and McKesson share prescribing information under a new system intended to stop the avalanches of pills that arrived in some regions about a decade ago.

Lawyers for local governments said full details could be shared within days. That would not be the end of the deal though; each state would have 30 days to decide whether to join. And local governments will have five months after that to decide. If governments don't opt in, the settlement total would go down.

"This is a nationwide crisis and it could have been and should have been addressed perhaps by other

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branches of government," Paul Geller, one of the lead lawyers representing local governments across the U.S., said in a conference call with reporters Tuesday. "But this really is an example of the use of litigation for fixing a national problem."

If approved, the settlement will likely be the biggest of many settlements to opioid litigation. While it means billions for lawyers who worked the cases, it is expected to bring more than \$23 billion to abatement and mitigation efforts to help get treatment for people who are addicted along with other programs to address the crisis. The money would come in 18 annual payments, with the biggest amounts in the next several years.

The deal echoes one the companies have been pushing, sometimes in public, for two years.

Johnson & Johnson reiterated in a statement that it's prepared to contribute up to \$5 billion to the national settlement.

"There continues to be progress toward finalizing this agreement and we remain committed to providing certainty for involved parties and critical assistance for families and communities in need," the company said. "The settlement is not an admission of liability or wrongdoing, and the Company will continue to defend against any litigation that the final agreement does not resolve."

But Cardinal Health declined to comment early Tuesday, and the other distribution companies did not respond to requests for comment.

An Associated Press tally finds there have been at least \$40 billion in completed or proposed settlements, penalties and fines between governments and the toll of opioids since 2007, not including one between the federal government and OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma in which most of the \$8.3 billion would be waived. Purdue is trying to reach a deal through bankruptcy court that could be worth \$10 billion over time; a hearing on that plan is scheduled for August.

Other deals are possible. While a growing number of companies in the industry have struck deals, some manufacturers have not — and no pharmacy companies have struck nationwide settlements.

But the total amount in the settlements is far below estimates of the financial costs of the epidemic. The Society of Actuaries found that the cost of the crisis in the U.S. was \$630 billion from 2015 through 2018, with most of the costs borne by the private sector. And the White House Council of Economic Advisers, when considering the economic impact of people who fatally overdosed, put the one-year cost at about \$500 billion nationally.

Unlike with the tobacco settlements reached in the 1990s, governments have agreed to spend money they bring in from opioid-related settlements to deal with the opioid crisis.

In a joint statement, the attorneys general for Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Tennessee said the settlement talks with the four companies are "potentially nearing their completion," and that, "we look forward to bringing much-needed dollars home to our states to help people recover from opioid addiction and to fundamentally change the opioid manufacturing and distributing industries so this never happens again."

But they still have choices ahead on exactly how they do it.

"Is it a nice chunk of change?" asked Ryan Hampton, who is in recovery from an opioid addiction and is a Las Vegas-based advocate for policy to address the overdose crisis. "Sure it is. Will it go to where it needs to go? The jury's still out on that."

Even before the settlement plan was unveiled Tuesday, a group of public health advocates and experts began calling for any settlement money to be spent to address the opioid crisis.

"It's money that can do a lot of good if it's used well," said Joshua Sharfstein, a vice dean at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, who is spearheading the effort. "It's really important to use it well to save lives because it's coming at the peak of the overdose epidemic."

Private lawyers on the Plaintiffs' Executive Committee representing local governments in opioid lawsuits across the country announced some details of the settlement Tuesday even before it was completed. The decision to do so was partly because the state of New York reached a settlement Tuesday with the three big distribution companies amid a trial playing out in a state court on Long Island.

New York's deal, worth more than \$1 billion, represents the share of the national deal it will receive from distributors if the national deal is finalized. New York also reached a similar deal last month with Johnson

& Johnson worth \$230 million.

"Today, we're holding them accountable delivering more than \$1 billion more into New York communities ravaged by opioids for treatment, recovery, and prevention efforts," New York Attorney General Letitia James said in a statement Tuesday.

The trial is expected to continue, but the settlement leaves only three drug manufacturers as defendants. Other manufacturers, regional distribution companies and pharmacies will remain in the New York and other cases for now. Closing arguments in a West Virginia trial against the distributors are expected to proceed as scheduled next week. The attorney general there, Patrick Morrisey, said the state would probably not agree to the terms.

"I will keep fighting to protect West Virginia and will not allow larger states to dictate how we hold defendants accountable for their actions," he said in a statement Tuesday.

The state and local governments say distribution companies did not have proper controls to flag or halt shipments to pharmacies that received outsized shares of powerful and addictive prescription painkillers. The companies have maintained they were filling orders of legal drugs placed by doctors — so they should not shoulder blame for the nation's addiction and overdose crisis.

An Associated Press analysis of federal distribution data found that enough prescription opioids were shipped in 2012 for every person in the U.S. to have a 20-day supply.

And opioids — including both prescription drugs and illegal ones like heroin and illicitly produced fentanyl — have been linked to more than 500,000 deaths in the U.S. since 2000. The number of cases reached a record high in 2020.

Schools confront more polarization with mask rules for fall

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH, TAMMY WEBBER and TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

Students in Wichita, Kansas, public schools can ditch the masks when classes begin. Detroit public schools will probably require them unless everyone in a room is vaccinated. In Pittsburgh, masks will likely be required regardless of vaccination status. And in some states, schools cannot mandate face coverings under any circumstances.

With COVID-19 cases soaring nationwide, school districts across the U.S. are yet again confronting the realities of a polarized country and the lingering pandemic as they navigate mask requirements, vaccine rules and social distancing requirements for the fast-approaching new school year.

The spread of the delta variant and the deep political divisions over the outbreak have complicated decisions in districts from coast to coast. Some conservative states, lawmakers have banned districts from requiring masks despite outcry from medical professionals. Schools are weighing a variety of plans to manage junior high and middle school classrooms filled with both vaccinated and unvaccinated students.

