

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 1 of 76

- [1- Truss Pros Help Wanted Ad](#)
- [1- Death Notice: Doris Zoellner](#)
- [2- JVT Annual meeting ad](#)
- [3- State B American Legion Baseball Tournament](#)
- [5- Today's State B Legion Tournament Pairings](#)
- [6- Johnson, Banks Introduce Legislation to Confront China Threat](#)
- [7- Thune Urges U.S. Forest Service to Improve the Black Hills National Forest Timber Sale Program](#)
- [8- Thune, Cardin, Smith, and Kuster Reintroduce Legislation to Increase Telehealth Services in Nursing Facilities](#)
- [10- Biden-Harris Administration Extends Eviction Moratorium for Homeowners](#)
- [11- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs](#)
- [12- Weather Pages](#)
- [15- Daily Devotional](#)
- [16- 2021 Community Events](#)
- [17- News from the Associated Press](#)

“None of us knows what might happen even the next minute, yet still we go forward. Because we trust. Because we have faith.”

-PAULO COELHO

Chicken Soup
for the Soul

Death Notice: Doris Zoellner

Doris Zoellner, 92, of Groton passed away July 29, 2021 at her home in Groton. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.



Day shift
and night
shift
assemblers!

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



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



Britton



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

JAMES VALLEY TELECOMMUNICATIONS 64TH ANNUAL MEETING

**Thursday, August 5th at 9am
Groton Area High School**

Registration begins at 8:30am in the old gym.

All members who register for the meeting will receive a **\$20 credit** on their JVT account.

\$500, \$250 (2) and \$100 (2) JVT credits to be given away!



**JAMES
VALLEY**
TELECOMMUNICATIONS

State B American Legion Baseball Tournament

Two Pitchers Work Together As Tabor Post 183 Defeats Big Stone City Post 229 In Shut-Out

Tabor Post 183 defeated Big Stone City Post 229 12-0 on Friday as two pitchers combined to throw a shutout. Nate Scieszinski struck out Isaac Kirchberg to finish off the game.

Tabor Post 183 got on the board in the first inning. Kaleb Kubal singled on a 1-1 count, scoring one run.

Tabor Post 183 notched five runs in the third inning. Dawson Bietz, Riley Rothschild, Nolan Dvorak, and Kubal each had RBIs in the frame.

One bright spot for Big Stone City Post 229 was a single by Adam Strei in the third inning.

Carter Uecker was credited with the victory for Tabor Post 183. The pitcher lasted four innings, allowing two hits and zero runs while striking out seven and walking zero. Scieszinski threw one inning in relief out of the bullpen.

Joshua Mueller took the loss for Big Stone City Post 229. The hurler went two and two-thirds innings, allowing nine runs on nine hits, striking out three and walking one.

Tabor Post 183 tallied 14 hits in the game. Kubal, Dvorak, and Bietz all collected multiple hits for Tabor Post 183. Bietz, Dvorak, and Kubal each managed three hits to lead Tabor Post 183. Tabor Post 183 didn't commit a single error in the field. Dvorak had the most chances in the field with seven.

Ricke's Walk-Off Seals The Deal In Madison Post 25 Victory Over Winner/Colome Post 169

Madison Post 25 took Friday's game in dramatic fashion, with a 6-5 walk-off victory over Winner/Colome Post 169. The game was tied at five with Madison Post 25 batting in the bottom of the seventh when Nathan Ricke singled on a 1-2 count, scoring one run.

Despite falling down by four runs in the third inning, Winner/Colome Post 169 tried to fight back. Winner/Colome Post 169 scored four runs in the failed comeback on a error in the fifth, a walk by Joey Cole in the fifth, a sacrifice fly by Zach Bohnet in the sixth, and a triple by Aiden Barfuss in the seventh.

Winner/Colome Post 169 got things started in the first inning when Kameron Meiners singled on a 0-1 count, scoring one run.

Madison Post 25 scored five runs in the third inning. The rally was led by singles by Logan Allbee, Sam Olson, and Ricke.

Braden Eimers got the win for Madison Post 25. The hurler surrendered one run on two hits over one inning, striking out one and walking zero. Ricke threw one and one-third innings in relief out of the bullpen.

Jacob Beckers took the loss for Winner/Colome Post 169. The bulldog went two-thirds of an inning, allowing one run on two hits, striking out two and walking one.

Ashton Nills started the game for Madison Post 25. The pitcher surrendered three runs on two hits over four and two-thirds innings, striking out seven. Ethan Bartels started the game for Winner/Colome Post 169. The hurler allowed six hits and five runs over six innings, striking out three.

Madison Post 25 collected eight hits. Ricke and Olson all had multiple hits for Madison Post 25. Olson and Ricke each collected two hits to lead Madison Post 25.

Rohlfs's Walk-Off Picture Perfect Ending In Redfield Post 92'S Victory Over Vermillion Post 1

Redfield Post 92 took Friday's game in dramatic fashion, with a 5-4 walk-off victory over Vermillion Post 1. The game was tied at four with Redfield Post 92 batting in the bottom of the seventh when Keaton Rohlfs singled on the first pitch of the at bat, scoring one run.

Vermillion Post 1 opened up scoring in the first inning. Dylan Thelen singled on a 1-1 count, scoring one run.

Redfield Post 92 tallied three runs in the third inning. Redfield Post 92 batters contributing to the big inning included Cooper Hainy, Camden Osborn, and Rohlfs, all knocking in runs in the inning.

Peyton Osborn led the Redfield Post 92 to victory on the mound. The hurler allowed four hits and four runs over seven innings.

Willis Robertson took the loss for Vermillion Post 1. The hurler allowed two hits and two runs over one-third of an inning, striking out one and walking one.

Drew Thelen started the game for Vermillion Post 1. The pitcher lasted five and two-thirds innings, allowing five hits and three runs while striking out nine

Redfield Post 92 racked up seven hits. Osborn and Christian DeYoung each had multiple hits for Redfield Post 92. DeYoung and Osborn all had two hits to lead Redfield Post 92. Osborn led Redfield Post 92 with two stolen bases, as they ran wild on the base paths with eight stolen bases.

Two Pitchers Team Up As Lake Norden/Badger Post 260 Defeats Groton Post 39 In Shut-Out

Lake Norden/Badger Post 260 defeated Groton Post 39 4-0 on Friday as two pitchers combined to throw a shutout. Jackson Noem struck out Tate Larson to finish off the game.

Lake Norden/Badger Post 260 got things moving in the second inning, when Cameron Thue hit a solo homer.

One bright spot for Groton Post 39 was a double by Alex Morris in the first inning.

Nicholai Arbach pitched Lake Norden/Badger Post 260 to victory. Arbach went six and two-thirds innings, allowing zero runs on two hits, striking out seven and walking zero. Noem threw one-third of an inning in relief out of the bullpen.

Peyton Johnson took the loss for Groton Post 39. The bulldog lasted four and a third innings, allowing six hits and two runs while striking out two and walking zero.

Lake Norden/Badger Post 260 hit one home run on the day. Thue had a homer in the second inning.

Lake Norden/Badger Post 260 tallied eight hits on the day. Christian Rodriguez and Noem all had multiple hits for Lake Norden/Badger Post 260. Noem and Rodriguez each collected two hits to lead Lake Norden/Badger Post 260. Lake Norden/Badger Post 260 was sure-handed in the field and didn't commit a single error. Rodriguez had the most chances in the field with eight.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 5 of 76

Today's State B Legion Tournament Pairings

Sat, Jul 31

10:00AM CDT Start

Vermillion Post 1

@ Big Stone City Post 229

Sat, Jul 31

1:00PM CDT Start

Winner/Colome Post 169

@ Groton Post 39

Sat, Jul 31

5:00PM CDT Start

Redfield Post 92

@ Tabor Post 183

Sat, Jul 31

8:00PM CDT Start

Madison Post 25

@ Lake Norden/Badger Post 260

Johnson, Banks Introduce Legislation to Confront China Threat

Washington, D.C. – This week, U.S. Representatives Dusty Johnson (R-SD) and Republican Study Committee Chairman Jim Banks introduced the Countering Communist China Act, a bill to combat the growing threat the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) poses to the United States.

The Countering Communist China Act is a comprehensive effort comprised of over 100 individual bills that targets China's malign censorship, investigates the CCP's role in COVID-19, addresses national security and medical supply chain concerns, highlights China's democracy, human rights abuses, and more.

"It has become quite clear that the CCP is developing into the single greatest geopolitical threat the United States will face in the 21st century," said Johnson. "We must be ready to combat malign Chinese behavior from a multifaceted approach which is what the Countering Communist China Act sets out to do."

One of Johnson's own bills targeting China's malign intellectual property (IP) abuses was included in this package. Johnson's bill amends the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act (FSIA) to exempt firms owned by China from the sovereign immunity defense to suits brought in U.S. courts. Under FSIA, American courts generally cannot hear cases brought against foreign states and certain state agencies and companies. This bill would create an exemption to allow cases to be brought against firms owned by China that are responsible for theft of U.S. intellectual property.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 80 percent of its economic-espionage cases involve China. Both U.S. government entities such as the Office of Personnel Management and private companies like Equifax have been targeted by the CCP in recent years.

Thune Urges U.S. Forest Service to Improve the Black Hills National Forest Timber Sale Program

"The BHNF timber sale program plays a critical role in maintaining the health of the forest and supporting the local forest products industry."

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.), a longtime member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, today urged newly appointed U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Chief Randy Moore to improve the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF) timber sale program. Earlier this year, Thune led his colleagues from the South Dakota and Wyoming congressional delegations in sending a letter to former USFS Chief Vicki Christiansen on this issue.

"The BHNF timber sale program plays a critical role in maintaining the health of the forest and supporting the local forest products industry," said Thune. "This is why I am deeply concerned about the USFS's failure to meet timber harvest targets in recent years as well as about discussions of reductions to harvest levels in future years."

Full text of the letter below:

The Honorable Randy Moore
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1111

Dear Chief Moore:

Congratulations on your recent appointment to serve as the 20th chief of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). I look forward to working with you in your new position. As you begin your new role, I write to highlight my concerns with the current state of the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF) timber sale program.

As you know, the BHNF consists of more than 1.2 million acres spanning western South Dakota to north-eastern Wyoming, and it has been nationally recognized as an example of how proactive forest management can help reduce impacts from mountain pine beetles and wildfires. This national forest provides recreation opportunities, supports wildlife, and contributes significantly to the local and regional economy.

The forest products industry in the Black Hills depends on the BHNF for approximately 80 percent of its raw material, and any reductions below the current fiscal year (FY) target will have direct and profoundly negative impacts on the health of the forest and the sustainability of local communities.

Earlier this year, a sawmill in Hill City, South Dakota, that employed approximately 150 people, closed its doors amid an all-time record lumber market due to a lack of timber coming off the BHNF. Hill City has a population of approximately 1,000 people, and other towns that depend on local sawmills have even smaller populations. I am concerned that additional sawmill closures may be imminent and about the tremendous impact this would have on local communities.

In October 2020, after nearly seven months of analyzing USFS and other data, the BHNF Advisory Board – one of two boards in the nation approved to provide formal advice and recommendations to the USFS – provided a formal recommendation to not reduce the timber sale program below the Allowable

Sale Quantity of 181,000 ccf sawtimber and identified potential additional timber resources to increase the timber sale program.

The BHNF timber sale program plays a critical role in maintaining the health of the forest and supporting the local forest products industry. This is why I am deeply concerned about the USFS's failure to meet timber harvest targets in recent years as well as about discussions of reductions to harvest levels in future years. With these concerns in mind, I request responses to the following questions:

How will the USFS incorporate the recommendations from the BHNF Advisory Board into determining timber sale targets?

Does the USFS expect to meet its FY 2021 harvest target of 175,000 ccf?

What actions has the USFS taken to meet the FY 2021 harvest target, and what actions will be taken to meet future targets?

How does the USFS plan to immediately begin working with states and forest products stakeholders on issues relating to forest management activities, including the timber sale program, among others?

How will the USFS accomplish a timber sale program in upcoming years that avoids negative impacts to the forest and local communities?

In addition to timely written responses to these questions, I request that the USFS brief my staff on these important issues as soon as practicable. Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter, and I look forward to working with you to proactively manage the BHNF and to implement a robust timber sale program that maintains the health of the forest and supports the communities that depend on it.

Thune, Cardin, Smith, and Kuster Reintroduce Legislation to Increase Telehealth Services in Nursing Facilities

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sens. John Thune (R-S.D.) and Ben Cardin (D-Md.), members of the Senate Finance Committee, and U.S. Reps. Adrian Smith (R-Neb.) and Ann Kuster (D-N.H.) today reintroduced companion versions of the Reducing Unnecessary Senior Hospitalizations (RUSH) Act of 2021, bipartisan, bicameral legislation to facilitate greater use of telehealth in skilled nursing facilities.

"Following an unprecedented year of telehealth usage, it's clear how essential this service is, especially in nursing facilities," said Thune. "South Dakota has led the way in utilization of telehealth, and the RUSH Act acknowledges the success we have seen from using technology to coordinate care for seniors in nursing facilities,"

"The COVID-19 pandemic led to increased and successful use of telehealth in health care settings of all varieties," said Cardin. "Continued use and expansion of telehealth in skilled nursing facilities will benefit patients and doctors, while reducing expensive and unnecessary hospital visits where inappropriate. I'm proud to be a partner on the bipartisan RUSH Act that will continue to increase the availability of safe and effective telehealth through Medicare and help deliver better health outcomes across the country."

"In the past year, we have been reminded how crucial telehealth services are for rural communities," said Smith. "The RUSH Act will help transform rural health care for seniors by allowing the use of new technologies and improved connectivity in skilled nursing facilities to enable appropriate treatment in place and eliminate unnecessary hospital transfers."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 9 of 76

"Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth services have been a lifeline for patients by eliminating the risk of transmission and preventing unnecessary hospital stays which can place a significant financial burden on providers and senior patients alike," said Kuster. "The RUSH Act will reduce this burden, cut down on costs, and expand access to care in our rural communities through telehealth options — all while reducing the risk of patients contracting an infection in a hospital. I'm pleased to join my colleagues to reintroduce this common-sense, bipartisan legislation and I will continue working to improve health care delivery across the Granite State."

"We strongly support Senator Thune's leadership by introducing the RUSH Act," said Tom Syverson, director of government relations for Sanford Health/Good Samaritan Society. "It will allow our integrated health system to utilize tele-health services to better care for residents in long-term care communities and prevent unnecessary hospitalizations, which will be particularly helpful as a leading rural health care system in the United States."

"Long-term care residents tend to be underserved when local providers aren't able to respond to nursing home requests quickly enough to avoid an emergency room visit and possible hospital readmission," said Joshua Hofmeyer, senior care officer of Avel eCARE. "Via telemedicine, local caregivers can have around-the-clock access to teams that specialize in geriatric medicine, providing urgent care, fall assessments, medication reviews, behavioral health services, medical directorship and more. We are greatly encouraged by the positive ways in which this legislation could positively impact the delivery of senior care services and improve access to quality and timely care."

The RUSH Act would allow Medicare to enter into voluntary, value-based arrangements with medical groups to provide acute care to patients in skilled nursing facilities using a combination of telehealth and on-site staff. Working together to coordinate care, the providers can avoid a more costly patient transfer to the emergency department. If the program generates savings, they would be shared between the medical group and the skilled nursing facility. While skilled nursing facilities with a star rating of less than three are eligible to participate in the program, they would not be eligible for shared savings until they successfully achieve a three-star rating.

As further incentive to improve quality of care, facilities in the Medicare Special Focus Facility program would be ineligible to participate in the program. If the program does not save money over time, Medicare would be required to terminate it.

Biden-Harris Administration Extends Eviction Moratorium for Homeowners

USDA Extends Eviction Moratorium for Homeowners to September 30, 2021

WASHINGTON, July 30, 2021 — The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today extended through Sept. 30, the eviction moratorium for homeowners of properties financed or guaranteed by USDA.

"The United States is still reeling from a nationwide housing affordability crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. USDA is taking this important action today to allow individuals and families who face eviction from homes purchased with USDA Single-Family Housing loans more time to maintain safe and stable housing, whether it's in their current homes, or by obtaining alternative housing options," USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development Justin Maxson said. "Actions like the one we're announcing today are part of President Biden's strategy to ensure a stable and equitable recovery from the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and will provide continued protection for thousands of individuals and families in rural America."

USDA also reminds servicers that the Single Family foreclosure moratorium will also expire on July 31. After this date, no new foreclosure filings should occur until homeowners are reviewed for new options to reduce their payments and stay in their homes. USDA released new COVID-19 Single Family Housing Guaranteed Loan Program loss mitigation options on July 23.

Beyond Sept. 30, USDA will continue to support homeowners experiencing financial hardship due to the pandemic by making loss mitigation options available to help keep them in their homes. Homeowners and renters can also visit www.consumerfinance.gov/housing for up-to-date information on their relief options, protections, and key deadlines from USDA, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Federal Housing Finance Agency, and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

COVID-19 has had a lasting impact on rural America. Families have lost their homes, students have resorted to unconventional solutions to access schoolwork online, the need for food assistance has grown, and access to COVID-19 testing and vaccinations has been limited. The American Rescue Plan Act implements funding that invests in the people of rural America now and beyond the July 31 moratorium extension. It provides:

- \$100 million through September 2022 in rental assistance for very-low-income tenants.
- \$39 million in Budget Authority (BA) through September 2023 to help refinance direct loans under the Single-Family Housing Loan Program and the Single-Family Housing Repair Loan program.
- \$500 million in Community Facilities Program funds to help rural hospitals and local communities broaden access to COVID-19 vaccines and food assistance.

In addition to programs facilitated by USDA, the American Rescue Plan Act provides significant investments into rural communities by expanding internet connectivity. It also establishes a homeowner assistance fund to assist struggling homeowners with mortgage payments, property taxes, property insurance, utilities and other housing-related costs.