"I'm so frustrated that it's become a political issue because it shouldn't be. It's science," said Mary Tuttle, who operates an Indianapolis in-home day care center and hopes the city's schools require masks for her daughters.

She worries that the delta variant could lead to a return to virtual learning, which caused her 10-year-old daughter to become depressed and anxious last year. Another daughter will turn 12 six days after starting 6th grade and will be vaccinated as soon as possible.

Adding to the concerns is a rise in cases overall — sharply in some states, including Arkansas, which won't let schools require masks. Public health researchers on Tuesday called Arkansas' rapidly climbing infections and hospitalizations a "raging forest fire," and the state's top health official warned of significant future outbreaks in schools.

Arkansas leads the country in new cases per capita, according to figures compiled by Johns Hopkins University researchers, and it has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the country, with only 35% of the population fully vaccinated.

In Mississippi, the leading health official said Tuesday that intensive care units are full in 13 hospitals because of a surge in cases, and he provided an ominous warning in one of the least vaccinated states in

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the country: "Y'all, we're going to have a rough few weeks," Dr. Thomas Dobbs said.

Weekly tallies by the American Academy of Pediatrics based on state reports show that COVID-19 cases in kids increased nationally in July after a couple of months of declines. The most recent data shows a 1% increase from July 1 to July 15, representing 43,000 additional cases.

The American Academy of Pediatrics on Monday recommended universal masking in schools, even for those who are vaccinated against the virus that causes COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention earlier this month recommended mask-wearing indoors only for students and staff who are not fully vaccinated.

The vaccine has not been approved for children under 12. If it shown to be safe and effective for younger ages, vaccine manufacturers may seek emergency authorization sometime this fall or winter.

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten said the fact that some states refuse to allow mask requirements "is just plain wrong." She said the organization has embraced recommendations from the CDC.

But school officials say masking decisions have been complicated by conflicting advice from public health officials.

"It's frustrating. Parents hear that these are recommendations, and it becomes a delicate dance" because of differing opinions, said Steve Matthews, superintendent of Novi Community Schools, outside Detroit.

He probably will recommend that the school board make masking optional, although he worries about potential outbreaks because people are gathering for sporting events, family reunions and other activities.

"It would be very helpful if there was agreement among the medical community what the approach should be," Matthews said. When everyone wore masks last year, "it created a sense of community, a sense that we're all in this together. Now it ends up dividing people."

That's part of the reason the academy recommended universal masking in schools, said Dr. Sonja O'Leary, chair of the academy's Council on School Health.

"People just wanted it to be clearer, masks or no masks," said O'Leary. She said data show COVID-19 infections have not been rampant in U.S. schools, but "we know masks do curb transmission." What's more, keeping track of who has had shots and who has not may be tough for schools.

School districts that can set their own policies are taking different approaches.

In Detroit public schools, everyone will likely be required to wear a mask unless an entire room is vaccinated. Officials are developing an identification system, perhaps by wearing lanyards, Superintendent Nikolai Vitti said.

In Pittsburgh, administrators are proposing that all public school students and staff be required to wear masks indoors to protect younger students and because of "concerns around unknowns from the variant," spokeswoman Ebony R. Pugh said. Universal masking also protects the privacy of older students who have not been vaccinated, she said.

In Kansas, most schoolchildren and teachers will not be required to wear masks. The state's largest district, Wichita, made masks optional starting July 6 and surveyed parents before announcing its reopening plan, said Wichita Public Schools spokeswoman Susan Arensman.

"A lot of them, their big talking points were about the emotional well-being of students and staff," Arensman said. "They still wanted kids to be safe, but they also wanted kids to be back to normal."

In Templeton, California, Jenny Grinager said she does not like masks and got an exemption for her 8-year-old son because he has attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism. She said her son struggles to communicate with people who wear masks because he's unable to see their facial expressions. Last year, he said he didn't have any friends in class and was lonely.

"For him, it is the relationship, the interaction that causes him to remember who somebody is," said Grinager, who also does not believe vaccination is necessary. She notes that children are less likely to get seriously ill with COVID-19, and she has not been vaccinated.

In Madison, Wisconsin, Sarah Jedd plans to send her 15- and 13-year old sons back to classes because both are vaccinated, but she will home-school her 9-year-old son and 8-year-old daughter if masks are

not required. The district is expected to announce its decision later this week.

"I'm just really concerned about (them) being inside a school building with lots and lots of kids with no masks on while they're too young to be vaccinated," Jedd said.

Jacky Frechette, who has a son who's vaccinated and a 4-year-old who isn't, said every Madison student should be required to wear a mask rather than having different rules for the vaccinated and unvaccinated, especially when people can so easily lie about it.

"It's sad (wearing masks) has become so divisive that we've put our political thoughts and feelings above what experts say," she said.

Bezos' comments on workers after spaceflight draws rebuke

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The world's richest man wanted to say thanks to the people who made his brief trip into space Tuesday possible.

But for some, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos' expression of gratitude went over like a lead rocket.

"I want to thank every Amazon employee, and every Amazon customer because you guys paid for all this," the 57-year-old Bezos said during a news conference Tuesday after becoming the second billionaire in just over a week to ride in his own spacecraft.

Bezos built Amazon into a shopping and entertainment behemoth but has faced increasing activism within his own workforce and stepped up pressure from critics to improve working conditions.

Labor groups and Amazon workers have claimed that the company offers its hourly employees not enough break times, puts too much reliance on rigid productivity metrics and has unsafe working conditions. An effort to unionize workers at an Amazon warehouse in Alabama failed earlier this year.

Robert Reich, former secretary of labor under President Bill Clinton and a professor of public policy at University of California, Berkeley, wrote on Twitter that Bezos has crushed unionizing attempts for decades.

"Amazon workers don't need Bezos to thank them. They need him to stop union busting — and pay them what they deserve," Reich wrote.

Bezos stepped down as Amazon CEO in July, allowing him more time for side projects including his space exploration company Blue Origin. He has said he finances the rocket company by selling \$1 billion in Amazon stock each year.

After the spaceflight, Bezos awarded \$100 million donations through a new philanthropic initiative to both D.C. chef Jose Andres and CNN contributor Van Jones to put towards any charity or nonprofit of their choice. Jones has founded a number of nonprofit organizations and Andres' nonprofit group World Central Kitchen provides meals to people following natural disasters.

Nevertheless, Rep. Earl Blumenauer, who is on the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee, proposed on Tuesday legislation that would tax space travel for non-scientific research purposes.

"Space exploration isn't a tax-free holiday for the wealthy," said Blumenauer, an Oregon Democrat. "Just as normal Americans pay taxes when they buy airline tickets, billionaires who fly into space to produce nothing of scientific value should do the same, and then some."

Others tied his spaceflight to reports that Bezos hasn't paid his fair share of taxes. According to the nonprofit investigative journalism organization ProPublica, Bezos paid no income tax in 2007 and 2011.

"Jeff Bezos forgot to thank all the hardworking Americans who actually paid taxes to keep this country running while he and Amazon paid nothing," Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., tweeted.

Allen Adamson, co-founder of marketing consultancy Metaforce, says it's challenging for Bezos to say where the money from the space trip is coming from without being offensive. He says he should have left out those comments and focused on thanking the Blue Origin team.

"For people who have an issue with inequality and his compensation versus the average employee compensation, this was rocket fuel," Adamson said.

Monster wildfire tests years of forest management efforts

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By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Ecologists in a vast region of wetlands and forest in remote Oregon have spent the past decade thinning young trees and using planned fires to try to restore the thick stands of ponderosa to a less fire-prone state.

This week, the nation's biggest burning wildfire provided them with an unexpected, real-world experiment. As the massive inferno half the size of Rhode Island roared into the Sycan Marsh Preserve, firefighters said the flames jumped less from treetop to treetop and instead returned to the ground, where they were easier to fight, moved more slowly and did less damage to the overall forest.

The initial assessment suggests that the many years of forest treatments worked, said Pete Caligiuri, Oregon forest program director for The Nature Conservancy, which runs the research at the preserve.

"Generally speaking, what firefighters were reporting on the ground is that when the fire came into those areas that had been thinned ... it had significantly less impact."

The reports were bittersweet for researchers, who still saw nearly 20 square miles of the preserve burn, but the findings add to a growing body of research about how to make wildfires less explosive by thinning undergrowth and allowing forests to burn periodically — as they naturally would do — instead of snuffing out every flame.

The Bootleg Fire, now 606 square miles (1,569 square kilometers) in size, has ravaged southern Oregon and is the fourth-largest fire in the state's modern history. It's been expanding by up to 4 miles (6 kilometers) a day, pushed by gusting winds and critically dry weather that's turned trees and undergrowth into a tinderbox.

Fire crews have had to retreat from the flames for 10 consecutive days as fireballs jump from treetop to treetop, trees explode, embers fly ahead of the fire to start new blazes and, in some cases, the inferno's heat creates its own weather of shifting winds and dry lightning. Monstrous clouds of smoke and ash have risen up to 6 miles into the sky and are visible for more than 100 air miles.

The fire in the Fremont-Winema National Forest merged with a smaller nearby blaze Tuesday, and it has repeatedly breached a perimeter of treeless dirt and fire retardant meant to stop its advance.

More evacuations were ordered Monday night, and a red flag weather warning signifying dangerous fire conditions was in effect through Tuesday. The fire is 30% contained.

"We're in this for as long as it takes to safely confine this monster," Incident Commander Rob Allen said Tuesday.

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.

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

On Tuesday, officials temporarily closed all recreational and public access to state-managed lands in eastern Washington due to fire danger, starting Friday.

Historically, wildfires in Oregon and elsewhere in the West burned an area as big or bigger than the current blaze more frequently but much less explosively. Periodic, naturally occurring fire cleared out the undergrowth and smaller trees that cause today's fires to burn so dangerously.

Those fires have not been allowed to burn for the past 120 years, said James Johnston, a researcher with Oregon State University's College of Forestry who studies historical wildfires.

The area on the northeastern flank of the Bootleg Fire is in the ancestral homeland of the Klamath Tribes, which have used intentional, managed fire to keep the fuel load low and prevent such explosive blazes. Scientists at the Sycan Marsh research station now work with the tribe and draw on that knowledge.

Climate change is the catalyst for the worsening wildfire seasons in the West, Johnston said, but poor forest management and a policy of decades of fire suppression have made a bad situation even worse.

"My colleagues and I have been predicting a massive fire in that area for years. It's an area that's ex-

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ceptionally prone to catastrophic fire," said Johnston, who is not affiliated with Sycan Marsh. "It's dry. It's fire-prone and always has been. But what's changed over the past 100 years is an extraordinary amount of fuel buildup."

Elsewhere, fire crews were engaged in other daunting battles.

In Northern California, authorities expanded evacuations for the Tamarack Fire in Alpine County in the Sierra Nevada to include the mountain town of Mesa Vista late Monday. That fire, which exploded over the weekend was 61 square miles (158 square kilometers) with no containment.

Tony Galvez fled with his daughter at the last minute and found out the family's home is gone.

"I lost my whole life, everything I've ever had. The kids are what's going to matter," he said as he fielded calls from relatives. "I got three teenagers. They're going to go home to a moonscape."

On the western side of the Sierra, the Dixie Fire has scorched more than 90 square miles (163 square kilometers), threatening tiny communities in the Feather River Valley region.

Meteorologist Julia Ruthford told a briefing that a surge of monsoonal moisture from the Southwest had created plumes topping 6 miles — so big that the fire generated a thunderstorm over itself with lightning and gusty winds.

For the past two days in Oregon, the fire has danced around Sycan Marsh, where researchers raced to protect buildings with sprinklers and fire lines. The 47-square-mile habitat attracts migrating and nesting birds and offers a unique location to research forest and fire ecology.

The nonprofit operates its own fire engines and now has three engines and seven firefighters on the blaze and more people are arriving.