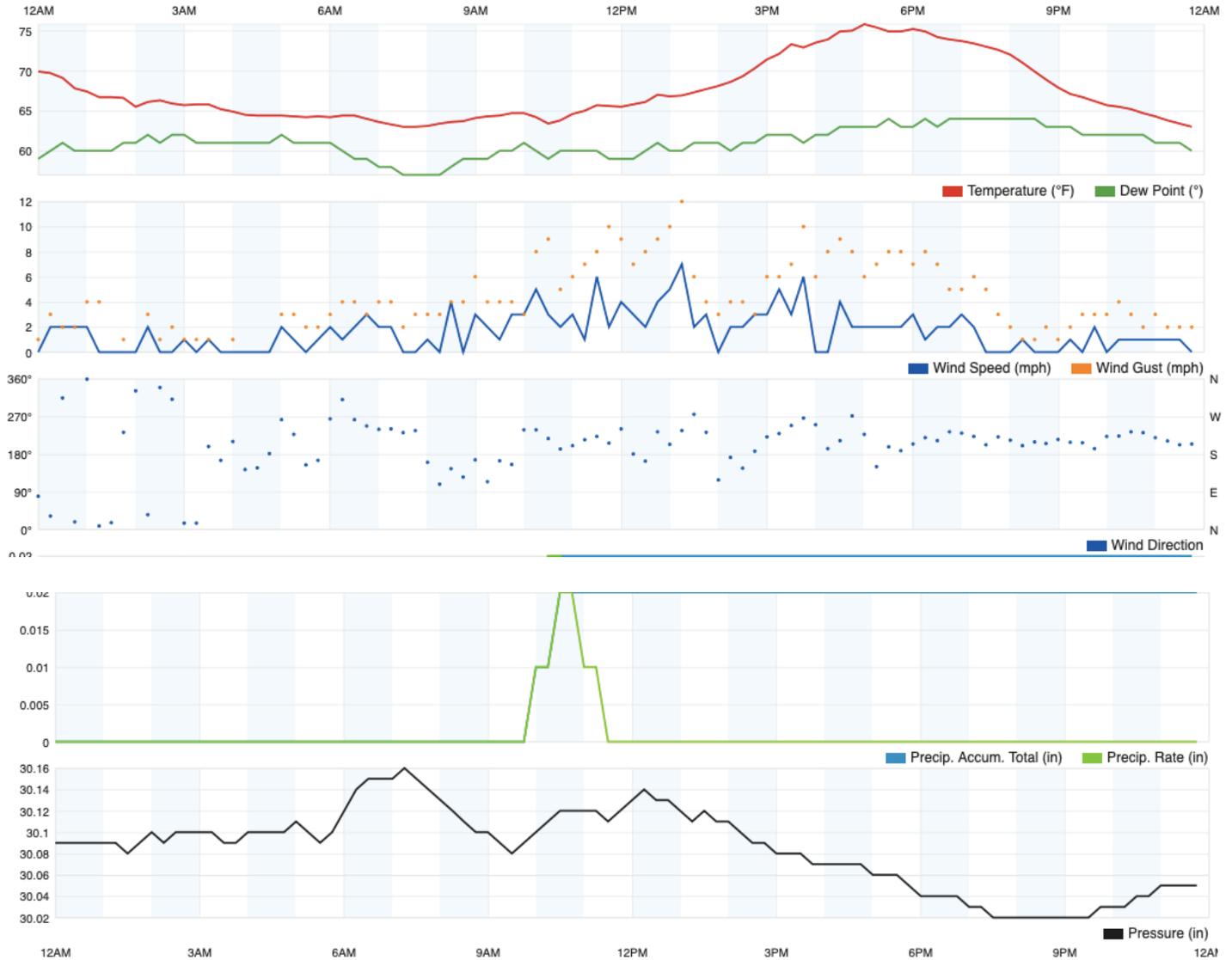
Under the Biden-Harris Administration, Rural Development provides loans and grants to help expand economic opportunities, create jobs and improve the quality of life for millions of Americans in rural areas. This assistance supports infrastructure improvements; business development; housing; community facilities such as schools, public safety and health care; and high-speed internet access in rural, Tribal and high-poverty areas. For more information, visit www.rd.usda.gov. If you'd like to subscribe to USDA Rural Development updates, visit our GovDelivery subscriber page.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, ensuring access to healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate, smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 11 of 76

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 12 of 76

Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
Patchy Fog then Areas Smoke	Areas Smoke then Mostly Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 84 °F	Low: 54 °F	High: 82 °F	Low: 55 °F	High: 86 °F

Areas of haze/smoke to continue through the weekend

Weekend Forecast

Today	Tonight	Sunday
		
77-91°	51-60°	73-90°

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD
7/31/2021 2:18 AM

Dry but with areas of haze and smoke are expected through the weekend. #sdwx #mnwx

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 13 of 76

Today in Weather History

July 31, 1966: A deadly, estimated F3 tornado moved southeast, passing south of Ashley, North Dakota, destroying buildings on five farms with near F4 damage to one farm house. Another tornado with F2 strength occurred north of Long Lake where two adults were killed, and three children were injured as a car was thrown 500 feet from Highway 101. A second estimated F2 tornado moved ENE just south of Aberdeen. A trailer was demolished, killing a man and injuring his wife. Seven airplanes were also had damage. Property damage was estimated at a quarter million dollars. An estimated 90 mph wind gust was also reported northeast of Aberdeen.

July 31, 2008: In the early morning hours of the 31st, a line of storms originating in North Dakota began to expand and surge southeast into northeast South Dakota. As the storms moved southeast, they started to tap into warmer, more humid air and rapidly evolve into a line of severe thunderstorms. Widespread damage occurred in a broad swath extending from Long Lake in McPherson County all the way into eastern Grant County and southern Big Stone County in Minnesota. The most extensive damage was found along and near US Highway 12 from Aberdeen to Milbank. Several observing stations in the path of this system measured wind speeds ranging from 70 mph to over 115 mph. Estimated wind speeds from damage surveys indicated even stronger winds with peak speeds of 120 mph.

Over fifty communities in northeast South Dakota and the surrounding rural areas received minor to major tree, and structural damage as straight-line winds from 70 to 120 mph raced across the area. Webster and Waubay received the most extensive damage from the storms. Thousands of trees were snapped or uprooted, hundreds of grain bins were damaged or destroyed, hundreds of homes, businesses, and outbuildings were damaged or destroyed along with many power poles and miles of power lines downed. Many mobile homes, campers, and boats were damaged or destroyed along with many road and business signs.

Fallen trees also damaged countless homes, vehicles, and campers. Thousands of acres of crops were also damaged or destroyed by the winds and hail. The most significant crop damage occurred in the Roslyn, Grenville, Eden, and Pickerel Lake areas in Marshall and Day counties. Many acres of corn were blown down and not able to come back. The large hail combined with the strong winds also broke out many windows in homes and vehicles along with damaging the siding on houses. Thousands of people were left without power for up to several days. Large hay bales were moved up to 700 yards by the high winds. A semi was overturned on Highway 12 near Webster, injuring the driver. Near Milbank on Highway 12, two other semis were blown off the road resulting in injuries to both drivers. A State Forestry Specialist said it was one of the worst tree damage events he has ever seen in the Webster area. A fifty-eight-year-old man died two miles north of Waubay during the cleanup after the storms when he was pinned between a backhoe and a tree.

1715: Spanish treasure ships, returning from the New World to Spain, encountered a hurricane during the early morning hours on this day. Eleven of the twelve ships were lost near present-day Vero Beach, Florida.

1949: Lightning struck a baseball field at Baker, Florida during a game. The shortstop and third baseman were killed instantly.

1987: The second deadliest tornado in Canadian history occurred in Edmonton, Alberta. An F4 tornado killed 27 people, injured over 300, and caused a quarter of a billion dollars in damage.

1997: South Pole, Antarctica recorded their coldest July ever. The average temperature of -86.8 degrees broke the previous record of -83.6 degrees set in July 1965.

Groton Daily Independent

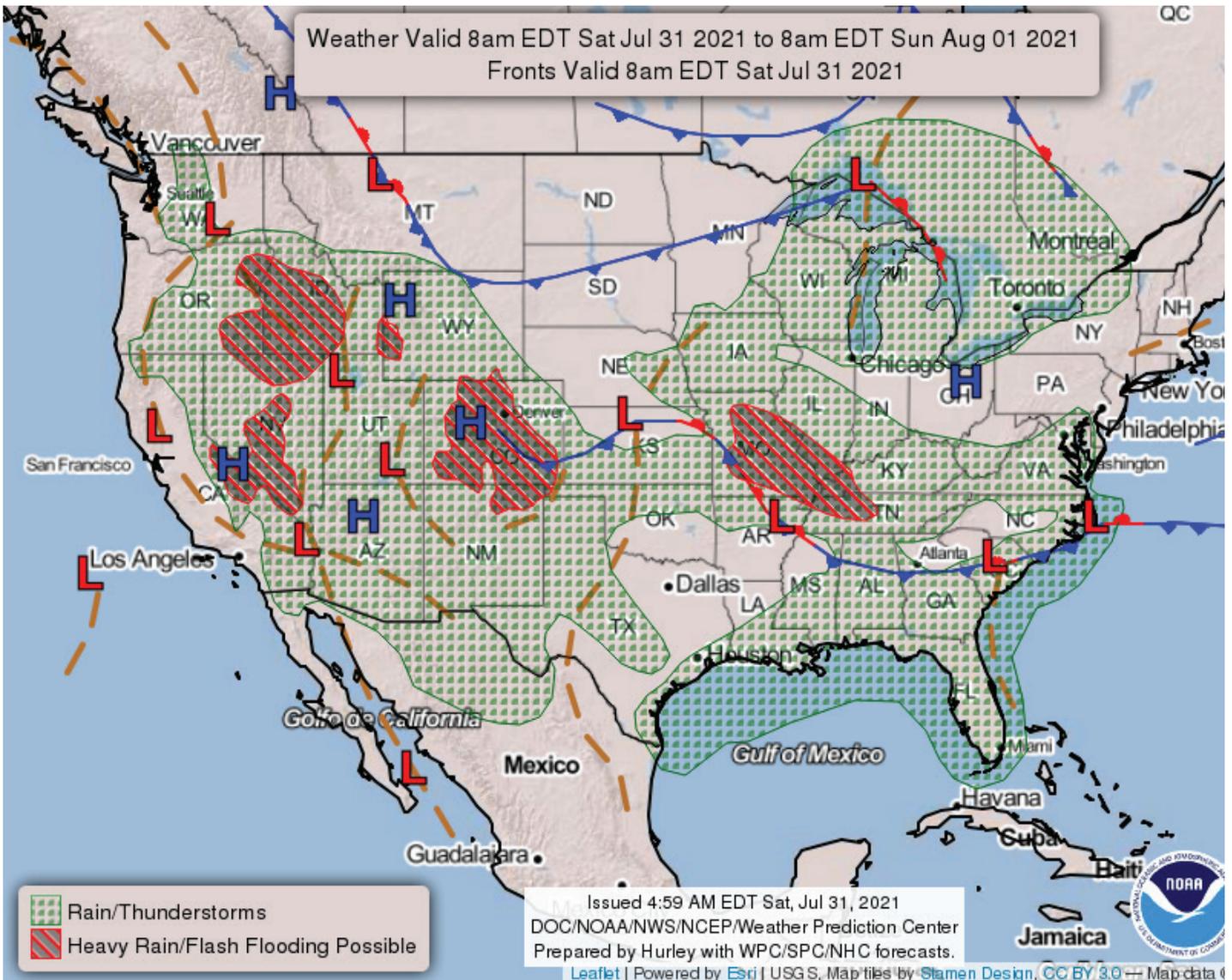
Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 14 of 76

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 75.8 °F at 5:00 PM
Low Temp: 63.0 °F at 7:45 AM
Wind: 12 mph at 1:15 PM
Precip: 0.02

Today's Info

Record High: 106° in 1987
Record Low: 42° in 1903
Average High: 85°F
Average Low: 60°F
Average Precip in July.: 3.01
Precip to date in July.: 2.52
Average Precip to date: 14.02
Precip Year to Date: 7.27
Sunset Tonight: 9:02 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:18 a.m.



Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 15 of 76



God's Grace

Every now and then it is good to take a "morning inventory" and reflect on the grace of God.

This morning when I opened my eyes I thanked God for protecting me while I slept. As I turned off the alarm clock, I thanked Him for sounds and my hearing. As I rested for a moment before I got out of bed, I could feel my beating heart which He kept going while I slept. As I stood up, I thanked Him for my balance, healthy legs and my slippers. As I took a shower, I thanked Him for the warm water, shampoo, soap, a towel and a mat on the floor to keep me from slipping. Then I continued by thanking Him for a mirror, razor, deodorant and on and on until I thanked Him for all of the articles of clothing He provided for me to wear today.

And then I thanked Him for the words of the psalmist that reminded me of His promise: "no good thing will He withhold from those whose walk is blameless."

It was then that I had to pause in deep humility and gratefully thank Him for His love and grace that I do not deserve. It is so easy for me to accept the gifts of God – including my salvation - without realizing that everything I have, ever have had, or will have are gifts from God.

As I reflected on that verse, the word blameless kept ringing in my ears as though it was my friendly alarm clock. I, of all people, am certainly not blameless. As I meditated on the word blameless for a few minutes and thought about everything I am or have, it's not because I am blameless. It's because of His unending love and grace!

Prayer: Thank You Lord, for loving us, saving us and giving us everything we have. May we be ever grateful! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: No good thing will He withhold from those whose walk is blameless. Psalm 84:11c

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 16 of 76

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)
12/04/2021 Olive Grove Tour of Homes
12/11/2021 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon

News from the Associated Press

Yankton native plays key role in ending Afghanistan mission

By RANDY DOCKENDORF Yankton Press and Dakotan

YANKTON, S.D. (AP) — When he closed down the largest military base in Afghanistan, Derek Thompson found the task reminded him of his Yankton hometown.

A U.S. Army major, Thompson commanded the mission during the past year that ultimately ended operations of the Bagram Air Base. It marked one of the largest undertakings in the withdrawal of the United States from Afghan soil after 20 years in the nation.

So how did the battle-torn Afghan terrain remind Thompson of his peaceful hometown of 15,000 residents on the banks of the Missouri River?

"Bagram was 40 miles north of Kabul (the capital). Size-wise, the base was 30 square miles. When I took over, we had 15,000 people on the base, he said. "It's as if you were to take Yankton, pick it up and set it down in Afghanistan, and you put two big air strips in the middle of it. I was the operations officer and completely in charge of shutting it down in six months. It would be like totally evacuating Yankton and everything in it."

The coalition forces have been stationed in the South Asian nation for 20 years, since shortly after the terrorist attacks on 9/11. Earlier this year, President Joe Biden announced the U.S. and its allies would withdraw from Afghanistan.

"We left a small contingent of about 600 to guard the embassy in Kabul," Thompson said. "That was the number when I left, and where it is right now is between 600 and 650."

Thompson arrived in Afghanistan in early June 2020 and returned home in late June 2021. He has completed the shutdown mission and recently visited Yankton with his wife, Jennifer (Sommer), and their 7-year-old son, Kohen.

Thompson had enrolled in the ROTC program at Wyoming and began his military career following his college graduation in 2008. He served in Iraq from 2010-11, an experience that prepared him for his later assignment in Afghanistan, the Yankton Press and Dakotan reported.

"When I arrived in Iraq, it was later in the war and they were shutting down operations in Iraq," he said. "I was a lieutenant in the First Infantry Division and part of the mission, so I've been through the shutdown of operations in two different countries."

The Iraqi withdrawal proved logistically easy because troops and equipment could be driven to nearby Kuwait or Jordan. Cargo was taken to seaports to be flown or shipped home.

After returning from Iraq, Thompson's military career hit the fast track. He took required courses for U.S. Army captains and then served with two special operations units.

After serving as a recruiter for a three-state area, he became a trainer of units for overseas deployment. He was then selected for a year-long course required of Army majors, taught at the U.S. Marine Corps in Quantico, Virginia.

After the year of study, he was selected as one of 100 Army officers to attend the School of Advanced Military Studies. Those selected took a yearlong, in-depth leadership and planning course.

"When I was at that course, I learned I was one of the 10 of us selected to go to Afghanistan. Our mission was to reduce our footprint in that nation," he said. "When I got (overseas), we had heard rumors that we were shutting down Afghanistan, and I had seen tweets that we were going to shut it down, but nothing official."

Thompson's title was United States Forces Afghanistan Planner, reporting to Generals Austin Scott Miller and James Mattis at the time. The mission became more challenging with the pandemic and a border shutdown, but Thompson credited the teamwork of multiple government agencies.

He had completed a 2013 mission to Afghanistan, which familiarized him with the nation.

Thompson gained an additional reminder of the global significance of his mission when he met ABC News

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 18 of 76

reporter Martha Raddatz, who serves as chief global affairs correspondent for the network.

"Before Bagram shut down, she interviewed General Miller on what it was like on the ground," Thompson said. "She was very personable and very interested in the individual soldier, where they were from and why they joined. She tried to relate to everybody. If you didn't see her on TV, you wouldn't know she was this big-time ABC reporter."

Thompson surprised Raddatz by knowing about "The Long Road Home," an eight-part television miniseries based on her book. She told the story about the soldiers and their families affected by a 2004 ambush on U.S. troops at Baghdad during the Iraq War. The attack lasted hours and killed eight troops while injuring more than 65 others.

During Raddatz's visit to Afghanistan, Thompson and others sought to tell the story of their successful mission.

From June-December 2020, the goal remained reducing personnel and equipment in Afghanistan, Thompson said. The work included not only the U.S. military but also America's coalition partners from NATO and the civilian contractors from across the globe.

"When I was there, we had 25,000 contractors from 95 countries spread out across about 20 bases in Afghanistan," he said. "We had contractors for all aspects of everyday life, from food service to private security to IT satellites. They filled so many categories."

Thompson ran into obstacles trying to step down the number of people, including civilians, in the midst of a pandemic. He told of Ugandan contractors who came down with COVID, requiring him to coordinate efforts with the Joint Chief of Staffs, the Pentagon and the State Department to return the Ugandans home.

The pandemic changed how the missions were run, with restricted travel between bases. Vaccinations became available in January, making everyday operations easier. Because of COVID, two-week leaves were canceled for all personnel, meaning Thompson worked 12 1/2 months straight of 14-18 hour days, seven days a week.

However, he described it as part of the mission, and he was grateful for social media allowing contact with his family.

With the incoming Biden administration last January, Thompson gained a sense that his mission could change and accelerate.

"In January 2021, we started to get more indication that we were going to shut down the country, but nothing official. I took on the role of Bagram Air Field operations officer and leadership planner. I was the Number 2 in charge of Bagram Air Base and worked for the commander of the air field," Thompson said.

"From January until April, we were planning for a shutdown but didn't have any type of end date. There weren't any official orders from the White House or national level of leadership. But then in April, President Biden went on national television and announced we would be out by September. The official order was that we were going to close down, and we started planning to shut down by September."

However, a week later the shutdown timeline started changing. The deadline was moved up to July 22 and then to the end of June.

"From the time President Biden announced we were going to (exit the country), it was roughly 82 days to close down the Bagram Air Field. We had to redeploy 15,000 people, about \$500 million of equipment to retrograde out of there and 1,500 tons of equipment that went out on large transport aircraft," Thompson said.

"We also had to destroy a bunch of sensitive equipment because, financially, it made more sense to destroy it than fly it back. We gave a bunch of equipment to our Afghan allies. When we shut down, those were the big things."

Thompson described much of his time as dedicated to "reverse city engineering," in which his troops disassembled state-of-the-art power, water treatment and wastewater plants. At the same time, the contractors who had worked with those operations had now exited or were preparing to leave the country.

"How do we still provide those basic life services and standard of living while reducing our footprint, of moving equipment and personnel and maintaining the security of everyone on the Bagram Air Field?" he asked.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 19 of 76

"I had to credit the course I took in Kansas the year before I deployed to Afghanistan. That planning course covered all about different ways to plan for contingencies that you don't expect."

However, Thompson wasn't caught off-guard by the changed timeline. He had already planned a contingency for shutting down operations.

"I did what I needed to do," he said. "When it came to that time frame, I wasn't starting from scratch."

As part of the withdrawal process, Thompson oversaw 1,500 tons of equipment that needed to be moved out, inspected, weighed, washed, strapped down and transported, usually from Bagram to Kuwait or Qatar using up to 20 cargo planes a day to take out equipment.

Sensitive equipment with classified or other secret information was wiped clean and placed into an industrial level shredder, Thompson said.

"We weren't just looking at the Taliban," he said. "When we leave, we anticipate Pakistani intelligence services will come in, and we know the Russians and Chinese have a vested interest."

As he closed out Bagram, the Germans and Italians were shutting down other major bases.

With his sensitive mission, Thompson's plans usually went to his two immediate levels of superiors. However, some of his plans went to the U.S. Defense Secretary and even President Biden's office.

"When you're shutting down our largest base in Afghanistan, any type of product I created could end up at the strategic national level," Thompson explained.

In addition, he worked on Bagram security matters with NATO partners that included Polish, Bosnian, Georgian, Bulgarian, Romanian and Czech troops. While NATO has existed since World War II, Afghanistan marked the only major conflict where a majority of NATO member nations was involved at the same time, he added.

"It was one of the most enjoyable aspects of my job, working with my European allies. We had the cultural exchange, and I learned how they handled problems," he said. "It was truly teamwork that came from our diverse backgrounds. We wanted everyone to be secure. Our motto was, 'We go in together, through it together and get out together.'"

While Thompson encountered little enemy fire, he noticed movement as the U.S. and allies shut down bases in Afghanistan.

"The Taliban consciously didn't attack the U.S. or NATO because we would end up staying longer," he said. "But they attacked our Afghan allies and took over district centers, which are like our county seats or regionally important cities."

Besides the remaining embassy troops, the U.S. provides air power and coverage, Thompson said. "(The Afghans) are on their own now. They are being supported as best we can, but we're not in the country," he said.

The question remains about any plan for helping Afghans, such as interpreters and contractors, who helped the coalition and now want to escape their country for fear of their safety, Thompson said.

"Their life is in danger unless we get them out, but they have to be vetted, screened and receive special immigration visas. With COVID, the processing of those visas is like anything else in the world. It slows down (the process)," he said. "It all takes time, but we're working against time as the Taliban starts moving in across Afghanistan. Their lives are in danger, day to day."

Thompson looks back with amazement at what was accomplished during his time at Bagram.

"I reduced and closed down the biggest base in Afghanistan. I was part of history, especially when you start reading or seeing stories on national television, like CNN other networks. They're talking about what I planned and executed," he said.

"My name isn't attached to any of that, but that's OK. It truly was a team effort by everybody. We had civilian contractors who had been there for 10-plus year who didn't believe until the end we were shutting down. After all, we had been there 20 years."

For perspective, Thompson noted he was in high school when 9/11 occurred, and some of the current Afghan troops weren't even born at the time.

His next assignment will make him executive officer of a chemical battalion which normally consists of

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 20 of 76

about 450 people. "I'll be the Number Two person. My job is really the equivalent of a chief of staff handling the daily operations of the battalion," he said.

Whatever the future holds, Thompson said he has been forever impacted by the past year.

"We did a lot of things right, and we did a lot of things wrong, but you learn from all of them," he said. "Down the road, others may look at what we did and apply it."

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

19-26-31-52-68, Mega Ball: 10, Megaplier: 3

(nineteen, twenty-six, thirty-one, fifty-two, sixty-eight; Mega Ball: ten; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$166 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$199 million

The Latest: Dallas judge says masks required in courthouses

By The Associated Press undefined

DALLAS — An administrative court judge has ordered that anyone entering a Dallas County courthouse must be wearing a mask to be admitted.

The order Friday by Administrative District Judge Maricela Moore requires masks to be worn in the common areas of the George Allen Courthouse, which houses the county's civil courts; the Frank Crowley Courthouse, which houses its criminal courts; and the Henry Wade Building, which houses its juvenile courts. Those refusing could be barred from entering the buildings.

The order comes after Gov. Greg Abbott repeated his order banning any mask mandates by any state, county or local government entity. However, it cites as its authority a Texas Supreme Court order "that confirms the judiciary's authority to take reasonable actions to avoid exposing court proceedings and participants to the threat of COVID-19."

Also cited is an opinion from Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's office upholding broad judicial authority to control orderly court proceedings.

The order is effective starting Monday. A message to Abbott's office seeking comment was not immediately returned.

The order came as COVID-19 was on a renewed rampage across the state, fueled by the highly contagious delta variant. The Texas Department of State Health Services reported 15,893 new cases Friday, the most since Feb. 3. Of those, 726 new cases came from Dallas County. Over the past two weeks, the rolling average of daily new cases has risen by 183% to 5,100.

As of Thursday, the most recent day reported by state health officials, 5,846 people were in Texas hospitals with COVID-19, the most since Feb. 26. Fifty-seven new COVID-19 deaths were reported Friday, five of them in Dallas County.

Texas had almost 44% of its population fully vaccinated against COVID-19 as of Friday, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That's well below the national average of 57.2%.

MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:

- CDC team: 'War has changed' as delta variant dangers emerge
- US passport delays lead to long lines of would-be travelers
- Walmart mandates vaccines for home office workers
- Like Phantom: Broadway requires masks at theaters
- Find more AP coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic> and <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccine>

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 21 of 76

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

HONOLULU — Hawaii officials announced 622 new COVID-19 cases, the highest number of confirmed infections since the start of the pandemic.

The total included cases from lab reporting delays from the past three days, officials said, but the number is still a significant spike for the state of about 1.4 million people. The seven-day positivity rate is now 5.1%, and officials said the average daily case count over the past three days is now over 300.

Previously, the record high total for confirmed cases in a single day was 355 set in August 2020.

Officials said the surge is associated with the highly contagious delta variant. Just over 60% of Hawaii residents are fully vaccinated.

ATLANTA — Local officials in Georgia are scrambling to increase vaccination rates even as more schools continue telling students and employees to wear masks in the face of rising COVID-19 infection rates.

At least 23 districts statewide, covering nearly a third of the public school population, now say they will require everyone to wear a mask. Dooly County had already started class on Wednesday, and someone at the 1,200-student district's high school tested positive for the respiratory illness, prompting a mask mandate.

The Montgomery County school district on Friday delayed its start date by a week until Aug. 10, saying it had a staff shortage because too many teachers had been quarantined after exposure to COVID-19.

Districts have been shifting policy after the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this week advised universal mask use in schools.

Some parents are protesting mask mandates. Dozens of opponents gathered outside the administration building on Friday in Gwinnett County, Georgia's largest school district.

DENVER — Gov. Jared Polis has announced that state employees who are not vaccinated against COVID-19 will have to be tested twice a week for the coronavirus and continue to wear masks indoors in public spaces.

The Colorado Sun reports Polis made the announcement Friday, citing the rise of the extremely contagious Delta variant of the virus and similar direction for federal workers announced by President Joe Biden on Thursday.

State workers who are or get fully vaccinated won't be required to get the twice-weekly tests, Polis said in a statement. Employees who are tested must submit the results to human resources officials.

"I have heard from state employees who are terrified that their unvaccinated co-workers will give them COVID-19 and want vaccination mandated, and from other state workers who have hesitation towards the vaccine," the Democratic governor said in emphasizing he was seeking a middle ground.

The new policy is effective Sept. 20. It covers about 30,000 state government employees who fall under the authority of the executive branch. It does not apply to judicial branch workers.

NEW ORLEANS — New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell is implementing a mandatory indoor mask mandate regardless of vaccination status and requiring that all city employees and city contractors be vaccinated against the coronavirus.

The mayor and top officials sounded the alarm during a quickly called Friday afternoon news conference, noting the alarming spike in coronavirus infections in a city that was an early hot spot for the pandemic.

"All of our people need to mask up when they are indoors," Cantrell said.

The city has a little over 4,000 employees, and all will be required to get vaccinated, effective immediately, she said. Contractors wanting to work for the city must also get vaccinated.

Officials said the average daily case count in the city has nearly tripled, and six people have died in the last week. Especially concerning were the number of children falling ill, officials said.

"This touches everyone in our community," said Cantrell. "Our children are dying."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 22 of 76

CHICAGO — There is now an indoor mask advisory in Chicago for everyone over 2 years old.

The action taken Friday comes as the Centers for Disease Control recommended people, even if vaccinated, wear masks indoor in areas where there is a high transmission of COVID-19.

Chicago's health department has announced the city surpassed 200 new coronavirus cases per day on Friday.

Public health commissioner Dr. Allison Arwady says the step advising indoor mask use was made to prevent further spread of the highly contagious Delta variant.

The Illinois Department of Public Health reported 2,348 new confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19, the second time in three days the tally has topped 2,000.

NEW ORLEANS -- Vaccinations and masks are both needed to slow a skyrocketing rate of new COVID-19 infections that is stressing health care facilities in Louisiana, Gov. John Bel Edwards said Friday, but Edwards stopped short of ordering a statewide mask mandate.

Having recommended statewide masking last week, Edward said he and state health officials would pore over the latest federal data before making a decision on a mandate, adding that an announcement would likely come Monday.

"But, to a very large extent, whether it s a mandate or a recommendation, the people of Louisiana ought to be doing this," Edwards said at a news conference with state health officer Dr. Joseph Kanter.

Looming over his decision will be new findings from a big COVID-19 outbreak in Massachusetts. Scientists who studied the outbreak concluded that vaccinated people who got so-called breakthrough infections carried about the same amount of the coronavirus as those who did not get the shots.

Officials still stress that vaccines help protect against infections and, when infections occur, against serious illness requiring hospitalization.

TORONTO — The Public Health Agency of Canada says two travelers who arrived in Toronto from the U.S. have been fined close to CDN\$20,000 (US\$16,029.37) for providing fake COVID-19 proof of vaccination documents and lying about pre-departure tests.

The pair also didn't comply with requirements to stay at a government-authorized hotel or to get tested upon arrival, the agency said in a new release Friday.

The travelers arrived last week and were handed four fines totaling CND \$19,720 (US\$15,804.96) each.

"For all travelers coming to Canada, it is important to be informed and to plan in advance," the release said. "It is the traveler's responsibility to ensure they are eligible to enter Canada and that they meet all of the mandatory requirements."

Canada eased quarantine requirements on July 5 for fully vaccinated Canadians and foreign nationals with an exemption to enter the country, but they must upload their proof of vaccination documents to the ArriveCAN app before entry.

Those who are not fully vaccinated are still required to stay for three days at a government-approved hotel, quarantine for 14 days and undergo tests pre-departure, post-arrival and eight days later.

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis barred school districts Friday from forcing students to wear masks when classes resume next month even as the state's coronavirus cases and hospitalizations continue to skyrocket toward levels not seen since before vaccines became widely available.

The Republican governor said parents should decide whether their child should be masked, saying he has seen no studies that show mask-wearing lowers the chance of outbreaks in schools.

DeSantis is seeking re-election next year and has been positioning himself nationally for a possible 2024 presidential bid.

His decision comes after the Broward County school board this week voted to require masks and other districts and colleges around the state were considering it. The state's confirmed coronavirus cases have grown nearly tenfold over the last month as the more contagious delta variant spreads.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 23 of 76

Florida is responsible for about 20% of the new cases reported nationwide over the last three weeks, even though it makes up 6.5% of the population.

On a per capita basis, Florida is second nationally in both new cases, behind Louisiana, and hospitalizations, behind Nevada. While rare, pediatric hospitalizations for COVID-19 are also increasing statewide, studies show.

MADRID — Spain announces a drop in the 14-day accumulated caseload of COVID-19 cases as part of prevailing downward trend in new infections, while the percentage of the Spanish population fully vaccinated hits 56.8%.

The health ministry reported Friday it had registered 326,127 new cases in the last 14 days, reflecting an incidence rate of 687 cases per 100,000 people.

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez announced the nation has also ordered 3.4 million extra Pfizer vaccines, with the aim of vaccinating 70% of the population by the end of August.

The new data comes as some Spanish regions push for vaccine certificates or negative COVID-19 tests to enter bars and restaurants, though they are facing legal challenges.

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem says she has no plans to ratchet up her messaging to urge people to get a COVID-19 vaccine, even as Republican leaders across the country try to persuade vaccine skeptics to roll up their sleeves and take the shots in response to a new, more contagious variant that has sent caseloads soaring in some parts of the country.

The Republican governor told The Associated Press this week she believes her messaging has reached "a saturation level where people start to tune you out."

South Dakota's Department of Health is trying a targeted approach to reach groups where vaccine uptake has been low. But it has been months since the governor used her position to encourage the vaccine, even with infections rising again in the state after a steep decline in the spring and early summer.

Noem's rise as a potential contender for the 2024 GOP presidential ticket has been mostly fueled by her hands-off approach to the pandemic.

The governor acknowledged the delta variant poses a new risk.

"We might need to really step up our communication so that people understand how the variant is different," she said. "You might see more communication from us if we start seeing cases dramatically increase."

PHOENIX — Arizona has reported 1,965 new COVID-19 cases, the most in a single day since early March.

It comes as virus-related hospitalizations continued to climb. The additional cases and 24 deaths reported Friday come as health officials in Arizona and across the country cite low vaccination rates and the fast-spreading delta variant for increasing numbers.

Meanwhile, the Arizona Department of Health Services director spoke more about her departure next month during an interview on KTAR-FM.

She denied there was any rift between her and Gov. Doug Ducey and plans to take a senior position with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona.

BATON ROUGE, La. — Two staffers in Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards' office have tested positive for the coronavirus.

The announcement Friday from Edwards' office says both are at home, in isolation, in accordance with state and federal health guidelines.

The release gave no details on their condition of the staffers. It says both had been vaccinated and noted "breakthrough" cases of vaccinated people "typically do not result in serious illness."

The governor, a Democrat, has previously been vaccinated and isn't in quarantine.

Coronavirus infections and hospitalizations in Louisiana are soaring amid urgent requests by government officials and health care providers for residents to get vaccinated.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 24 of 76

Earlier, Edwards' administration announced it is requiring Louisiana's executive branch employees and visitors to state office buildings to wear masks, regardless of vaccination status.

LOS ANGELES — Frustrated would-be travelers are overwhelming U.S. offices as easing COVID-19 travel restrictions have unleashed a pent-up demand for passports.

At the West Los Angeles Federal Building, hundreds of passport applicants camped out overnight this week for same-day appointments — only to be told that walk-ins were no longer being taken.

Wait times for new passports and renewals are now up to 18 weeks, causing many to seek expedited appointments at understaffed agencies for travel in the next few weeks. But even expedited appointments can take up to 12 weeks. Officials encouraged those without immediate travel plans to renew their passports by mail.

DES MOINES, Iowa — Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds has no plans to offer \$100 incentives to Iowans to get the coronavirus vaccine.

Reynolds spokesman Pat Garrett says the governor doesn't plan to follow up on President Joe Biden's offer to states to spend \$100 in federal funds for each newly vaccinated person to help slow the spread of the coronavirus delta variant.

While many states and some Iowa counties have offered incentives for citizens to get a COVID-19 vaccination, Iowa's governor continues to call for citizens to get vaccinated, repeating it's their choice.

Iowa had 49.5% of the population fully immunized Thursday, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data. That ranks Iowa 21st in the nation.

Vaccination rates have fallen rapidly in Iowa since the spring, from a seven-day average of 17,000 people becoming fully vaccinated in May to 1,402 in recent days.

ORLANDO, Fla. — A large hospital network in Florida announced it will postpone elective procedures due to the sharp rise in admissions.

Dr. Neil Finkler, chief clinical officer at AdventHealth in central Florida, says the network currently has 1,060 patients with COVID-19 of the 9,300 currently hospitalized in the state.

"We have peaked above any previous wave, and it is straining our system, our physicians and all of our clinicians and team members," he said. "Throughout the week, we hoped we would see a sign of slowing down. Unfortunately, we have not."