"It's an amazing place," Caligiuri said. "It's very hard to watch it all happening, and seeing all of that work being threatened by this fire is a lot to process."

Tom Brady, champion Buccaneers visit Biden at White House

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Sports Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Tom Brady embraced his inner comedian to deliver jokes at old friend Donald Trump's expense Tuesday when he and the Super Bowl-winning Tampa Bay Buccaneers visited President Joe Biden at the White House, the first visit by the reigning NFL champions since 2017.

The seven-time Super Bowl champion who once was gifted a "Make America Great Again" hat from Trump that he displayed in his locker at Gillette Stadium compared those backing Trump's false assertion that he won the 2020 election to people who couldn't believe the underdog Buccaneers beat the Kansas City Chiefs.

"Not a lot of people think that we could have won, and in fact I think about 40% of the people still don't think we won," Brady said. "You understand that, Mr. President?"

"I understand that," Biden responded.

Brady also played off Trump's derisive "Sleepy Joe" nickname for Biden when talking about a time he forgot what down it was.

"I lost track of one down in 21 years of playing, and they started calling me 'Sleepy Tom,'" Brady said with a grin. "Why would they do that to me?"

It was Brady's first visit since 2005 with the New England Patriots when George W. Bush was in office. Brady has won the Super Bowl during four different administrations but skipped visits by the Patriots in 2015 with Barack Obama and 2017 with Trump. The Patriots as a team chose not to attend after winning in 2019.

Brady was front and center this time, one of 42 Bucs players accompanying Biden, coach Bruce Arians and owner Bryan Glazer to the ceremony, which included more than just his jokes. There was some pointed political commentary from Arians and a push from the president for players to get vaccinated against the coronavirus if they hadn't already.

Arians quickly shifted from extolling his Buccaneers' guiding principles of "trust, loyalty, and respect" that focused the team on "one team, one cause" to taking an indirect dig at Republican lawmakers on Capitol

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Hill who have opposed elements of the president's agenda.

"I hope the Senate and the House start helping you," Arians said to Biden. "One team, one cause."

Biden was presented with the traditional gift of a No. 46 jersey — which Glazer said was appropriate since Tampa Bay is heading into its 46th season as a franchise. With the sun beating down in the late morning, Biden told players to take their suit jackets off following a group picture, but those in attendance next to the Lombardi Trophy didn't mind.

"I know the guys really, really enjoyed it, even with the heat," said Arians, who's eager for the Buccaneers to get their Super Bowl rings Thursday and move on to next season with training camp opening next week. "I just told them it's another work day. We got to get a workout in today, so standing in the sun's a good one."

Before baking in the sun, players Donovan Smith and Bradley Pinion from the team's social justice committee met with Vice President Kamala Harris to talk about voting rights, a subject the Buccaneers have prioritized.

"It feels like it gives us validity or the weight of some of the stuff that we were doing in Tampa, especially around voting and getting people to vote," offensive lineman Ali Marpet said after the ceremony. "As an organization we're really trying to be leaders in (that area), and that was a big point of emphasis for her."

Talking about how nearly 200,000 vaccine doses were given out at Raymond James Stadium — the Buccaneers' home and where they won the Super Bowl — Biden turned to dozens of players behind him and said: "If you don't have a shot, get one, OK? Get one, get one, get one. You're saving lives, helping us get back to our lives and our loved ones."

Biden also lauded NFL efforts to promote COVID-19 vaccinations.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki did not directly answer when asked if the Buccaneers provided information on which team attendees were vaccinated. Over half of their traveling party of players coached and staff has been fully vaccinated, and while 10 NFL teams as of Friday had reached the 85% threshold it's unclear if Tampa Bay was one of them.

Biden in his prepared remarks singled out receiver Chris Godwin, like himself Pennsylvania-born and Delaware-raised, who he spoke with before the Super Bowl.

"I wasn't expecting it, so it definitely took me by surprise," Godwin said afterward. "He gave me a call the day before the Super Bowl, and I was shocked then. We chatted, had a five-, 10-minute talk, talked about Delaware a little bit and he wished me good luck. That was an honor for me. Then he was kind enough to send me a letter afterwards congratulating me on the win and congratulating the team."

As the oldest person to become president, Biden compared himself to Brady being the oldest quarterback and Arians the oldest coach to win it all.

"You won't hear any jokes about that from me," he said. "As far as I'm concerned, there's nothing wrong with being the oldest guy to make it to the mountaintop."

India's pandemic death toll could be in the millions

By SHEIKH SAALIQ and KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's excess deaths during the coronavirus 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 3.4 million to 4.7 million since the pandemic began through last month. 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 was published by Arvind Subramanian, the Indian government's former chief economic adviser, and two other researchers at the Center for Global Development, a nonprofit think tank based in

Washington, and Harvard University.

It said the count could have missed deaths that occurred in overwhelmed hospitals or while health care was disrupted, particularly during the devastating virus 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 three times 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 more in urban versus rural states and since health care quality varies greatly around India.

Other nations also are believed to have undercounted deaths in the pandemic. But India is thought to have a greater gap due to having the world's second-highest population of 1.4 billion and because not all deaths were recorded even before the pandemic.

The health ministry did not immediately respond to an Associated Press request for comment on the report.

Dr. Jacob John, who studies viruses at the Christian Medical College at Vellore in southern India and was not part of the research, reviewed the report for the AP and said it underscores the devastating impact COVID-19 had on the country's underprepared 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, and that India's villages were also badly affected.

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

Critics take aim at charitable money sitting in donor funds

By HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writer

Wealthy philanthropists have long enjoyed an advantageous way to give to charity: Using something called a donor-advised fund, they've been able to enjoy tax deductions and investment gains on their donations long before they give the money away.

These so-called DAFs set no deadlines for when the donations must reach charities; the donors themselves decide when and where the money goes.

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Critics complain that because DAFs provide no financial incentive to quickly donate the money, much of it ends up sitting indefinitely in the accounts rather than being distributed to needy charities.