Dr. Finkler says he's imploring to the community to get vaccinated this weekend.

"It really is remarkable, over 90% of our COVID inpatients are unvaccinated," he said. "None of these patients thought they would get the virus. But the delta variant has proven to be so highly contagious that even the young and the healthy, including pregnant patients, are now starting to fill up our hospitals."

NEW YORK — Vaccinations for COVID-19 and masks will be required for all Broadway audience members when theaters reopen in the coming weeks.

The Broadway League announced audience members must wear face coverings and show proof they're fully vaccinated when they enter the theaters. There'll be exceptions to the vaccine rule for children under 12 and for people with a medical condition or religious belief that prevents vaccination. Those individuals will need to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test.

Vaccinations will be required for performers, crew members and theater employees. The move comes a day after Actors' Equity Association, the union which represents nearly 52,000 actors and stage managers, said it would require cast and crew members to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

Company members who are not vaccinated must wear masks, practice physical distancing and undergo testing at least twice a week. The protocols apply to both Broadway productions and Equity-backed shows across the nation.

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis says he'll issue an executive order barring local

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 25 of 76

school districts from forcing students to wear masks when classes resume next month.

That's despite skyrocketing coronavirus cases and hospitalizations in the state. The Republican governor says it should be up to parents to decide whether their child should be masked. He says he has seen no studies that show mask-wearing lowers the chance of outbreaks in schools. He didn't say when he would issue the order.

This week, the Broward County school district in Fort Lauderdale voted to require masks. Other districts and colleges around the state were considering masks as the confirmed cases have grown nearly tenfold in the last month.

Florida is responsible for about 20% of the new cases reported nationwide in the last three weeks, although just 6.5% of the total population.

On a per capita basis, Florida is second nationally in new cases (behind Louisiana), and hospitalizations (behind Nevada). While rare, pediatric hospitalizations for COVID-19 are also increasing statewide, studies show.

South Dakota air quality alert expanded statewide

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources has expanded an air quality alert to include all of South Dakota, where smoke from wildfires in Canada has settled.

The smoke is causing low visibility and increased fine particulate matter pollution to levels that may be a concern to public health.

The smoke caused poor visibility and created unhealthy air conditions for sensitive groups, such as the elderly or children.

Smoke from wildfires near Lake Winnipeg drifted southward and moved through the Sioux Falls area on Thursday, causing the city to close its public pools and the largest waterpark in the state, Wild Water West, to shutter its gates.

There are six "out of control" fires located near Lake Winnipeg in Canada as of Thursday, the Argus Leader reported. The biggest wildfire is about 304 square miles and is believed to have started by natural causes.

Body found in burned vehicle near Rockerville

ROCKERVILLE, S.D. (AP) — Authorities are investigating after a body was discovered in a burned vehicle in a remote area near Rockerville.

The Pennington County Sheriff's Office is calling the death suspicious. The sheriff's office said witnesses reported hearing a loud popping sound and seeing a fire in the area shortly after 9:30 p.m. Thursday. Authorities arrived to find a small wildfire about a quarter acre in size, the Rapid City Journal reported.

After the wildfire was put out, firefighters found the destroyed vehicle with the body inside. The person has not been identified. Anyone with information is asked to contact the Pennington County Sheriff's Office.

South Dakota's Noem doesn't plan to ratchet up vaccine push

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem says she has no plans to ratchet up her messaging to urge people to get a COVID-19 vaccine, even as Republican leaders across the country try to persuade vaccine skeptics to roll up their sleeves and take the shots in response to a new, more contagious variant that has sent caseloads soaring in some areas.

The Republican governor told The Associated Press this week she believes her messaging has reached "a saturation level where people start to tune you out."

South Dakota's Department of Health is trying a targeted approach to reach groups where vaccine uptake has been low. But it has been months since the governor used her position to encourage the vaccine, even with infections rising again in the state after a steep decline in the spring and early summer.

Noem's rise as a potential contender for the 2024 GOP presidential ticket has been mostly fueled by her

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 26 of 76

hands-off approach to the pandemic.

Other party leaders and conservative cable news personalities, facing a fresh wave of infections spurred by the delta virus variant, have sounded the alarm in recent weeks and tried to convince people to get the shot. Republican governors such as Arkansas' Asa Hutchinson, who recently took over as chairman of the National Governors Association, have called combating vaccine resistance a priority and used their positions to advocate for the shot.

Noem initially championed the arrival of the vaccine, putting out a video message in March to say she was "trusting people to do the right thing" in getting the shot and posting a social media photo of her rolling up a sleeve for it. She also touted how South Dakota initially had one of the country's highest rates of vaccinations. But the state's vaccination rate has since tumbled into the bottom half of states, with under half of the total population fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Meanwhile, virus cases in the state have more than doubled in the last two weeks, though the rate remained lower than at any other point besides the early days of the pandemic.

The governor acknowledged the delta variant poses a new risk.

"We might need to really step up our communication so that people understand how the variant is different," she said. "You might see more communication from us if we start seeing cases dramatically increase."

Public health officials believe the variant is at least twice as contagious as the original version, but the shots appear to offer robust protection against serious illness for most people. Nearly all COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. are now people who haven't been vaccinated. Nonetheless, just 57.1% of Americans have received at least one vaccine dose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Noem has held out against ordering people to wear masks, even as the state last year saw one of the worst virus surges in the country, and has expressed doubts about the effectiveness of their widespread use in public. When the CDC this week offered new guidance for vaccinated people to return to wearing masks indoors in areas with high infection rates, she responded with a mocking Twitter meme.

She argued that governors who issued orders aimed at curbing infections were overstepping the bounds of their office.

"Any other governor that took a stronger mitigation measure, they broke their oath to the Constitution," she said. "Every governor that closed a business could be sued for the taking of that business."

Her approach has drawn attention, as well as criticism. In a wide-ranging interview with the AP as she returned from a visit to the U.S. border with Mexico, Noem discussed how she has not shied away from controversy during her first term in office, and at times sees the backlash as an advantage.

Before the pandemic, Noem was perhaps best known for being nationally lampooned for an anti-drug campaign that used the tagline, "Meth. We're On It." She said she has no regrets about approving the ads, especially after seeing South Dakota become one of just two states that saw drug-related overdoses decline in 2020.

"Every addiction counselor and even addicts told me, 'I know that people are making fun of this campaign, but everybody's talking about it and that's the first step to getting people into addiction treatment,'" she said. "We got more people into addiction treatment after that campaign than we had the previous three or four years combined."

However, she did acknowledge the political risk that comes with another unpopular stance she has taken: opposition to recreational marijuana. South Dakota voters approved legalizing it last year, but Noem launched a lawsuit challenging the measure on constitutional grounds. A circuit court struck down the law, though an appeal is pending before the state Supreme Court.

"I don't feel like I should have changed my position, but if I could have communicated it better," Noem said. "I think public opinion polls would say, just let it go. But 10 years from now, there's going to be real consequences, real costs to families, real costs to the government."

In a state dominated by Republicans, it's not clear if Democrats have much chance to unseat Noem in next year's midterm election. Noem has burnished her conservative track record and described seeing the state as a "pilot project" for conservative policies.

"It's a different way of approaching the same problems every state has, except doing it from a conser-

vative, smaller government mindset," she said.

However, so far, many of her stump speeches have occurred at conservative gatherings and fundraisers outside the state rather than in South Dakota, fueling criticism she is more focused on a 2024 White House bid than on being governor. She also has hammered hard on national issues sure to rile the GOP's base.

But Noem denies she is angling for anything beyond being South Dakota's governor, saying, "Anybody who wants to run for president should never be president."

EXPLAINER: Evictions in South Dakota could spike despite aid

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A federal freeze on most evictions that was enacted last year is scheduled to expire Saturday, after the Biden administration extended the original date by a month. The moratorium put in place by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in September has been the only tool keeping millions of tenants in their homes. Many of them lost jobs during the coronavirus pandemic and have fallen months behind on their rent.

Landlords successfully challenged the order in court, arguing that they also had bills to pay. They pointed out that tenants could access nearly \$47 billion in federal money set aside to help pay rents and related expenses.

Advocates for tenants said the distribution of the money had been slow and that more time was needed to distribute it and repay landlords. Without an extension, they feared a spike in evictions and lawsuits seeking to oust tenants who were behind on their rents.

Even with the delay, roughly 3.6 million people in the U.S. as of July 5 said they would face eviction within the next two months, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey. The survey measures the social and economic effects of the pandemic every two weeks through online responses from a representative sample of U.S. households.

Here's the situation in South Dakota:

WHAT'S THE STATUS OF EVICTION MORATORIUMS IN THE STATE?

South Dakota did not enact its own moratorium on evictions, so when the CDC's expires, thousands of renters will lose their protection.

WHAT'S BEING DONE TO HELP PEOPLE FACING EVICTION?

South Dakota has received \$360 million in federal funds to help tenants with outstanding rent, utility payments and other expenses. The money can go toward 15 months of rent and other expenses, including internet access. Renters who pay 30% of their income toward rent and earn 80% or less of their area's median income qualify.

So far, only a small fraction of the funds have been sent to renters. The South Dakota Housing Development Authority, which oversees the money, estimates that it has distributed about \$12 million to 1,903 tenants.

"There's a large population that isn't aware this assistance exists," said Brent Thompson, the executive director of East River Legal Services, a legal clinic that aids renters facing evictions and that is one of several local groups working with the Housing Development Authority to make renters facing eviction aware of the assistance.

HOW ARE THE COURTS HANDLING EVICTION ACTIONS?

During the moratorium, courts had halted many eviction actions or landlords have decided not to file them. But Thompson said that is changing.

The East River Legal Services clinic has seen a 50% increase in people facing evictions since May. The clinic is now handling at least one case a day, Thompson said, adding he feared the situation will only worsen.

"We are expecting a tsunami of eviction actions," he said.

According to the state court system, evictions decreased by about 10% after the pandemic started in March 2020. This year, evictions filings have been even lower, decreasing by about 22% from pre-pandemic levels.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 28 of 76

HOW AFFORDABLE ARE THE STATE'S MAJOR RENTAL MARKETS?

South Dakota's rental housing market has tightened, partly due to the strong economy and a shortage of affordable housing. From 2015 through 2020, rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Sioux Falls, the state's largest city, increased by 17%, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The state's vacancy rate was about 7% before the pandemic, which roughly matched the national average.

Statistics on rental housing during the pandemic haven't been released yet. But lawmakers have sounded the alarm about a run on affordable housing and formed a special committee to try to find solutions to the problem. Republican state Rep. Roger Chase, who also works as a realtor, said recently that the housing market was as tight as he had seen in more than 30 years.

ARE EVICTIONS EXPECTED TO CREATE A SURGE IN HOMELESSNESS?

It's hard to say how much homelessness will increase in South Dakota. Thompson, of East River Legal Services, expects evictions and eviction-related lawsuits to spike after the CDC's moratorium ends. One indication of the scope of the problem is census data estimating that there are over 13,500 adults in the state who are fearful they will be evicted in the next two months.

Thompson feared the moratorium's end would create a "crisis event" in evictions, and his legal clinic is bracing for a surge in people facing evictions or owing multiple months of rent.

He is now trying to make judges and court administrators aware of the federal relief in the hopes they can help resolve the cases without ordering an eviction.

Senate work on infrastructure plan slides into Saturday

By KEVIN FREKING and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senators are returning to the Capitol for a rare Saturday session as they try to make further progress on a roughly \$1 trillion infrastructure plan.

A bipartisan group of senators helped it clear one more hurdle Friday and braced to see if support can hold during the next few days of debate and efforts to amend it.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said the chamber should be able to process the legislation quickly given the bipartisan support. But as Friday evening came around, the full text of what promises to be a massive bill was not finished by the time lawmakers adjourned.

"We may need the weekend, we may vote on several amendments, but with the cooperation of our Republican colleagues, I believe we can finish the bipartisan infrastructure bill in a matter of days," Schumer said.

But Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, predicted, "It's going to be a grind."

The effort got off to a haphazard start Friday. Shortly after the Senate began the procedural vote, it was stopped. Cornyn said the reason was that some of the text in the draft bill did not comport with the agreement between the negotiators. The rare bipartisan work is testing senators' ability to trust one another.

Several moments later, the vote resumed and the effort to proceed to consideration of the bill passed by a vote of 66-28.

Earlier this week, 17 GOP senators joined all Democrats in voting to start the debate, launching what will be a dayslong process to consider the bill. That support largely held Friday with Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., again voting yes to nudge the process along.

But whether the number of Republican senators willing to pass a key part of President Joe Biden's agenda grows or shrinks in the days ahead will determine if the president's signature issue can make it across the finish line.

Cornyn said he expects Schumer to allow all senators to have a chance to shape the bill and allow for amendments from members of both parties.

"I've been disappointed that Sen. Schumer has seen fit to try to force us to vote on a bill that does not exist in its entirety, but I hope we can now pump the brakes a little bit and take the time and care to evaluate the benefits and the cost of this legislation," Cornyn said.

Schumer had hoped to introduce the text of the bill later Friday with supporters aiming to complete

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 29 of 76

action before leaving for the August recess. Sens. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, and Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., released a statement saying they were close to finalizing the legislative text and hoped to make it public later in the day.

But Friday came and went without final paperwork that's now expected Saturday.

"When legislative text is finalized that reflects the product of our group, we will make it public together consistent with the bipartisan way we've worked for the last four months," the senators said.

The bipartisan plan is big, with \$550 billion in new spending over five years beyond the typical highway and public works accounts. A draft circulating Capitol Hill indicated it could have more than 2,500 pages when introduced. It's being financed from funding sources that may not pass muster with deficit hawks, including repurposing untapped COVID-19 relief aid and relying on projected future economic growth.

Among the major investments are \$110 billion for roads and bridges, \$39 billion for public transit and \$66 billion for rail. There's also \$55 billion for water and wastewater infrastructure as well as billions for airports, ports, broadband internet and electric vehicle charging stations.

The outcome will set the stage for the next debate over Biden's much more ambitious \$3.5 trillion spending package, a strictly partisan pursuit of far-reaching programs and services including child care, tax breaks and health care that touch almost every corner of American life. Republicans strongly oppose that bill, which would require a simple majority, and may try to stop both.

On the other side of the Capitol, a bipartisan group of senators and representatives gathered to voice their support for the narrower, bipartisan infrastructure effort and to encourage House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to allow a quick vote on it after it passes the Senate. However, Pelosi has stated there won't be an infrastructure bill vote unless the Senate also passes the more ambitious package, too.

"I'm not asking Speaker Pelosi today to support the bill. I'm asking for something a lot more basic than that. I'm asking to give us a vote," said Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-S.D. "Let us vote."

Rep. Josh Gottheimer, D-N.J., also appealed for a stand-alone vote on the bipartisan plan because "that's what the country wants."

Biden's infrastructure win overshadowed by new virus surge

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Joe Biden wagered his campaign and now his presidency on the premise that government itself could still work, even at a time of fractious political division.

When the Senate voted this week, with bipartisan support, to begin work on an infrastructure bill that Biden supported, he seemed to have proof of the concept.

But the triumph was overshadowed by the surging delta variant of the coronavirus that has forced the restoration of mask guidelines, imperiled the nation's economic recovery and threatened Biden's central promise that he would lead the United States out of the pandemic.

"Democrats have to put wins on the board going into 2022, and COVID clouds on the horizon make getting infrastructure and reconciliation done all that much more important," said Robert Gibbs, former press secretary to President Barack Obama. He added that it's "imperative for the Biden administration to communicate on this regularly and prepare for us for the ups and downs of this pandemic."

The president's first six months in office, for which he has received strong marks in most public polls, featured the full vaccination of more than 60% of Americans, the creation of more than 3 million new jobs and the passage of a sweeping \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill. And in recent days, he has made progress along the massive, two-pronged infrastructure track that could pour \$4.5 trillion into the United States economy while he also eyed future moves on voting rights and immigration.

But the virulence of the delta strain coupled with stubborn vaccine hesitancy among a significant portion of the American population has raised alarms about another punishing wave of the pandemic, a prospect that has rattled financial markets already nervously eyeing the possibility of long-term inflation.

And now Biden has entered a more challenging phase of his presidency as the virus has once more proved to be an intractable foe that now endangers the nation's fragile return to normalcy.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 30 of 76

"I know this is hard to hear. I know it's frustrating. I know it's exhausting to think we're still in this fight," Biden said to reporters at the White House on Thursday. "And I know we hoped this would be a simple, straightforward line, without problems or new challenges. But that isn't real life."

At the same time, the administration response has hardly been seamless. It has been criticized about its messaging on the virus, including confusing guidance this week as to when and why vaccinated people would need to resume wearing masks indoors.

In front of 1,000 mask-free people at the White House, Biden had decreed July 4th to be the day that America declared its "independence" from the virus. But just weeks later, staffers and journalists working at the White House were required to don face coverings again, regardless of their vaccination status.

And across the country, Americans who reveled in a return to normalcy are now being asked to wear masks again, stirring resentment in some of those who have followed health guidelines throughout the pandemic, including getting the shot. And the rollback calls into question whether the Biden administration had been too quick to relax guidelines and now risked losing some of the public's confidence.

"They broke their word. They broke their own rules," said House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif. "And now they've broken the trust of the American people."

To be sure, though, the vaccine hesitancy has been most pronounced in areas strongly associated with support for former President Donald Trump, and some conservative media outlets have amplified the wariness.

Any president must be able to set aside the most organized, carefully laid plans to deal with a sudden crisis. Trump was overwhelmed by the pandemic, his best reelection argument — a strong economy — vanishing overnight while his administration's erratic and sporadic response to the virus was judged harshly by voters.

Biden's White House is more methodical and spent months carefully working on its infrastructure plan, which the president has prioritized for months even amid calls from some in his own party to focus on voting rights. The strategy was crafted to reach a bipartisan agreement by persuading at least 10 Republicans to lay down their partisan arms to reach a deal on so-called hard infrastructure — highways, broadband internet access, mass transit — while then proceeding on a larger, Democrats-only budget reconciliation vote for the rest of the plan.