That criticism has helped drive a Senate bill that would tighten the rules for DAFs and aim to speed donations to charities. The bill, introduced by Sens. Angus King, a Maine Independent, and Chuck Grassley, an Iowa Republican, appears to be gaining bipartisan support in Congress.

The bill would make numerous reforms to DAFs by, among other things, creating new categories of accounts.

One type of account would give donors an immediate income tax deduction for money they agree to give to a charity within 15 years.

The second type would let them delay the distribution of their money for 50 years. These donors would get no income tax deduction until then. But they would still get to enjoy capital gains and estate tax savings for donating stocks or gifts into a DAF.

Community foundation-sponsored DAFs with less than \$1 million would be exempt from the requirement. But donors with more than \$1 million in such accounts would qualify for upfront tax benefits only if they distributed at least 5% of their assets annually or gave their money to a charity within 15 years. Under current law, assets can remain in a DAF indefinitely, tax-free.

"This is about as common sense a bill as I've ever seen," said King, who caucuses with Democrats.

"The idea of getting a tax deduction today for money that may not be paid out for 50 years makes no sense," the senator added. "I understand you might want to put it into a fund and have someone else manage it. But it's got to go out within a reasonable period of time. Otherwise, it's an abuse of the tax code."

The proposed reforms have opened a rift in philanthropy circles among billionaire donors, community foundations and trade associations and have sparked intense lobbying efforts both for and against the legislation.

The debate was ignited when John Arnold, a Texas-based billionaire who made his fortune in hedge funds and now co-chairs Arnold Ventures, joined with a group of scholars and philanthropies to propose a set of reforms under a coalition they called The Initiative to Accelerate Charitable Giving. Members of the group met with lawmakers to advocate for the reforms, which have largely been incorporated into the Senate bill.

What sparked Arnold's interest, he said, was seeing rich people with philanthropic intent funneling money into DAFs yet distributing very little of it to charities.

"The money was just sitting there growing," Arnold said. "There wasn't any intent of abuse of the system. But the money was just building up because there was no forcing mechanism."

Opponents of the bill counter that tighter restrictions on DAFs are unnecessary because the average annual payout rates for DAFs hover around 20% — much higher than the 5% minimum required of private foundations. Richard Graber, who leads the conservative Bradley Foundation, calls the legislation "a solution in search of a problem." (The foundation is affiliated with Bradley Impact Fund, a DAF sponsor).

Yet without payout requirements, supporters of the legislation say DAFs — which hold an estimated \$142 billion in the United States — have essentially become warehouses for charitable donations. The accounts let donors set up endowed accounts that exist in perpetuity and can pass on to their heirs.

A June report by the Council of Michigan Foundations showed that 35% of DAFs sponsored by Michigan community foundations distributed no money in 2020, a year marked by enormous need because of the viral pandemic.

Today, roughly 1 in 8 charitable dollars are estimated to go into DAFs. The New York Community Trust, a community foundation, established the first DAF in 1931. Their use accelerated in the 1990s, when Fidelity Charitable launched a national donor-advised fund program. Charitable arms of many financial firms, including Vanguard Charitable and Schwab Charitable, now run robust DAF programs.

Community foundations, along with universities, hospitals, faith-based groups and large charities like United Way also sponsor DAFs. Collectively, they account for a 300% growth in DAF accounts over the past 10 years, according to the National Philanthropic Trust.

Eileen Heisman, who leads the philanthropic trust, notes the ease of opening a DAF account online, the

emergence of workplace charitable-giving accounts and low initial minimum contributions. Indeed, Fidelity and Schwab require no initial contributions at all for opening a DAF account, Heisman noted, thereby transforming it into a financial vehicle anyone can use. Still, the average value of a DAF account — estimated at about \$162,000 — shows that DAFs remain a vehicle mainly for the affluent.

The Senate bill was crafted with guidance from Ray Madoff, a Boston College law professor who, alongside Arnold, has called for stricter DAF rules. Madoff and a colleague published a study in May that showed that working charities had lost \$300 billion in contributions over a five-year period as more people channeled donations through DAFs and private foundations rather than directly to charities.

The Philanthropy Roundtable, a conservative-leaning group that opposes payout requirements for DAFs, disputes those findings. Its president, Elise Westhoff, argues that “more mandates and regulations on giving will just make it harder for all Americans to support the causes they care about.”

Supporters of the bill, including William Schambra, a philanthropy expert at the conservative Hudson Institute, say much of the pushback reflects a financial incentive that DAF sponsors want to preserve: The fees they charge to manage the accounts.

Some community foundation leaders agree.

“Community foundations’ business models are based on asset management,” said Paul Major, the CEO of the Colorado-based Telluride Foundation. “They charge fees, and that’s how they fund their operations. If they have less money to manage, they bring in less fees.”

“But the objective of charitable giving is not to manage more money,” Major said. “The objective is to put the money to work.”

Other experts agree on the need to rein in DAFs but favor a different approach. Edward A. Zelinsky, a professor at Yeshiva University’s Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, argues that creating a minimum annual contribution requirement for all DAFs would more effectively accelerate donations to charities.

Some community foundations say they think the bill is unnecessary because their organizations already have policies that incentivize faster payouts. Jeff Hamond, who oversees a coalition of 130 community foundations, contends that the legislation would increase the financial burden on community foundations, requiring them to track each donation.

“For every kind of additional cost burden you put on a community foundation,” Hamond said, “you’re actually driving more people to Fidelity, Vanguard and Schwab.”

The Senate bill would also prohibit donors from claiming tax benefits for complex donations — like real estate — that exceed the value of the gift. It would also incentivize private foundations to increase their payouts to 7% and bar them from meeting their payout requirements by paying salaries or other expenses for relatives or by donating to DAFs.

The Senate bill has been referred to the Finance Committee, though a vote hasn’t been scheduled. A spokesman for King’s office said the senator expects a bipartisan House version of the bill to be introduced in the coming weeks.