Though the negotiations were left for dead more than once, Biden's bet on reaching across the aisle paid off, as 17 GOP senators voted to advance the nearly \$1 trillion bipartisan plan. It marked a significant win for the White House, even as numerous twists and turns surely lie ahead, including keeping all the Democrats in line for the \$3.5 trillion reconciliation plan.

Biden had framed it as necessary to prove that the two parties could still work together, a demonstration that democracies could still deliver for their people.

"Our economy grew more in six months than most Wall Street forecasters expected for the entire year before we implemented our plan," said Biden, who predicted that the infrastructure deal is "going to continue this momentum over the long term by making the most significant investment to rebuild America in nearly a century."

Biden has pushed his broadly popular agenda directly into conservative strongholds — he has held about a half-dozen events in Republican-controlled districts in recent weeks — in an effort to paint Republicans as the party of no while hoping to rein in their turnout next fall when he tries to help preserve threadbare Democratic majorities in Congress.

With a wary eye on inflation, the president is betting that voters will reward him for his policies, as the White House argues it is Republicans who are running solely on identity politics rather than sincerely delivering for their voters.

But that strategy depends on the policy working — which is what makes the virus so dangerous.

If another wave causes businesses or schools to close, not only would the public's faith in Biden's management of the virus surely waver, but the economic recovery would also likely stagnate, jeopardizing the Democrats' central arguments heading into next fall's midterms.

"We're not out of the woods," Gibbs said.

Evictions loom after Biden and Congress fail to extend ban

By LISA MASCARO, MICHAEL CASEY and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A nationwide eviction moratorium is set to expire Saturday night after President Joe Biden and Democrats in Congress worked furiously but ultimately failed to align on a long-shot strategy to prevent millions of Americans from being forced from their homes during a COVID-19 surge.

More than 3.6 million Americans are at risk of eviction, some in a matter of days, as nearly \$47 billion in federal housing aid to the states during the pandemic has been slow to make it into the hands of renters and landlords owed payments. The moratorium expires at midnight.

Tensions mounted late Friday as it became clear there was no resolution in sight. Hours before the ban was set to expire, Biden called on local governments to “take all possible steps” to immediately disburse the funds. Evictions could begin as soon as Monday.

“There can be no excuse for any state or locality not accelerating funds to landlords and tenants that have been hurt during this pandemic,” Biden said in a statement.

“Every state and local government must get these funds out to ensure we prevent every eviction we can,” he said.

The stunning outcome, as the White House and Congress each expected the other to act, exposed a rare divide between the president and his allies on Capitol Hill — one that could have lasting impact as the nation’s renters face widespread evictions.

Biden set off the scramble by announcing he would allow the eviction ban to expire instead of challenging a recent Supreme Court ruling signaling this would be the last deadline. He called on Congress on Thursday to swiftly pass legislation to extend the date.

Racing to respond Friday, Democrats strained to rally the votes. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi implored colleagues to pass legislation extending the deadline, calling it a “moral imperative,” to protect renters and also the landlords who are owed compensation.

Congress must “meet the needs of the American people: both the families unable to make rent and those to whom the rent is to be paid,” she said in an overnight letter late Thursday.

But after hours of behind-the-scenes wrangling throughout the day, Democratic lawmakers had questions and could not muster support to extend the ban even a few months. House Republicans objected to an attempt to simply approve an extension by consent, without a formal vote. The Senate may try again Saturday.

Democratic lawmakers were livid at the prospect of evictions in the middle of a surging pandemic.

“Housing is a primary social indicator of health, in and of itself, even absent COVID,” said Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y. “A mass eviction in the United States does represent a public health crisis unto itself.”

Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., the Financial Services Committee chair who wrote the emergency bill, said House leaders should have held the vote, even if it failed, to show Americans they were trying to solve the problem.

“Is it emergency enough that you’re going to stop families from being put on the street?” Waters testified at a hearing Friday morning urging her colleagues to act. “What the hell is going to happen to these children?”

But Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington, the top Republican on another panel handling the issue, said the Democrats’ bill was rushed.

“This is not the way to legislate,” she said.

The ban was initially put in place to prevent further spread of COVID-19 by people put out on the streets and into shelters.

Congress pushed nearly \$47 billion to the states earlier in the COVID-19 crisis to shore up landlords and renters as workplaces shut down and many people were suddenly out of work.

But lawmakers said state governments have been slow to distribute the money. On Friday, they said only some \$3 billion has been spent.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 32 of 76

By the end of March, 6.4 million American households were behind on their rent, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. As of July 5, roughly 3.6 million people in the U.S. said they faced eviction in the next two months, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey.

Some places are likely to see spikes in evictions starting Monday, while other jurisdictions will see an increase in court filings that will lead to evictions over several months.

Biden said Thursday that the administration's hands are tied after the Supreme Court signaled the moratorium would only be extended until the end of the month.

At the White House, deputy press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the administration backs the congressional effort "to extend the eviction moratorium to protect these vulnerable renters and their families."

The White House has been clear that Biden would have liked to extend the federal eviction moratorium because of the spread of the highly contagious delta variant of the coronavirus. But there were also concerns that challenging the court could lead to a ruling restricting the administration's ability to respond to future public health crises.

The administration is trying to keep renters in place through other means. It released more than \$1.5 billion in rental assistance in June, which helped nearly 300,000 households. Biden on Thursday asked the departments of Housing and Urban Development, Agriculture and Veterans Affairs to extend their eviction moratoriums on households living in federally insured, single-family homes. In a statement late Friday, the agencies announced an extension of the foreclosure-related ban through the end of September.

On a 5-4 vote last month, the Supreme Court allowed the broad eviction ban to continue through the end of July. One of those in the majority, Justice Brett Kavanaugh, made clear he would block any additional extensions unless there was "clear and specific congressional authorization."

Aides to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, the chair of the Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, said the two were working on legislation to extend the moratorium and were asking Republicans not to block it.

"The public health necessity of extended protections for renters is obvious," said Diane Yentel, executive director of the National Low Income Housing Coalition. "If federal court cases made a broad extension impossible, the Biden administration should implement all possible alternatives, including a more limited moratorium on federally backed properties."

Landlords, who have opposed the moratorium and challenged it repeatedly in court, are against any extension. They, too, are arguing for speeding up the distribution of rental assistance.

The National Apartment Association and several others this week filed a federal lawsuit asking for \$26 billion in damages because of the impact of the moratorium.

"Any extension of the eviction moratorium equates to an unfunded government mandate that forces housing providers to deliver a costly service without compensation and saddles renters with insurmountable debt," association president and CEO Bob Pinnegar said, adding that the current crisis highlights a need for more affordable housing.

Pentagon grappling with new vaccine orders; timing uncertain

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Association Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is vowing he "won't let grass grow under our feet" as the department begins to implement the new vaccine and testing directives. But Pentagon officials were scrambling at week's end to figure out how to enact and enforce the changes across the vast military population and determine which National Guard and Reserve troops would be affected by the orders.

The Pentagon now has two separate missions involving President Joe Biden's announcement Thursday aimed at increasing COVID-19 vaccines in the federal workforce. The Defense Department must develop plans to make the vaccine mandatory for the military and set up new requirements for federal workers who will have to either attest to a COVID-19 vaccination or face frequent testing and travel restrictions.

Austin said Friday that the department will move expeditiously, but added that he can't predict how long it will take. He said he plans to consult with medical professionals as well as the military service leaders.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 33 of 76

Any plan to make the vaccine mandatory will require a waiver signed by Biden because the Food and Drug Administration has not yet given the vaccine final, formal approval. According to federal law, the requirement to offer individuals a choice of accepting or rejecting use of an emergency use vaccine may only be waived by the president and "only if the president determines in writing that complying with such requirement is not in the interests of national security."

Mandating the vaccine before FDA approval will likely trigger opposition from vaccine opponents and drag the military into political debates over what has become a highly divisive issue in America.

Military commanders, however, have also struggled to separate vaccinated recruits from unvaccinated recruits during early portions of basic training across the services in order to prevent infections. So, for some, a mandate could make training and housing less complicated.

Military service members are already required to get as many as 17 different vaccines, depending on where they are based around the world. Some of the vaccines are specific to certain regions. Military officials have said the pace of vaccines has been growing across the force, with some units seeing nearly 100% of their members get shots.

According to the Pentagon, more than 1 million service members are fully vaccinated, and 233,000 have gotten at least one shot. There are roughly 2 million active-duty, Guard and Reserve troops.

A vaccine mandate will also raise questions about whether the military services will discharge troops who refuse the vaccine.

National Guard officials said initial guidance suggests that Guard troops who initially refuse the vaccine once its mandatory will receive counseling from medical personnel. If they still refuse, they would be ordered to take it, and failure to follow that order could result in administrative or punitive action.

On Friday, Guard officials said leaders were still nailing down legal recommendations on which citizen soldiers would be affected by the new requirements. Officials said it appears the bulk of the Guard would eventually have to get the vaccine, when it is mandated.

Guard troops on federal active duty would be given the vaccine in their units wherever they are deployed, and others would get it when they report to their monthly drill weekend or annual training. The system, according to Guard officials, would resemble any other vaccine requirement.

Guard members who are on state active duty would not be subject to the requirement initially because they are subject to state laws. But once they return to a monthly drill, the order would apply to them. Guard officials spoke about the new vaccine process on condition of anonymity because procedures are still being finalized.

While the number of COVID-19 deaths across the military has remained small — largely attributed to the age and health of the force — cases of the virus have been increasing.

As of this week, there have been more than 208,600 cases of COVID-19 among members of the U.S. military. Of those, more than 1,800 members have been hospitalized and 28 have died.

Earlier this year, the number of cases and hospitalizations had been growing by relatively small, consistent amounts, and the number of deaths had stalled at 26 for more than 2 1/2 months. In recent weeks, the totals spiked. The number of cases increased by more than 3,000 in the last week alone, and those hospitalized grew by 36. Two Navy sailors also died in the last week.

EXPLAINER: How does a grain of sand make it to the Olympics?

By JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — There's a lot more to building a beach volleyball court than just stringing up a net by the sea.

A year after hosting the Olympic competition on Brazil's iconic Copacabana beach, this year's event isn't on a beach at all. Instead, the venue is in the urban Shiokaze Park overlooking Tokyo Bay, with 3,500 tons of sand shipped in from Vietnam to create a 16-inch deep surface that is safe and consistent for the players.

"The sand quality is great here," American Alix Klineman said after a rainy match that tested the venue's drainage. (It passed.) "We just have to kind of keep an eye on what the sand is doing based on the weather."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 34 of 76

This is not your basic playground sandbox. The International Volleyball Federation "Sand Specification and Homologation Process" lists the requirements that all event organizers, including the Olympics, must follow. Among the topics: has color, size, shape — even odor.

So how does a grain of sand make it to the Olympics?

THE SPECS

The FIVB guide says 80% to 92% of the grains must be coarse or medium grade, from 0.5mm to 2mm. Too small, and the sand becomes dusty and compacts over the course of a match; too large, and it scrapes against the players' skin when they dive.

It should be "an aesthetically pleasing, non-glaring color, preferably tan, cream or pale brown." Darker sand absorbs too much heat; if it's too light, it gives off glare.

All organic material like shells and seaweed must be sifted out. It's a safety thing, and also it starts to smell.

The grains must be rounded or "sub-angular," naturally weathered and should NOT be acquired from a crushed rock source. This seems especially important, because it is in all caps, in bold, and underlined.

"A man-made fractured material is too sharp and it will compact," negating the give that makes beach volleyball so different than the indoor game, said Todd Knapton, who works at the Toronto-area sand and aggregate supplier that has vetted the FIVB's surfaces since the Sydney Games.

"It should be like riding a bicycle through ball bearings. You labor through it," he said. "Kudos to them, because these athletes are in phenomenal shape. And the sand has set the bar."

WHERE'S THE BEACH?

Since the sand is usually trucked in, and it is always at the very least cleaned and sifted, the only real reason to put the beach volleyball court on a beach is for atmosphere. And more often than not the Olympic venue has been far from the water.

When the sport was added to the Olympics in 1996, the venue was in Jonesboro, Georgia, outside of landlocked Atlanta. Four years later, the competition was at Sydney's Bondi Beach, using local sand that was cleaned of shells and rocks for safety.

"We just gave the sand some TLC," said Knapton, a vice president of Hutcheson Sand Mixes, which has been designated as the FIVB's "official recognized and approved sand laboratory." "We just gave it some love, and fluffed it up."

Athens set up the venue in the coastal town of Faliro, but the sand was brought in from Belgium. In Beijing, the beach volleyball was played in a city park; the original plan was to host it in Tiananmen Square, which was likely to remind international Olympic audiences of a 1989 government massacre of student protesters. (The sand came from southern China's Hainan Island.)

London's venue was Horse Guards Parade, within the sound of Big Ben's pealing, with sand trucked up from Brighton. In Rio de Janeiro, the venue returned to the seashore at Copacabana, where the crashing waves mixed with the sounds of recreational beach volleyball players just outside the stadium gates.

DOES IT REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Although players will often practice on an actual beach, they rely on the competition surfaces to be consistent.

Having the proper sand also matters when it rains, as it did for gold medal matches in both Beijing and Rio. During the preliminary round in Tokyo, a typhoon skirted past the city and drenched the court and the players alike.

Although the rain compacts the sand and makes it easier for the barefoot players to move, jump and spike, nary a puddle was seen.

"You could literally have a monsoon come through, or a firetruck try to flood it," Knapton said. "That's when you feel good."

Ban on 'Soul Cap' spotlights lack of diversity in swimming

By JENNA FRYER AP Sports Writer

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 35 of 76

TOKYO (AP) — Alice Dearing has an afro, a voluminous puff nearly impossible to protect in most swimming caps. Her hair shrinks if it gets wet. And the chlorine? The chemicals in a pool can cause severe damage that requires substantial time and money to treat.

The first Black female swimmer on Britain's Olympic team uses the the Soul Cap, an extra-large silicone covering designed specifically to protect dreadlocks, weaves, hair extensions, braids, and thick and curly hair. But Dearing has been forbidden from using the cap in her Olympic debut next week in the women's 10k marathon swim.

FINA, which oversees international competitions in swimming, rejected the application from the British makers of the Soul Cap for use in the Tokyo Games, citing no previous instance in which swimmers needed "caps of such size and configuration." It also wondered if the cap could create an advantage by disrupting the flow of water.

On social media and in Black swimming circles, the outcry was swift and the conversation went on for days. A Change.org petition was launched and Dearing, an ambassador for the cap and co-founder of the Black Swimming Association, openly expressed disappointment.

For people of color, this was so much more than a ban on a swimming cap. Dismissing it represented yet another injustice.

THE BACKLASH

It's been five years since the Rio Games, when American Simone Manuel became the first Black female swimmer to win Olympic gold. Since then, there has been little uptick in swimmers of color at the elite level.

Like Dearing, Donta Katai of Zimbabwe is the first Black swimmer to represent her country. And at almost any meet at the international level, swimmers of color are extremely rare. The U.S. team has only two black females, Manuel and Natalie Hinds.

Those familiar with the situation say the reasons for that shortage — and the racism behind them — run deep in history.

Neither Manuel nor Hinds understands the dismissal of the Soul Cap. Both Americans have sponsorship from other companies that make caps to protect their hair, but they were disappointed that a cap made by a Black-owned business specifically to aid swimmers of color was outlawed.

"It doesn't do the best for inclusivity in the sport," Manuel said.

The tenuous relationship between Black people and water goes back a long way. In the era of segregation in the United States, Black swimmers were barred from pools; those that did permit swimmers of color were often unsafe and neglected.

"The predominance of white athletes in swimming is a key example of a racial disparity in sport that can be linked to histories of institutional racism," said Claire Sisco King, an associate professor of communication studies at Vanderbilt University and editor of the Women's Studies in Communication international journal.

Accessibility to public pools is another barrier, King notes, and wealth inequality makes an often expensive sport like swimming inaccessible. She said the banning of the Soul Cap "risks perpetuating the racist assumption that Black athletes don't belong in the sport of swimming."

According to the USA Swimming Foundation, 64% of Black children do not know how to swim compared to 40% of white American children. Additionally, 79% of children in American families that earn less than \$50,000 a year do not know how to swim.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that between 1999 and 2010, the fatal unintentional drowning rate for Blacks was significantly higher than white swimmers; for every white child between 5 and 18 years old who drowned, 5.5 Black children drowned.

Danielle Obe co-founded, with Dearing, the Black Swimming Association not long after the 2019 Christmas Eve drowning of a father and two children while on holiday in Spain.

"We just thought, we've got to do something for our community," Obe said. After conversations with Swimming World magazine, she found that 95% of Black adults in London do not swim and 80% of Black children leave primary school not yet able to swim.

Said Obe: "We thought the only way to get more Alice Dearing's in the pool, with Alice being Black and

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 36 of 76

among the 5% in the water, we had to reduce the 95% not in the water.”

ROOTS OF THE SOUL CAP

Dearing is among the Black swimmers who balance love of the water with the difficulties of protecting hair. Obe suspects Dearing will have her afro braided into cornrows in order to use an approved cap in the marathon swim, but Dearing had been using the Soul Cap. It was created by schoolmates Toks Ahmed and Michael Chapman, who both did not learn how to swim until their late 20s.

“The perception has always been that swimming isn’t for Black people; my mom doesn’t swim, Michael’s mom doesn’t swim, none of our friends swim,” Ahmed said, “and it was like, ‘This is nuts, — we need to learn how to swim.’”

A woman in the class struggled to keep her bathing cap on her head, which sparked the Soul Cap idea. “We both wondered why there wasn’t swim caps made to accommodate that more voluminous hair and afro textures and bigger hair,” Ahmed said. “We spoke to our moms and our sisters and they both all said, to be fair, a big barrier to swimming is the fact our hair gets soaked, we haven’t got a swimming cap that works.”

What they thought would be a niche product received such favorable feedback that the duo realized “we were filling a gap, providing something that removed a barrier to women and children who did not want to swim.”

In 2017 they self-funded 150 black extra-large caps, another 60 in burgundy, and are now taking orders for about 25,000 caps. The caps started with the two understated colors; then they were contacted by open-water swimmers who needed brighter hues. Then came queries from swimmers who didn’t have full afros and wanted the caps in smaller sizes.

The attention created by the federation’s rejection has been effective, though Dearing wasn’t available to talk about it. Her team wouldn’t make her available for comment until after her Aug. 4 competition.

SUCCESS CAUSING CHANGE

Manuel and Hinds were part of the bronze medal-winning 4x100 meter freestyle relay and Manuel, a four-time medalist, made history when she won gold in the 100-meter free at Rio.

Black swimmers’ success can be a change agent, but there must also be specific steps toward creating more interest and opportunity, said Shontel Cargill, a former competitive swimmer who is Black. She is now a therapist and assistant clinic director at Thriveworks in Cumming, Georgia.

“Due to the discriminatory and segregated past of swimming, Black families have been taught to fear swimming instead of embrace it,” Cargill said.

FINA is now in talks with Soul Cap and said in a statement it will review the application again later this year. The governing body said it is “understanding of the importance of inclusivity and representation,” and the review of the Soul Cap and similar products “are part of wider initiatives aimed at ensuring there are no barriers to participation in swimming, which is both a sport and a vital life skill.”

The federation’s swimwear approval committee chairman “is fully aware of the cultural issues that Soul Cap has raised, and we are reviewing the process,” Brent Nowicki, an American named executive director of FINA in June, said Saturday.

Ahmed feels encouraged after conversations with Nowicki, who he said was “quite apologetic for the way the application was handled.”

“I think it’s testament that if there was more representation at that level, and more representation at the approval process, someone might have said ‘Hey, let’s consider this because there are people out there who want to swim competitively, but don’t want to cut their hair down short and maybe don’t want to compromise,’” Ahmed said. “It’s just about giving people an option.”

Si, Oui, Hai: Interpreting joy and heartbreak at Tokyo Games

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Ask him how many languages he speaks, and Alexandre Ponomarev replies: “If you mean to make myself understood, I’ve lost count.”

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 37 of 76

Count 'em. Ponomarev speaks Russian, Ukrainian, English, German, Spanish, French and Danish. And gets by in Swedish, Portuguese, Italian and Norwegian.

Ahh, but how about your Japanese?

"Muzukashi," replied Ponomarev, which means "difficult" in Japanese, and can be interpreted to mean he doesn't speak much.

OK, nobody's perfect.

Ponomarev is the chief interpreter for the Tokyo Games, overseeing a staff of almost 100 interpreters who render Olympic joy and Olympic heartbreak into a calibrated cacophony of 11 languages: Japanese, English, French, Spanish, German, Russian, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Korean, and Portuguese.

Ponomarev worked his first Olympics in 2008 in Beijing and took over as the chief in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. His mother got him started with language learning, smuggling videos of American films into the old Soviet Union. One by one, the languages piled up.

"When somebody walks into a room full of interpreters, and it's somebody who doesn't speak the languages, it does feel like the Tower of Babel," he explained. "You can see people speaking at the same time in all these dialects and languages and using strange words. It may seem crazy but we are actually not."

What they are in Tokyo is busy.

Most work in the Main Press Center in a cable-strewn room with 20 translation booths lining the walls. Wires, screens, and computer coders splice their words onto a network. The booths are decorated with Japanese art from famous masters like Hokusai, and carry labels like JPN or ENG to designate the languages being worked.

Unlike previous Olympics, all the interpretation is being done remotely. Press conferences from remote venues are fed into the press-center hub. Some two dozens interpreters aren't even in the country, chiming in from the Americas or Europe to handle late night events in Japan.

Their simultaneous translations can be accessed at all Olympic venues on an app. This eliminates interpreters getting tied up in traffic heading to a venue — and there's no longer any need to distribute handheld translation devices.

"We are here in the press center all the time, and we watch the events on the TV just like anybody else," said Andrea Hofmann Miller, a German interpreter. "In Rio, we had to be on the bus for about four hours just to get to the swimming venue. And in my case, if a German-speaking athlete didn't win, we spent eight hours on a bus for nothing."

Ponomarev pointed out that cultural differences affect language. He may assign a speaker of Brazilian Portuguese to a Brazilian, and a peninsular Portuguese speaker to someone from Portugal; likewise with Spanish, which is spoken differently across 20 countries.

A visitor entering his office the other day found Ponomarev speaking Spanish with an accent from Spain. He was chatting with an Argentine, a Venezuelan and another Spaniard. They were all speaking their own brand of Spanish, and a few times they slipped into French.

"When you get four or five interpreters in the room, and they all share at least two or three languages, they automatically switch back and forth," Ponomarev explained. "The conversation starts in one language then quickly switches to another simply because another language is more conducive to talking about a specific topic."

For a polyglot, toggling among several language seems more natural than staying in only one, sort of like a musician who plays several instruments. He used the example of the German word "schadenfreude," which means pleasure derived from the misfortune of others.

"This kind of word exists only in German and it would be difficult to express that concept in English. By the same token, there are concepts that exist only in Russia and we don't convey them very well in any other language. To avoid lengthy descriptions, we switch to another language and people will understand instantly."

He said his interpreters all bone up before the Olympics, studying the nuances of judo or the vagaries of Modern Pentathlon. But they can be stumped, particularly in new events like surfing and skateboarding.

"These are young people and they have their own speak," he said. "If somebody says 'the wave are

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 38 of 76

bad, man' — meaning the waves were great."

Ponomarev and much of his staff have worked high-powered political events like the G20 or the World Economic Forum, which are far trickier than the Olympics.

"There you have a wide variety of people — presidents, royalty, politicians, interesting influencers, you name it," he said.

Sometimes, though, things can get incredibly delicate at the Olympics. Hofmann Miller nearly teared up talking about the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver, where Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili died in a training run before the opening ceremony. He lost control of this sled and hit a steel pole beside the track.

"I was chosen to do the press interview for that, and it was a very, very sad event and I will never forget that," she said. "It was very moving, and it was really tough for all of us sitting on stage taking the questions from the press and to keep our emotions back."

Interpretation is, in the end, more art than science — a discipline that requires skill, yes, but a strong dose of humanity as well. Both Ponomarev and the German interpreter, Hofmann Miller, acknowledge cheering for the athletes, or sympathizing with them in defeat.

"We all get absolutely excited for these athletes," Ponomarev said. "Because when you interpret, you're in someone else's head. You don't interpret words, you interpret meaning. And when you're in somebody's head, you start sympathizing."

Glimpses of bygone era in English seaside holiday village

By TONY HICKS Associated Press

SHALDON, England (AP) — They are simple pleasures that hark back to analog, unplugged summer days: a book and a picnic blanket, a bucket and spade, fish and chips.

They are also the traditional trappings of the great British seaside holiday that is making a comeback amid foreign travel concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Back in the day, as the eagerly awaited school summer break loomed on the horizon, one question dominated the playground: "Where are you off to on holiday?"

This was the '70s, and time may have dimmed the memories, but I don't recall any of the 30 children in my class saying they were heading overseas. I was part of the last generation for whom the British seaside holiday was still king.

Its heyday stretches back to Victorian times and probably peaked in the post-war years of the 1950s and 1960s. Full employment and annual paid leave gave the working and middle classes the financial clout to take a break on the coast each summer.

For people in southern England like my family, that meant heading to Margate, Camber Sands, Brighton, Weymouth or other coastal towns. A longer drive west took you to the English Riviera. Elsewhere, holiday towns like Blackpool on the northwest coast or Clacton-on-Sea on the east were flooded with visitors during school holidays.

The glory days began to wane with the arrival of cheap airline travel and package tour holidays that whisked families to resorts dotted around the warm waters of the Mediterranean Sea, where sunshine was almost guaranteed.

Visiting the fishing village of Shaldon in Devon, a small cluster of mainly Georgian houses and shops at the mouth of the River Teign, is like stepping back into a bygone era of simple pleasures. Even as a recent heat wave sent Britons flocking to the coast to cool off, Shaldon retained an effortless tranquility.

The ingredients are simple: Two nice beaches, a handful of pubs, a shop selling the quintessentially British holiday fare of fish and chips (though the meal is sadly no longer wrapped in old newspapers), and a pitch-and-putt golf course with lovely views across the Teign estuary.

Take a cool dip between small fishing boats and less traditional stand-up paddle boards. Cast a line into the estuary at low tide as the day's last rays of sun illuminate green seaweed-covered stones. Finish things off with a pint in a pub beer garden.

For those seeking a staycation destination, Shaldon ticks many boxes for a great British seaside stay.

Bring in the kids: Estonian city targets youths for jabs

By MARIS HELLRAND Associated Press

TARTU, Estonia (AP) — With her father in tow, 13-year-old Gloria Raudjarv marched through a vaccination center inside a sports hall in Estonia's second-largest city and up to a nurse for her first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

So far, around half of Tartu's teenagers from 12 to 17 have already received their first vaccine shot, and local health officials are working to reach 70% by the time school resumes on Sept. 1.

"I really want to go to school already, we have been distance learning for so long," she said, gripping her vaccination certificate.

Two months after the European Medicines Agency recommended that the coronavirus vaccine made by Pfizer-BioNTech be expanded to children 12 to 15, large disparities in the access to vaccination are being seen for youths across Europe. Last week, the EU drug regulator also cleared the vaccine made by Moderna for the same age group.

While countries like Estonia, Denmark and France are actively encouraging families to vaccinate their children before the new school year begins, others such as Sweden and the United Kingdom have yet to begin mass vaccinations for those under 18.

The World Health Organization, meanwhile, has said that children are not a priority for vaccination given the extremely limited global supplies and the fact that they face a significantly lower risk of severe disease and death. It has urged rich countries to stop vaccinating children and donate their doses to the developing world instead.

But as the highly transmissible delta variant creates new infections even as vaccination rates rise among adults in Europe, there are fears that young people will now accelerate the spread of the virus.

Maria Theodoridou, head of the Greece's National Vaccination Committee, said a significant increase has been noted in the past few weeks in Greece of positive cases in children and adolescents.

"Children and adolescents, as we know, are a source of spread of the virus," Theodoridou said, adding that those most at risk were the people in the children's environment who were unvaccinated.

Children getting infected "will lead to new variants and to a reduction in the effectiveness of the vaccines," she warned.

Vaccination remains voluntary for children in Europe but in Denmark, where more than a third of all children 12 to 15 are getting their first dose, health officials are hoping parents will yield to recommendations for all to get vaccinated before returning to class.

In France, where a third of all children from 12 to 17 have received at least one dose, the French education minister prompted criticism this week for announcing that starting in September, unvaccinated students in that age group would be sent home from school if anyone in their class gets COVID-19.

Critics said this would create a two-tier education system and unfairly discriminate against children whose parents are anti-vaccine. WHO has said children do not need to be immunized as long as the at-risk adults around them, including teachers and parents, are protected.

In the U.S., just a quarter of those 12 to 15 who got access to Pfizer's vaccine starting in May have had their second dose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Among U.S. teens 16 and 17, about 37% are fully vaccinated.

In Estonia, where youth vaccination campaigns are run by municipalities, the rapid rollout in Tartu is credited to a strong outreach campaign via schools and social media, easy registration procedures and an educated population. Tartu is a university and research town.

For the teenagers themselves, it's mostly about seeing their friends again. Estonia's schools have been closed for in-school learning since February, with some exceptions for the youngest children and those sitting exams.

Gloria, who is entering 7th grade and aspires to be a singer, is looking forward to returning to the school stage.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 40 of 76

"Contacts, interactions, discussions, but also the change of environment, getting out from home to go to school is really important," said Ott Maidre, a biology teacher at the city's Hugo Treffner Gymnasium, who misses face-to-face teaching.

With more than 3,100 teenagers already vaccinated and another four weeks to go before school resumes, Tartu's Vice Mayor Mihkel Lees is confident the city will reach its 70% vaccination goal for students 12 to 17 by Sept. 1.

If not, they have Plan B.

"In case we can't vaccinate enough kids and youth at the vaccination center during the summer," he said, "school nurses will join in."

Chaotic waters: US stars win, but Dressel won't get 6 golds

By PAUL NEWBERRY AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Caeleb Dressel is pretty much invincible when he has a lane to himself.

But give him a deficit of more than 8 seconds?

Well, that's too much for even the world's greatest swimmer to overcome with two laps of the pool.

On a morning of mixed emotions and chaotic racing at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre, Dressel set a world record in the 100-meter butterfly, but was basically doomed before he even dove into the pool on the new mixed relay Saturday.

So went his chances of joining a very exclusive club. His bid to win six gold medals fell apart with another U.S. relay debacle. The Americans were too far behind in the 4x100-meter mixed medley when their top swimmer took over, so the best Dressel could do was rally the U.S. to a fifth-place finish in an event that features two men and two women on each team. Britain set a world record to win the gold.

"Fifth place is unacceptable for USA Swimming," Dressel said. "It stings."

It was a disappointing capper to a golden morning for the Americans, whose biggest swimming stars both ascended to the top of the medal podium.

After Dressel won his third gold of the games, Katie Ledecky closed out her grueling Olympic program with a third straight victory in the 800 freestyle.

Ledecky was pushed hard by Australian rival Ariarne Titmus, but the American held on in a race she hasn't lost since 2010.

Ledecky finished up with two golds, two silver and a fifth-place finish at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre — not as successful as she was five years ago in Rio de Janeiro, but not bad at all.

Ledecky became the first female swimmer to capture six individual gold medals in her career with another Olympic title in the 800 free, winning with a time of 8 minutes, 12.57 seconds.

Titmus closed strong to claim the silver in 8:13.83, while the bronze went to Italy's Simona Quadarella in 8:18.35.

"I could see her the whole way," Ledecky said of Titmus. "I was trying to keep tabs on her and trying to inch my way out a little bit each 50. I knew she was just going to be lurking there the whole time."

Ledecky lost her first two individual matchups with Titmus, but finally beat the Terminator in their final showdown.

"I knew I had to have a little gap," Ledecky said, "because if we were neck and neck on the last 100, I know she she has that finish."

Dressel led right from the start in the fly and held off Hungary's Kristof Milak to touch in 49.45 seconds, breaking the mark of 49.50 that the American set at the 2019 world championships.

Milak, winner of the 200 fly, earned the silver with a blistering 49.68. The bronze went to Switzerland's Noe Ponti.

When he saw the "WR" beside his name, Dressel smiled and joined hands with Milak in the lane next to him. They raised their arms together before Dressel flexed his left arm and pumped it in the air.

"He's going to put me out of a job one day, so I'm just trying to hang on as long as I can," Dressel said. "Kristof executed perfectly. We both swam exactly the race we needed to."

The Australian women added another gold.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 41 of 76

Kaylee McKeown completed a sweep of the backstroke events with a victory in the 200. Her winning time was 2:04.68.

The silver went to Canada's Kylie Masse in 2:05.42, with another Australian, Emily Seebohm, claiming the bronze in 2:06.17.

Americans Rhyan White and Phoebe Bacon finished fourth and fifth.

It's been a huge Olympics for the Aussie women. They have won six of their team's seven gold medals at the pool.

In another bummer for the Americans, Simone Manuel failed to advance to the final of the 50 free, her only individual event in these games.

The first Black American woman to win an individual swimming gold posted the 11th-best time in the semi-finals and was eliminated, capping a trying year in which she was diagnosed with overtraining syndrome.

Dressel advanced easily in the men's freestyle semifinals with the top final time (21.42).

The mixed medley was another story.

For the second time at these Olympics, the U.S. failed to win a relay medal, joining a fourth-place finish in the men's 4x200 freestyle. Before Tokyo, the Americans had never failed to finish in top three of an Olympic relay they entered.

The Americans tried a different strategy than everyone else, going with Dressel on the freestyle while the other seven teams all closed with a woman.

The Americans faltered when 17-year-old Lydia Jacoby — already the only woman swimming the breast-stroke leg — had her goggles knocked off on her dive into the water.

The 17-year-old struggled to finish in 1:05.09, her goggles dangling from her mouth as the rest of the field pulled away.

"I've never really had that happen before," said Jacoby, who one wears a single cap while most swimmers wear two largely to prevent such a problem. "I was definitely panicking a little. My turn was where it was most rough because I couldn't see the wall."

Her teammates praised her effort.

"Anyone that swam with their goggles in their mouth like she did (knows) she did fantastic," said Ryan Murphy, who took the opening backstroke leg.

When 18-year-old Torri Huske passed off to Dressel after the butterfly leg, the Americans were 8.01 seconds behind the leaders in last place.

Dressel furiously tried to cut into the huge gap. His 46.99 leg was better than his winning time in the 100 free individual event, but it wasn't nearly enough to chase down all the teams ahead of him.

"Everyone swam as well as they could in the moment," Dressel said. "We got beat by a better team."

Britain's team of Kathleen Dawson, Adam Peaty, James Guy and Anna Hopkin claimed the gold with a world record of 3:37.58. The silver went to China in 3:38.86, while Australia took the bronze in 3:38.95.

Dressel touched in 3:40.58, also finishing behind Italy.

He was hoping to sweep his six events, which would have made him only the the fourth swimmer and fifth athlete overall to win six gold medals at a single Olympics.

Swimming icon Michael Phelps did it twice, capturing six golds at the 2004 Athens Games before setting the record with eight golds in Beijing four years later.

For Dressel, who has two more races on the final day of swimming, five golds is now the best he can do.

West African health officials race to vaccinate amid spikes

By CARLEY PETESCH Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — A resurgence of coronavirus cases in West Africa is hitting the region hard, inundating cemeteries where funeral numbers are rising and hospitals where beds are becoming scarce.

Those visible shifts are also pushing a reluctant population to seek out the vaccines in larger numbers at a time when shipments of doses are arriving from multiple sources after nearly grinding to a halt in recent months.

Thousands of new COVID-19 cases have been reported in the region in the past few weeks amid low

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 42 of 76

vaccination rates and the spread of the delta variant, with some countries seeing their highest numbers since the pandemic began.