“I haven’t met anybody yet that I’ve described it to,” King said, “who does anything but say, ‘Why didn’t we do this a long time ago?’”

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.

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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 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.

"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

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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.

"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."

An Olympics like no other, Tokyo perseveres to host Games

By CHRIS LEHOURITES AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — It's an Olympics like no other — and the Tokyo Games are surely that — but this is an event that has persevered through wars, boycotts and now a pandemic over its 125-year modern history.

The Tokyo Olympics have already broken new ground because of the 12-month delay caused by the coronavirus pandemic, pushing it into an odd-numbered year for the first time. But with no fans permitted in Japan, foreign or local, it has the distinction of being the first Games without spectators.

"We're in uncharted territory," said Steve Wilson, the former president of the Olympic Journalists Association who covered the Olympic movement for The Associated Press for nearly three decades until 2017.

"These will be Games without the carnival atmosphere, celebration and fun that we've come to expect and look forward to. Definitely one for the history books."

There have been many other unusual editions of the Olympics in the past, however. The United States and many of its allies boycotted the 1980 Moscow Games to protest the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. The Soviets and many of its allies reciprocated four years later by boycotting the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics.

Dozens of countries, mainly from Africa, boycotted the 1976 Montreal Games to protest New Zealand's sporting ties to the South African apartheid regime. South Africa was banned from competing from 1964 to 1988 because of apartheid.

World War I and World War II forced the Olympics to be canceled altogether, so there were no 1916, 1940 or 1944 Games. The separate Winter Olympics didn't exist at the time of World War I, but World War II forced two of them to be called off.

The 1940 Games were supposed to be held in Tokyo, but upon the return of the Olympics in 1948, London was chosen as host. Tokyo had to wait until 1964 to host the Games for the first time.

And then there was 1920, an Olympics held in Antwerp, Belgium, that took place as the world was emerging from both World War I and a flu pandemic that killed more than 50 million people.

"In a minimum of time, they organized the Games, but they were relatively improvised Games," Roland Renson, a Belgian sports historian, told the AP last year. "They had to do it with the means they had at their disposal, and they were at that time far from abundant in a city so heavily hit by war."

The coronavirus pandemic even affected Antwerp's 100-year anniversary, forcing last year's celebrations to be canceled.

Another odd Olympic occurrence came at the 1956 Melbourne Games, when the equestrian events were held in Stockholm because of animal quarantine regulations in Australia.

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And then there is the 1906 Athens Olympics, or maybe the lack of a 1906 Olympics.

Originally called the "Athens International Olympic Games" and sanctioned by the IOC, they are now known as the Intercalated (or Intermediary) Games of 1906 — hosted halfway between the normal four-year Olympic cycle. They were ruled unofficial in 1949, according to Olympic historian David Wallechinsky.

Tragedy has also marked the Olympics, most notably when 11 members of the Israeli team were murdered by the Palestinian terrorist group Black September at the 1972 Munich Games and when a bomb exploded in the Olympic Park at the 1996 Atlanta Games.

Other host cities have turned down the right to host the Games. The 1908 Olympics, for instance, were originally awarded to Rome, but they were relocated to London following the eruption of Mount Vesuvius because the Italian government decided its financial resources would be better spent on rebuilding Naples.

Rome finally hosted the Games in 1960.

One particular Olympics has an especially controversial past: the 1936 Berlin Games. Although the Games were awarded about two years before Adolf Hitler became dictator, they went ahead under Nazism. Jesse Owens, an African American track great, went on to win four gold medals, but he was supposed to compete in only three events, the 100 meters, 200 meters and long jump.

Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller had been two of the presumed team members for the 4x100-meter relay. They were replaced by Owens and Ralph Metcalfe, who won the race alongside Frank Wykoff and Foy Draper in world record time.

"What made the situation ugly," Wallechinsky wrote in "The Complete Book of the Olympics" in 2012, "was that Stoller and Glickman were the only Jews on the U.S. track team, and they returned to the United States as the only members of the squad who didn't compete."

Critics take aim at charitable money sitting in donor funds

By HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writer

Wealthy philanthropists have long enjoyed an advantageous way to give to charity: Using something called a donor-advised fund, they've been able to enjoy tax deductions and investment gains on their donations long before they give the money away.

These so-called DAFs set no deadlines for when the donations must reach charities; the donors themselves decide when and where the money goes.

Critics complain that because DAFs provide no financial incentive to quickly donate the money, much of it ends up sitting indefinitely in the accounts rather than being distributed to needy charities.

That criticism has helped drive a Senate bill that would tighten the rules for DAFs and aim to speed donations to charities. The bill, introduced by Sens. Angus King, a Maine Independent, and Chuck Grassley, an Iowa Republican, appears to be gaining bipartisan support in Congress.

The bill would make numerous reforms to DAFs by, among other things, creating new categories of accounts.

One type of account would give donors an immediate income tax deduction for money they agree to give to a charity within 15 years.

The second type would let them delay the distribution of their money for 50 years. These donors would get no income tax deduction until then. But they would still get to enjoy capital gains and estate tax savings for donating stocks or gifts into a DAF.

Community foundation-sponsored DAFs with less than \$1 million would be exempt from the requirement. But donors with more than \$1 million in such accounts would qualify for upfront tax benefits only if they distributed at least 5% of their assets annually or gave their money to a charity within 15 years. Under current law, assets can remain in a DAF indefinitely, tax-free.

"This is about as common sense a bill as I've ever seen," said King, who caucuses with Democrats.

"The idea of getting a tax deduction today for money that may not be paid out for 50 years makes no sense," the senator added. "I understand you might want to put it into a fund and have someone else manage it. But it's got to go out within a reasonable period of time. Otherwise, it's an abuse of the tax code."

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The proposed reforms have opened a rift in philanthropy circles among billionaire donors, community foundations and trade associations and have sparked intense lobbying efforts both for and against the legislation.