Residents who were previously wary of getting shots as conspiracy theories spread online are now lining up by the thousands from Liberia to Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal.

"At the beginning, there were people who gave false information, but when people noticed an increase of contaminations and deaths, people understood that only vaccination can save them," said Bamba Fall, mayor of the Medina municipality in Senegal's capital, Dakar.

Shortages and delays have caused Africa's 54 countries to fall far behind wealthier nations in their COVID-19 vaccine rollouts. Some 82 million doses have arrived on the continent to date, though that is just 10% of the number needed to vaccinate 30% of its population by the end of 2021, said Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, World Health Organization regional director for Africa.

But more shipments are finally rolling in, steering the continent of 1.3 billion people into an "encouraging phase after a bleak June," Moeti said. "There's light at the end of the tunnel on vaccine deliveries to Africa, but it must not be snuffed out again."

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country with more than 210 million people, next month will receive more than 29 million Johnson & Johnson vaccines purchased by the government through the African Union. It's also expecting 4 million doses of Moderna and almost 700,000 AstraZeneca vaccines through the COVAX program and from donations by the United States and the United Kingdom, according to Health Minister Osagie Ehanire.

Nigeria's virus cumulative case count recently topped 172,200, an increase of more than 4,500 cases since July 10. Its seven-day rolling average of daily new cases more than doubled over the past two weeks, from 0.06 new cases per 100,000 people on July 15 to 0.17 new cases per 100,000 people on July 29, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Isolation centers that were closed after a previous surge are being reopened in anticipation of a large number of patients, said Dr. Chikwe Ihekweazu, director-general of the Nigeria Center for Disease Control.

Meanwhile, confirmed cases in Senegal, which had been ahead in the fight against the virus, leapt from only 380 on July 10 to 1,700 on July 18, the highest number since the pandemic began, according to the Ministry of Health.

Dakar's main cemetery also is seeing large numbers of funerals, many that were likely due to COVID-19 but weren't recorded as such.

"I came for an uncle's funeral. He died at home. Out of modesty, he did not take the tests, but everything suggests that he died of COVID-19, because he had symptoms of the disease," said Saliou Ndoye. "This situation is worrying. There are a lot of deaths."

Senegal is employing more community-focused campaigns as residents see people close to them — including those young and healthy — succumbing to the disease.

"Senegalese don't know where to turn," resident Khalifa Abbacar Diop said. "We are afraid."

The country received nearly 300,000 Johnson & Johnson doses and more than 330,000 of the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine in the past week. Tens of thousands of residents are waiting for a second dose of AstraZeneca, but it is out of stock and new deliveries are not expected until August.

An increase in hospitalizations and deaths is leading many residents across West Africa to get inoculated.

"Initially, I was hesitant to take the vaccine because I saw many conspiracy theories and also the anti-vaccine media campaign appeared stronger," Harris Fomba Tarnue, principal of the Booker Washington Institute, Liberia's oldest technical high school, told The Associated Press.

"But when I reflected a lot on taking vaccines in the '60s and '70s, and the (beneficial) impact vaccines now have on global health, I concluded it's a must for me and my family to take," Tarnue said.

Liberia received 96,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine through the COVAX initiative, but the first consignment of about 27,000 had only a month lifespan and expired as people were reluctant to get the shots, Chief Medical Officer Dr. Francis Kateh said.

The country received more than 300,000 Johnson & Johnson doses on Sunday, about two weeks after

it ran out of AstraZeneca with at least 86,000 people awaiting a second dose.

Since its vaccine drive started in March, only 9,579 people in the nation of nearly 5 million have been fully vaccinated, according to the health minister.

In Ghana, President Nana Akufo-Addo raised the alarm Sunday as new confirmed infections tripled, stretching hospitals and ICU wards to their limit.

Ghana "cannot afford to allow the recklessness of a few to endanger the lives of the majority of persons in the country," he said, announcing masks are now mandatory in public places.

Ghana is committed to vaccinating 20 million people, representing its entire adult population, by the end of this year, he said.

He pledged \$25 million to start an institute that would allow Ghana to produce vaccines, and not be dependent upon foreign manufacturers. South Africa is currently the only country in sub-Saharan Africa that has the capacity to manufacture the doses.

Justice Department says Russians hacked federal prosecutors

By ALAN SUDERMAN and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Russian hackers behind the massive SolarWinds cyberespionage campaign broke into the email accounts some of the most prominent federal prosecutors' offices around the country last year, the Justice Department said.

The department said 80% of Microsoft email accounts used by employees in the four U.S. attorney offices in New York were breached. All told, the Justice Department said 27 U.S. Attorney offices had at least one employee's email account compromised during the hacking campaign.

The Justice Department said in a statement Friday that it believes the accounts were compromised from May 7 to Dec. 27, 2020. Such a timeframe is notable because the SolarWinds campaign, which infiltrated dozens of private-sector companies and think tanks as well as at least nine U.S. government agencies, was first discovered and publicized in mid-December.

The Biden administration in April announced sanctions, including the expulsion of Russian diplomats, in response to the SolarWinds hack and Russian interference in the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Russia has denied wrongdoing.

Jennifer Rodgers, a lecturer at Columbia Law School, said office emails frequently contained all sorts of sensitive information, including case strategy discussions and names of confidential informants, when she was a federal prosecutor in New York.

"I don't remember ever having someone bring me a document instead of emailing it to me because of security concerns," she said, noting exceptions for classified materials.

The Administrative Office of U.S. Courts confirmed in January that it was also breached, giving the SolarWinds hackers another entry point to steal confidential information like trade secrets, espionage targets, whistleblower reports and arrest warrants.

The list of affected offices include several large and high-profile ones like those in Los Angeles, Miami, Washington and the Eastern District of Virginia.

The Southern and Eastern Districts of New York, where large numbers of staff were hit, handle some of the most prominent prosecutors in the country.

"New York is the financial center of the world and those districts are particularly well known for investigating and prosecuting white-collar crimes and other cases, including investigating people close to the former president," said Bruce Green, a professor at Fordham Law School and a former prosecutor in the Southern District.

The department said all victims had been notified and it is working to mitigate "operational, security and privacy risks" caused by the hack. The Justice Department said in January that it had no indication that any classified systems were impacted.

The Justice Department did not provide additional detail about what kind of information was taken and what impact such a hack may have on ongoing cases. Members of Congress have expressed frustration with

the Biden administration for not sharing more information about the impact of the SolarWinds campaign.

The Associated Press previously reported that SolarWinds hackers had gained access to email accounts belonging to the then-acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf and members of the department's cybersecurity staff whose jobs included hunting threats from foreign countries.

Pentagon grappling with new vaccine orders; timing uncertain

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Association Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is vowing he “won’t let grass grow under our feet” as the department begins to implement the new vaccine and testing directives. But Pentagon officials on Friday were scrambling to figure out how to enact and enforce the changes across the vast military population and determine which National Guard and Reserve troops would be affected by the orders.

The Pentagon now has two separate missions involving President Joe Biden’s announcement Thursday aimed at increasing COVID-19 vaccines in the federal workforce. The Defense Department must develop plans to make the vaccine mandatory for the military, and set up new requirements for federal workers who will have to either attest to a COVID-19 vaccination or face frequent testing and travel restrictions.

Austin said the department will move expeditiously, but added that he can’t predict how long it will take. He said he plans to consult with medical professionals as well as the military service leaders.

Any plan to make the vaccine mandatory will require a waiver signed by Biden, because the Food and Drug Administration has not yet given the vaccine final, formal approval. According to federal law, the requirement to offer individuals a choice of accepting or rejecting use of an emergency use vaccine may only be waived by the president, “only if the president determines in writing that complying with such requirement is not in the interests of national security.”

Mandating the vaccine prior to FDA approval will likely trigger opposition from vaccine opponents, and drag the military into political debates over what has become a highly divisive issue in America.

Military commanders, however, have also struggled to separate vaccinated recruits from those not vaccinated during early portions of basic training across the services in order to prevent infections. So, for some, a mandate could make training and housing less complicated.

Military service members are already required to get as many as 17 different vaccines, depending on where they are based around the world. Some of the vaccines are specific to certain regions. Military officials have said the pace of vaccines has been growing across the force, with some units seeing nearly 100 percent of their members get shots.

According to the Pentagon, more than 1 million service members are fully vaccinated, and another 233,000 have gotten at least one shot. There are roughly 2 million active duty, Guard and Reserve troops.

A vaccine mandate will also raise questions about whether the military services will discharge troops who refuse the vaccine.

National Guard officials said initial guidance suggests that Guard troops who initially refuse the vaccine once its mandatory will receive counseling from medical personnel. If they still refuse they would be ordered to take it, and failure to follow that order could result in administrative or punitive action.

On Friday, Guard officials said leaders were still nailing down legal recommendations on which citizen soldiers would be affected by the new requirements and who would not. Officials said it appears the bulk of the Guard would eventually have to get the vaccine, when it is mandated.

Guard troops on federal active duty would be given the vaccine in their units wherever they are deployed, and others would get it when they report to their monthly drill weekend or annual training. The system, according to Guard officials, would resemble any other vaccine requirement.

Guard members who are on state active duty would not be subject to the requirement initially because they are subject to state laws. But once they return to a monthly drill, the order would apply to them. Guard officials spoke about the new vaccine process on condition of anonymity because procedures are still being finalized.

While the number of COVID-19 deaths across the military has remained small — largely attributed to

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 45 of 76

the age and health of the force — cases of the virus have been increasing.

As of this week, there have been more than 208,600 cases of COVID-19 among members of the U.S. military. Of those, more than 1,800 have been hospitalized and 28 have died.

Earlier this year, the number of cases and hospitalizations had been growing by relatively small, consistent amounts, and the number of deaths had stalled at 26 for more than two and a half months. In recent weeks the totals spiked. The number of cases increased by more than 3,000 in the last week alone, and those hospitalized grew by 36. Two Navy sailors also died in the last week.

Olympic attention to mental health: Can NBC coverage pivot?

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — If NBC's Michele Tafoya expected exultation or tears of joy from American swimmer Caeleb Dressel when she asked how it felt to reach his dream of an Olympic gold medal, that's not what she got.

He was happy, but hurting. "It's a really tough year," he said. "It's really hard."

Olympic athletes, most notably gymnast Simon Biles, haven't been afraid to express the mental and emotional difficulties they've faced during these pandemic games, a development that's thrown NBC a curve.

The network that presents the games has been forced to pivot, and the addition of Michael Phelps to its broadcast team turned into a master stroke for unanticipated reasons. Yet it's also worth questioning whether an intense focus on gold is out of touch for what these Games have become.

For most of the athletes, it has been an extraordinarily intense year. After training with the goal of being ready in 2020, the Games' postponement to 2021 — and the pandemic that caused it — forced them to decide if they wanted to essentially put another year of their lives on hold for what is often a lonely quest, said Mark Aoyagi, coordinator of the Sports and Performance Psychology program at the University of Denver.

Then they traveled to a lockdown environment to perform without their friends and family present; indeed, they had hardly any audience at all.

That strain was evident when NBC connected Dressel with his parents, wife and sister at home for a conversation shortly after his swim. He started sobbing.

In its coverage, NBC should make it a point to talk to athletes about their mental, not just physical, preparation for the games, said Hillary Cauthen, a sports psychologist from Austin, Texas who is on the executive board of the Association for Applied Sports Psychology.

"We need to lean into this conversation," Cauthen said.

Between cable networks and streaming, NBC Universal peeks into every corner of the Olympics. By far, though, NBC's prime-time coverage is the window through which most Americans experience the Games, and that is primarily focused on the medal hunt by American athletes in gymnastics, swimming & diving and track & field.

By its very nature, the Olympics are an athletic competition. There are winners and losers, dreams fulfilled and dreams dashed. While many athletes thrive in that environment, Biles' decision to pull out of the team and all-around gymnastics competition is the most prominent sign that for some, the pressure takes a toll.

Not many television viewers realize that a large number of competing Olympians understand they have no realistic expectation of winning a medal. For them, simply coming to Tokyo and competing is a joyful accomplishment, Aoyagi said.

"We never see that story," he said. "Obviously, NBC highlights those that are in medal contention. It's a very cultivated story that is presented to people that doesn't capture the essence of why most of them are over there."

Molly Solomon, executive producer of NBC's Olympics coverage, objects to any characterization of the network's philosophy as simply winner takes all.

"We always celebrate winning a silver or bronze and the achievement of being an Olympian," Solomon said. "That's our foundational philosophy, our ethos. If you listen to the tenor and tone of our comments

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 46 of 76

in the opening ceremony, we talk about for so many of the Olympians, that simply being at the Games is their crowning achievement.”

For NBC Universal, the Olympics are a multibillion-dollar business, and the company needs stars to entice viewers. That put athletes like Katie Ledecky and Biles in an intense spotlight, and the gymnast’s decision not to compete has likely contributed to the network’s disappointing ratings thus far. American Sunisa Lee’s victory in the women’s gymnastics all-around competition on Thursday offered a boost.

For Biles, the attention turned her from a woman chasing her own dreams to America’s great sports hope. “We just have to have a grace and kindness to understand what they’re going through,” Cauthen said.

NBC’s Olympics host, Mike Tirico, noted in a commentary that Biles’ story and the focus on mental health didn’t fit into society’s desire for instant results and a willingness to criticize athletes who don’t live up to expectations.

“Maybe this helps the rest of us understand that even though they crave and create a lot of the attention, sometimes what we know them for and what we admire them for is not the most important thing,” he said.

NBC hired the 23-time gold medalist Phelps primarily to add context to its swimming coverage. Instead, Phelps’ activism and willingness to talk about his own mental health issues has provided a crucial element to NBC’s Biles coverage. Phelps said he understood how Biles felt she carried the weight of the world on her shoulders, since he felt it, too.

He’ll keep talking about the issue, Solomon said.

\$1 trillion infrastructure plan clears another Senate hurdle

By KEVIN FREKING and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate further advanced a roughly \$1 trillion infrastructure plan Friday with a bipartisan group of senators helping it clear one more hurdle and bracing to see if support can hold during the next few days of debate and efforts to amend it.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said the chamber should be able to process the legislation quickly given the bipartisan support. But as the day dragged into evening, the full text of what promises to be a massive bill was not finished by the time lawmakers adjourned.

Senators will return for a rare Saturday session as they push through a lengthy process.

“We may need the weekend, we may vote on several amendments, but with the cooperation of our Republican colleagues I believe we can finish the bipartisan infrastructure bill in a matter of days,” Schumer said.

But Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, predicted, “It’s going to be a grind.”

The effort got off to a haphazard start Friday. Shortly after the Senate began the procedural vote, it was stopped. Cornyn said the reason was that some of the text in the draft bill did not comport with the agreement between the negotiators. The rare bipartisan work is testing senators’ ability to trust one another.

Several moments later, the vote resumed and the effort to proceed to consideration of the bill passed by a vote of 66-28.

Earlier this week, 17 GOP senators joined all Democrats in voting to start the debate, launching what will be a dayslong process to consider the bill. That support largely held Friday with Republican Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky again voting yes to nudge the process along.

But whether the number of Republican senators willing to pass a key part of President Joe Biden’s agenda grows or shrinks in the days ahead will determine if the president’s signature issue can make it across the finish line.

Cornyn said he expects Schumer to allow all senators to have a chance to shape the bill and allow for amendments from members of both political parties.

“I’ve been disappointed that Senator Schumer has seen to fit to try to force us to vote on a bill that does not exist in its entirety, but I hope we can now pump the brakes a little bit and take the time and care to evaluate the benefits and the cost of this legislation,” Cornyn said.

Schumer had hoped to introduce the text of the bill later in the day with supporters aiming to complete

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 47 of 76

action before leaving for the August recess. Sens. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, and Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., released a statement saying they were close to finalizing the legislative text and hoped to make it public later in the day.

But Friday came and went without final paperwork that's now expected Saturday.

"When legislative text is finalized that reflects the product of our group, we will make it public together consistent with the bipartisan way we've worked for the last four months," the senators said.

The bipartisan plan is big, with \$550 billion in new spending over five years beyond the typical highway and public works accounts. A draft circulating Capitol Hill indicated it could have more than 2,500 pages when introduced. It's being financed from funding sources that may not pass muster with deficit hawks, including repurposing untapped COVID-19 relief aid and relying on projected future economic growth.

Among the major investments are \$110 billion for roads and bridges, \$39 billion for public transit and \$66 billion for rail. There's also \$55 billion for water and wastewater infrastructure as well as billions for airports, ports, broadband and electric vehicle charging stations.

The outcome will set the stage for the next debate over Biden's much more ambitious \$3.5 trillion spending package, a strictly partisan pursuit of far-reaching programs and services including child care, tax breaks and health care that touch almost every corner of American life. Republicans strongly oppose that bill, which would require a simple majority, and may try to stop both.

On the other side of the Capitol, a bipartisan group of senators and representative gathered to voice their support for the narrower, bipartisan infrastructure effort and to encourage House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to allow a quick vote on it after it passes the Senate. However, Pelosi has stated there won't be an infrastructure bill vote unless the Senate also passes the more ambitious package, too.

"I'm not asking Speaker Pelosi today to support the bill. I'm asking for something a lot more basic than that. I'm asking to give us a vote," said Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-S.D. "Let us vote."

Rep. Josh Gottheimer, D-N.J., also appealed for a stand-alone vote on the bipartisan plan because "that's what the country wants."

Florida coronavirus cases jump 50% as surge continues

By TERRY SPENCER and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Florida's coronavirus cases jumped 50% this week, the state Health Department reported Friday, continuing a six-week surge that has seen it responsible for 1 in 5 new infections nationally, becoming the outbreak's epicenter.

The release came shortly after Gov. Ron DeSantis barred school districts from requiring students to wear masks when classes resume next month.

More than 110,000 new coronavirus cases were reported statewide over the past week, up from 73,000 last week and 11 times the 10,000 reported the week of June 11, six weeks ago. Case numbers are now back to where they in January, just before vaccinations became widely available.