The debate was ignited when John Arnold, a Texas-based billionaire who made his fortune in hedge funds and now co-chairs Arnold Ventures, joined with a group of scholars and philanthropies to propose a set of reforms under a coalition they called The Initiative to Accelerate Charitable Giving. The group met with lawmakers to advocate for the reforms, which have largely been incorporated into the Senate bill.

What sparked Arnold's interest, he said, was seeing rich people with philanthropic intent funneling money into DAFs yet distributing very little of it to charities.

"The money was just sitting there growing," Arnold said. "There wasn't any intent of abuse of the system. But the money was just building up because there was no forcing mechanism."

Opponents of the bill counter that tighter restrictions on DAFs are unnecessary because the average annual payout rates for DAFs hover around 20% — much higher than the 5% minimum required of private foundations. Richard Graber, who leads the conservative Bradley Foundation, calls the legislation "a solution in search of a problem." (The foundation is affiliated with Bradley Impact Fund, a DAF sponsor).

Yet without payout requirements, supporters of the legislation say DAFs — which hold an estimated \$142 billion in the United States — have essentially become warehouses for charitable donations. The accounts let donors set up endowed accounts that exist in perpetuity and can pass on to their heirs.

A June report by the Council of Michigan Foundations showed that 35% of DAFs sponsored by Michigan community foundations distributed no money in 2020, a year marked by enormous need because of the viral pandemic.

Today, roughly 1 in 8 charitable dollars are estimated to go into DAFs. The New York Community Trust, a community foundation, established the first DAF in 1931. Their use accelerated in the 1990s, when Fidelity Charitable launched a national donor-advised fund program. Charitable arms of many financial firms, including Vanguard Charitable and Schwab Charitable, now run robust DAF programs.

Community foundations, along with universities, hospitals, faith-based groups and large charities like United Way also sponsor DAFs. Collectively, they account for a 300% growth in DAF accounts over the past 10 years, according to the National Philanthropic Trust.

Eileen Heisman, who leads the philanthropic trust, notes the ease of opening a DAF account online, the emergence of workplace charitable-giving accounts and low initial minimum contributions. Indeed, Fidelity and Schwab require no initial contributions at all for opening a DAF account, Heisman noted, thereby transforming it into a financial vehicle anyone can use. Still, the average value of a DAF account — estimated at about \$162,000 — shows that DAFs remain a vehicle mainly for the affluent.

The Senate bill was crafted with guidance from Ray Madoff, a Boston College law professor who, alongside Arnold, has called for stricter DAF rules. Madoff and a colleague published a study in May that showed that working charities had lost \$300 billion in contributions over a five-year period as more people channeled donations through DAFs and private foundations rather than directly to charities.

The Philanthropy Roundtable, a conservative-leaning group that opposes payout requirements for DAFs, disputes those findings. Its president, Elise Westhoff, argues that "more mandates and regulations on giving will just make it harder for all Americans to support the causes they care about."

Supporters of the bill, including William Schambra, a philanthropy expert at the conservative Hudson Institute, say much of the pushback reflects a financial incentive that DAF sponsors want to preserve: The fees they charge to manage the accounts.

Some community foundation leaders agree.

"Community foundations' business models are based on asset management," said Paul Major, the CEO of the Colorado-based Telluride Foundation. "They charge fees, and that's how they fund their operations. If they have less money to manage, they bring in less fees."

"But the objective of charitable giving is not to manage more money," Major said. "The objective is to put the money to work."

Other experts agree on the need to rein in DAFs but favor a different approach. Edward A. Zelinsky, a professor at Yeshiva University's Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, argues that creating a minimum annual contribution requirement for all DAFs would more effectively accelerate donations to charities.

Some community foundations say they think the bill is unnecessary because their organizations already have policies that incentivize faster payouts. Jeff Hamond, who oversees a coalition of 130 community foundations, contends that the legislation would increase the financial burden on community foundations, requiring them to track each donation.

"For every kind of additional cost burden you put on a community foundation," Hamond said, "you're actually driving more people to Fidelity, Vanguard and Schwab."

The Senate bill would also prohibit donors from claiming tax benefits for complex donations — like real estate — that exceed the value of the gift. It would also incentivize private foundations to increase their payouts to 7% and bar them from meeting their payout requirements by paying salaries or other expenses for relatives or by donating to DAFs.

The Senate bill has been referred to the Finance Committee, though a vote hasn't been scheduled. A spokesman for King's office said the senator expects a bipartisan House version of the bill to be introduced in the coming weeks.

"I haven't met anybody yet that I've described it to," King said, "who does anything but say, 'Why didn't we do this a long time ago?'"

Britney Spears' conservatorship case sparks legislative push

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Prompted by Britney Spears' conservatorship fight, a bipartisan legislative effort has emerged to reform the process created to protect the rights of more than 1 million people across the United States under the protective arrangements.

On Tuesday, Reps. Charlie Crist and Nancy Mace unveiled "The Free Britney Act," designed to give more options to people placed under conservatorships. Those include the ability to talk about their situations with caseworkers — over any objections from their conservators — and petition a court to replace their conservators without having to "prove wrongdoing or malfeasance."

"This is just a commonsense approach to doing what is right, to making sure that rights are balanced," Crist, a Florida Democrat, said during a virtual news conference on Tuesday.

Both Mace, a Republican from South Carolina, and Crist said it was Spears' passionate plea last month that a judge end the conservatorship that controls her life and money that spurred their proposal.

"What she had was an opportunity to do is bring to light, to shine a light, on those abuses," Mace said. "Her situation is a nightmare, and if it can happen to Britney Spears, it can happen to anyone in this country."

Speaking in open court, Spears condemned her father and others who control the conservatorship, put in place as Spears underwent a mental health crisis in 2008. Spears said that the arrangement has compelled her to use birth control and take other medications against her will, and prevented her from getting married or having another child.

Spears' father and his attorneys have emphasized that she and her fortune, which court records put at more than \$50 million, remain vulnerable to fraud and manipulation. Under current law, the burden is on Spears to prove she is competent before the case could end.

Mace and Crist said they expected more bipartisan support for the measure, which would also provide at least \$260 million in grant funds for states to hire caseworkers or conservators.

The #FreeBritney movement has already crossed party lines.

"Everyone deserves control over their own body. Period," U.S. Rep. Katherine Clark of Massachusetts, the fourth-ranking House Democrat, tweeted last month following Spears' testimony.

Some House Republicans have invited Spears to testify before Congress. The political arm of the House Republican caucus sent texts that described Ms. Spears as "a victim of toxic gov't overreach & censorship."

Earlier this month, Florida Republican U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz, a close ally of former President Donald Trump,

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made a brief appearance addressing the Spears supporters outside the downtown Los Angeles courthouse, at one point shouting "Free Britney!"

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, July 21, the 202nd day of 2021. There are 163 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 21, 1944, American forces landed on Guam during World War II, capturing it from the Japanese some three weeks later.

On this date:

In 1861, during the Civil War, the first Battle of Bull Run was fought at Manassas, Virginia, resulting in a Confederate victory.

In 1925, the so-called "Monkey Trial" ended in Dayton, Tennessee, with John T. Scopes found guilty of violating state law for teaching Darwin's Theory of Evolution. (The conviction was later overturned on a technicality.)

In 1954, the Geneva Conference concluded with accords dividing Vietnam into northern and southern entities.

In 1969, Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin blasted off from the moon aboard the ascent stage of the lunar module for docking with the command module.

In 1972, the Irish Republican Army carried out 22 bombings in Belfast, Northern Ireland, killing nine people and injuring 130 in what became known as "Bloody Friday."

In 1980, draft registration began in the United States for 19- and 20-year-old men.

In 1999, Navy divers found and recovered the bodies of John F. Kennedy Jr., his wife, Carolyn, and sister-in-law, Lauren Bessette (bih-SEHT'), in the wreckage of Kennedy's plane in the Atlantic Ocean off Martha's Vineyard.

In 2000, Special Counsel John C. Danforth concluded "with 100 percent certainty" that the federal government was innocent of wrongdoing in the siege that killed 80 members of the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas, in 1993.

In 2009, prosecutors in Cambridge, Massachusetts, dropped a disorderly conduct charge against prominent Black scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr., who was arrested by a white officer at his home near Harvard University after a report of a break-in.

In 2011, the 30-year-old space shuttle program ended as Atlantis landed at Cape Canaveral, Florida, after the 135th shuttle flight.

In 2008, former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic (RA'-doh-van KA'-ra-jich), one of the world's top war crimes fugitives, was arrested in a Belgrade suburb by Serbian security forces. (He was sentenced by a U.N. court in 2019 to life imprisonment after being convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.)

In 2015, after a nearly decade-long steroids prosecution, former baseball star Barry Bonds emerged victorious when federal prosecutors dropped what was left of their criminal case against the career home runs leader.

Ten years ago: The 30-year-old space shuttle program ended as Atlantis landed at Cape Canaveral, Florida, after the 135th shuttle flight. Eurozone leaders agreed to a sweeping deal that would grant Greece a massive new bailout and radically reshape the currency union's rescue fund.

Five years ago: Donald Trump accepted the GOP presidential nomination with a speech in which he pledged to cheering Republicans and still-skeptical voters that as president, he would restore the safety they feared they were losing, strictly curb immigration and save the nation from what he said was Hillary Clinton's record of "death, destruction, terrorism and weakness." The NBA moved the 2017 All-Star Game out of Charlotte because of its objections to a North Carolina law that limited anti-discrimination protec-

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tions for lesbian, gay and transgender people.

One year ago: Minnesota lawmakers approved a police accountability package including a ban on neck restraints like the one used on George Floyd before his death in Minneapolis. (Gov. Tim Walz signed the bill two days later.) After months of resisting wearing a mask in public, President Donald Trump told reporters that he was "getting used to" wearing one; as Trump returned from a three-month hiatus from daily virus briefings, he warned that the coronavirus would get worse in the United States before it got better. The Republican speaker of the Ohio House, Larry Householder, and four associates were arrested in a \$60 million federal bribery case connected to a taxpayer-funded bailout of Ohio's two nuclear power plants. (Householder, who has proclaimed his innocence, was expelled from the Ohio House by fellow lawmakers in June 2021.) Jazz singer and actor Annie Ross died at her New York home, four days before her 90th birthday.

Today's Birthdays: Movie director Norman Jewison is 95. Actor Leigh Lawson is 78. Singer Yusuf Islam (also known as Cat Stevens) is 73. Cartoonist Garry Trudeau is 73. Actor Jamey Sheridan is 70. Rock singer-musician Eric Bazilian (The Hooters) is 68. Comedian Jon Lovitz is 64. Actor Lance Guest is 61. Actor Matt Mulhern is 61. Comedian Greg Behrendt is 58. Soccer player Brandi Chastain is 53. Rock singer Emerson Hart is 52. Rock-soul singer Michael Fitzpatrick (Fitz and the Tantrums) is 51. Actor Alysia Reiner is 51. Country singer Paul Brandt is 49. Christian rock musician Korey Cooper (Skillet) is 49. Actor Ali Landry is 48. Actor-comedian Steve Byrne is 47. Rock musician Tato Melgar (Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real) is 44. Actor Justin Bartha is 43. Actor Josh Hartnett is 43. Contemporary Christian singer Brandon Heath is 43. Actor Sprague Grayden is 43. Reggae singer Damian Marley is 43. Country singer Brad Mates (Emerson Drive) is 43. Former MLB All-Star pitcher CC Sabathia (suh-BATH'-ee-uh) is 41. Singer Blake Lewis ("American Idol") is 40. Latin singer Romeo Santos is 40. Rock musician Johan Carlsson (Carolina Liar) is 37. Actor Vanessa Lengies (LEHN'-jeez) is 36. Actor Betty Gilpin is 35. Actor Rory Culkin is 32. Actor Jamie Waylett ("Harry Potter" films) is 32. Figure skater Rachael Flatt is 29.