The Florida Hospital Association also said Friday that statewide COVID-19 hospitalizations are nearing last year's peak. More than 9,300 patients are hospitalized, up from 1,845 a month ago and nearing the record 10,179 set on July 23, 2020. On a per capita basis, Florida now has more people hospitalized than any other state.

The state reported 409 deaths this week, bringing the total to more than 39,000 since its first in March 2020. The state's peak happened in mid-August 2020, when 1,266 people died over a seven-day period. Deaths usually follow increases in hospitalizations by a few weeks.

DeSantis has blamed the surge on a seasonal increase — more Floridians are indoors because of the hot weather with air conditioning circulating the virus. About 60% of Floridians 12 and older are vaccinated, ranking it about midway among the states.

DeSantis said his executive order barring mask mandates at schools will improve students' experience and make it easier for them to focus on learning.

"I have (three) young kids. My wife and I are not going to do the mask with the kids. We never have;

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 48 of 76

we won't. I want to see my kids smiling. I want them having fun," DeSantis said at a news conference in southwest Florida a few hours before he signed the executive order. DeSantis is seeking reelection next year and has been positioning himself nationally for a possible 2024 presidential bid.

DeSantis also contended there is no evidence masks prevent outbreaks at schools, which is at odds with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines recommending "universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status."

His critics say his unwillingness to mandate mask wearing endangers the health of students and staff. "We know that masks are a simple and effective way to help prevent virus spread, and from a medical perspective it makes absolutely zero sense to discourage their use," said Dr. Bernard Ashby, head of Florida's progressive Committee to Protect Health Care. "DeSantis' power grab will put the health of kids and teachers alike at risk."

DeSantis' decision came after the Broward County school board voted to require masks and other districts and colleges across the state were considering it.

"We will have to change our policy," Broward board member Debbi Hixon told the South Florida Sun-Sentinel. "I am not looking to defy the governor. I believe it is an irresponsible decision but if it is the law, I will agree to follow it."

The Florida Education Association, the state's teachers union, said DeSantis should leave the decision to local officials rather than impose a statewide edict — a position he once held. When the pandemic began in March 2020, DeSantis said local officials should control the response, that the business closures and mask mandates imposed in Miami, Tampa and other big cities wouldn't work in small, rural counties.

"Gov. DeSantis continues to think that Tallahassee knows best what all Floridians need," union President Andrew Spar said in a statement. "We reject that kind of thinking. Instead, we ask Gov. DeSantis to allow all Florida's citizens to have a voice by empowering the elected leaders of cities, counties and school districts to make health and safety decisions locally."

Meanwhile, Publix, the state's largest supermarket chain, announced Friday that employees will again be required to wear masks and several hospitals said they are postponing elective surgeries and limiting visitors.

At Tampa General Hospital, the 90-plus patients hospitalized with COVID already exceeds the previous high of 86, said Dr. Seetha Lakshmi, medical director of its Global Emerging Diseases Institute. She said the hospital, like many, can't hire enough staff and it is leaving those working exhausted.

"It feels like we are getting hit by a train, the pace is so fast and uncontrolled," Laskshmi said. "I just don't have any words anymore. This is awful, just awful and it is going to be awful."

She said last year, her patients' median age was in the 70s. Now, it is just over 50, with the younger patients getting sicker than in the past.

She pointed to a patient in his early 30s whose lungs "sound like Velcro" being pulled apart. A father of young children, he will likely have permanent damage and might need a transplant eventually, she said.

She said 83% of Tampa General's COVID patients are unvaccinated while the others have immune-deficiency issues that prevented the vaccine from working.

Bob Odenkirk says he had a small heart attack, will be back

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — "Better Call Saul" star Bob Odenkirk said Friday that he "had a small heart attack" but will "be back soon."

The 58-year-old actor took to Twitter to make his first public statement since collapsing on the show's Albuquerque, New Mexico, set on Tuesday.

"Hi. It's Bob," Odenkirk tweeted. "Thank you. To my family and friends who have surrounded me this week. And for the outpouring of love from everyone who expressed concern and care for me. It's overwhelming. But I feel the love and it means so much."

"I had a small heart attack," he continued. "But I'm going to be ok thanks to Rosa Estrada and the doctors who knew how to fix the blockage without surgery."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 49 of 76

His representatives had previously only said that he had a "heart related incident" and was stable in an Albuquerque hospital after collapsing while shooting the show's sixth and final season.

Odenkirk also thanked the network that airs "Better Call Saul" and the company that produces it.

"AMC and SONYs support and help throughout this has been next-level," he tweeted. "I'm going to take a beat to recover but I'll be back soon."

The tone of Odenkirk's friends and co-stars had already shifted from concern to relief before his tweets.

"Just got off the phone with Bob and he's doing great!" David Cross, who formed a comedy duo with Odenkirk to make the HBO sketch show "Mr. Show." "Joking and japing and joshing. Both he and his family are overwhelmed with the outpouring of love and concern everyone has shown. You will be hearing from him soon. But he's doing really well!!!"

Odenkirk has been nominated for four Emmys for playing the title character, a down-on-his-luck lawyer named Jimmy McGill who becomes increasingly corrupt and adopts the pseudonym Saul Goodman, the "criminal lawyer" who appeared in dozens of episodes of "Breaking Bad" before getting his own spin-off.

Both shows were shot in, and mostly set in, New Mexico.

Trump urged Justice officials to declare election 'corrupt'

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump urged senior Justice Department officials to declare the results of the 2020 election "corrupt" in a December phone call, according to handwritten notes from one of the participants in the conversation.

"Just say the election was corrupt and leave the rest to me and the R. Congressmen," Trump said at one point to then-Acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen, according to notes taken by Richard Donoghue, who was then Rosen's deputy and who was also on the call.

The notes of the Dec. 27 call, released Friday by the House Oversight Committee, underscore the lengths to which Trump went to try to overturn the results of the election and to elicit the support of senior government officials in that effort. Emails released last month show Trump and his allies in the last weeks of his presidency pressured the Justice Department to investigate unsubstantiated claims of widespread election fraud, forwarding them conspiracy theories and even a draft legal brief they hoped would be filed with the Supreme Court.

The pressure is all the more notable because just weeks earlier, Trump's own attorney general William Barr, revealed that the Justice Department had found no evidence of widespread fraud that could have overturned the results. Unsubstantiated claims of fraud have been repeatedly rejected by judge after judge, including by Trump appointees, and by election officials across the country.

"These handwritten notes show that President Trump directly instructed our nation's top law enforcement agency to take steps to overturn a free and fair election in the final days of his presidency," committee chairman Rep. Carolyn Maloney, a New York Democrat, said in a statement.

She said the committee had begun scheduling interviews with witnesses as part of its investigation into Trump's effort to overturn the results. The Justice Department earlier this week authorized six witnesses, including Rosen and Donoghue, to appear before the panel and provide "unrestricted testimony," citing the public interest in the "extraordinary events" of those final weeks.

The Dec. 27 call took place just days after Barr had resigned, leaving Rosen in charge of the department during a turbulent final weeks of the administration that also included the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol in which pro-Trump loyalists stormed the building as Congress was gathered to certify the election results.

During the call, according to the notes, Trump complained that people were "angry" and blaming the Justice Department for "inaction" and said that "We have an obligation to tell people that this was an illegal, corrupt election." He claimed the department had failed to respond to legitimate complaints and reports of election-related crime.

The Justice Department officials told Trump that the department had been investigating, including through hundreds of interviews, but that the allegations were not supported by evidence. They said that much of

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 50 of 76

the information the president was getting was "false," according to Donoghue's notes.

At one point in the conversation, the notes show, Rosen told Trump that the Justice Department "can't + won't snap its fingers + change the outcome of the election, doesn't work that way."

Trump responded by saying: "Don't expect you to do that, just say that the election was corrupt + leave the rest to me and the R. Congressmen," according to the notes.

Trump mused during the call about replacing Justice Department leadership with Jeffrey Clark, the then-assistant attorney general of the Environment and Natural Resources Division who also served as the acting head of the Civil Division. Donoghue replied that such a move would not change the department's position.

After The New York Times reported that Trump had been contemplating a plan to replace Rosen with Clark, the inspector general announced that it would investigate whether any former or current department officials "engaged in an improper attempt" to overturn the results of the presidential election.

To get shots in arms, governments turn to money in pockets

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

Millions of people in the U.S. who haven't gotten the COVID-19 vaccine could soon have a new reason to roll up their sleeves: money in their pockets.

President Joe Biden is calling on states and local governments to join those that are already handing out dollars for shots. New York, the nation's biggest city, started doling out \$100 awards on Friday.

The president, health officials and state leaders are betting that the financial incentive will spur hesitant people to get the shot just as the highly contagious delta variant sweeps through parts of the country — particularly those with low vaccination rates — and as the number of daily inoculations falls sharply from its April high.

Jay Vojno, getting his shot Friday in New York, said he figured some kind of incentive was coming, so he was willing to hold off on getting vaccinated until it did.

"I knew they were going to do it, so I just waited," he said.

Bradley Sharp was among those getting a shot Friday in Times Square. The soon-to-be college student had been putting it off, but knew he would have to get vaccinated because the school he's going to attend requires it.

"I thought I'd come here and get it today and get my hundred dollars because I'm going to get it anyway," Sharp said.

Other states are beginning programs to hand out money too. New Mexico helped pioneer cash incentives in June and is starting another \$100 handout for vaccinations on Monday. Ohio is offering \$100 to state employees who get vaccinated.

Minnesota's \$100 incentive started Friday, although several people who showed up at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport to get jabbed with the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine hadn't heard about the money.

Vidiya Sami, an office worker from the Minneapolis suburb of Richfield, went to the airport because it was the only location offering the "one-and-done" vaccine.

"That's why I chose it," Sami said.

She said she delayed getting the shot because she was scared at first, "especially reading about ... the side effects from other people."

"And then I kind of made myself more paranoid by joining Facebook groups, and reading everybody else's symptoms after they got the shots," she said. "I was basically just giving myself anxiety, but the more I researched about it, you know, the pros outweighed the cons."

Incentives are not new: States have tried lottery-like giveaways, free beer, gift cards and more. Whether they result in getting more people vaccinated is not clear, said Harald Schmidt, an assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania and a research associate at the school's Center for Health Incentives and Behavioral Economics.

Turning to such measures suggests that governments are facing a level of desperation in trying to get

shots into arms, he said.

"It is right to be alarmed," Schmidt said. "It is right to be thinking how do we right this ship." He added that he understands the motivation for cash incentives, but questioned why they're needed in the first place.

"If we just get needles into arms we haven't really made any progress on the bigger picture, which is that whole communities are lacking trust in health care systems or the government," he said.

California awarded \$116.5 million in gift cards and prizes — the nation's biggest pot of vaccine prize money. The spending was aimed at getting 70% of eligible people inoculated by June 15. As of Thursday, though, 62.5% of Californians 12 or older were fully vaccinated.

In Colorado, Democratic Gov. Jared Polis insists a host of prizes, including five \$1 million awards and 25 \$50,000 college scholarships, are critical to the vaccination campaign. The state health department sends text messages to unvaccinated residents who live near scheduled clinic locations to alert them about a \$100 Walmart gift card incentive. The state says clinics have seen a 40% increase in visits since the program was announced July 21.

The Biden administration is betting the incentives will work. In a statement this week, the White House cited a grocery store chain that offered \$100 to its workers to get the COVID-19 shot and then saw vaccination rates climb.

State and local governments can use federal American Rescue Plan relief funding to provide the \$100, according to the statement.

Study: Vaccinated people can carry as much virus as others

By LINDSEY TANNER, MIKE STOBBE and PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

In another dispiriting setback for the nation's efforts to stamp out the coronavirus, scientists who studied a big COVID-19 outbreak in Massachusetts concluded that vaccinated people who got so-called breakthrough infections carried about the same amount of the coronavirus as those who did not get the shots.

Health officials on Friday released details of that research, which was key in this week's decision by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to recommend that vaccinated people return to wearing masks indoors in parts of the U.S. where the delta variant is fueling infection surges. The authors said the findings suggest that the CDC's mask guidance should be expanded to include the entire country, even outside of hot spots.

The findings have the potential to upend past thinking about how the disease is spread. Previously, vaccinated people who got infected were thought to have low levels of virus and to be unlikely to pass it to others. But the new data shows that is not the case with the delta variant.

The outbreak in Provincetown — a seaside tourist spot on Cape Cod in the county with Massachusetts' highest vaccination rate — has so far included more than 900 cases. About three-quarters of them were people who were fully vaccinated.

Travis Dagenais, who was among the many vaccinated people infected, said "throwing caution to the wind" and partying in crowds for long nights over the July Fourth holiday was a mistake in hindsight.

"The dominant public messaging has been that the vaccine means a return to normal," the 35-year-old Boston resident said Thursday. "Unfortunately, I've now learned it's a few steps toward normal, not the zero-to-sixty that we seem to have undertaken."

Dagenais credits being vaccinated with easing the worst of the flu-like symptoms in a couple of days. He has recovered.

Like many states, Massachusetts lifted all COVID-19 restrictions in late May, ahead of the traditional Memorial Day start of the summer season. Provincetown this week reinstated an indoor mask requirement for everyone.

Leaked internal documents on breakthrough infections and the delta variant suggest the CDC may be considering other changes in advice on how the nation fights the coronavirus, such as recommending masks for everyone and requiring vaccines for doctors and other health workers.

The delta variant, first detected in India, causes infections that are more contagious than the common

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 52 of 76

cold, flu, smallpox and the Ebola virus, and it is as infectious as chickenpox, according to the documents, which mentioned the Provincetown cases.

The documents were obtained by The Washington Post. As they note, COVID-19 vaccines are still highly effective against the delta variant at preventing serious illness and death.

The Provincetown outbreak and the documents highlight the enormous challenge the CDC faces in encouraging vaccination while acknowledging that breakthrough cases can occur and can be contagious but are uncommon.

The documents appear to be talking points for CDC staff to use with the public. One point advised: "Acknowledge the war has changed," an apparent reference to deepening concern that many millions of vaccinated people could be a source of wide-ranging spread.

An agency spokeswoman declined to comment on the documents.

The White House on Friday defended its approach to rising virus cases and shifting public health guidelines, repeatedly deferred to the CDC while stressing the need for vaccinations.

"The most important takeaway is actually pretty simple. We need more people to get vaccinated," White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said.

Pressed about the changing guidance, Jean-Pierre repeatedly said, "We don't make those types of decisions from here."

People with breakthrough infections make up an increasing portion of hospitalizations and in-hospital deaths among COVID-19 patients, coinciding with the spread of the delta variant, according to the leaked documents.

Although experts generally agreed with the CDC's revised indoor masking stance, some said the report on the Provincetown outbreak does not prove that vaccinated people are a significant source of new infections.

"There's scientific plausibility for the (CDC) recommendation. But it's not derived from this study," said Jennifer Nuzzo, a Johns Hopkins University public health researcher.

The CDC report is based on about 470 COVID-19 cases linked to the Provincetown festivities, which included densely packed indoor and outdoor holiday events at bars, restaurants, guest houses and rental homes.

Researchers ran tests on a portion of them and found roughly the same level of virus in those who were fully vaccinated and those who were not.

Three-quarters of the infections were in fully vaccinated individuals. Among those fully vaccinated, about 80% experienced symptoms with the most common being cough, headache, sore throat, muscle aches and fever.

Dagenais said he started to feel ill the evening he returned home and initially chalked it up to long nights of partying in packed Provincetown nightclubs.

But as the days wore on and the fever, chills, muscle aches and fatigue set in, he knew it was something more.

In the report, the measure researchers used to assess how much virus an infected person is carrying does not indicate whether they are actually transmitting the virus to other people, said Dr. Angela Rasmussen, a virologist at the University of Saskatchewan.

CDC officials say more data is coming. They are tracking breakthrough cases as part of much larger studies that involve following tens of thousands of vaccinated and unvaccinated people across the country over time.

First evacuation flight brings 221 Afghans, many kids, to US

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The first flight evacuating Afghans who worked alongside Americans in Afghanistan brought more than 200 people, including scores of children and babies in arms, to new lives in the United States on Friday, and President Joe Biden said he was proud to welcome them home.

The launch of the evacuation flights, bringing out former interpreters and others who fear retaliation

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 53 of 76

from Afghanistan's Taliban for having worked with American troops and civilians, highlights American uncertainty about how Afghanistan's government and military will fare after the last U.S. combat forces leave that country in the coming weeks.

Family members are accompanying the interpreters, translators and others on the flights out. The first evacuation flight, an airliner, carried 221 Afghans under the special visa program, including 57 children and 15 infants, according to an internal U.S. government document obtained by The Associated Press.

It touched down in Dulles, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C., after midnight, according to the FlightAware tracking service.

Friday's flight was "an important milestone as we continue to fulfill our promise to the thousands of Afghan nationals who served shoulder-to-shoulder with American troops and diplomats over the last 20 years in Afghanistan," Biden said. He said he wanted to honor the military veterans, diplomats and others in the U.S. who have advocated for the Afghans.

"Most of all," Biden said in a statement, "I want to thank these brave Afghans for standing with the United States, and today, I am proud to say to them: 'Welcome home.'"

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin lauded the Afghans for their work alongside Americans and said their arrival demonstrates the U.S. government's commitment to them.

Friday's flight was all about "keeping promises," said Will Fischer, an Iraq war veteran and an advocate on veteran's issues.

But a refugee agency said the Biden administration appeared to be still scrambling to work out the resettlement of thousands more of the Afghans, and it urged Biden to bring them quickly to the U.S. or a U.S. territory, such as Guam.

"To date, there is simply no clear plan as to how the vast majority of our allies will be brought to safety," Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, president of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service resettlement agency, said of the Afghan interpreters.

"We cannot in good conscience put them at risk in third countries with unreliable human rights records, or where the Taliban may be able to reach them," the resettlement official said.

The Biden administration calls the effort Operation Allies Refuge. The operation has broad backing from Republican and Democratic lawmakers and from veterans groups. Supporters cite repeated instances of Taliban forces targeting Afghans who worked with Americans or with the Afghan government.

Congress on Thursday overwhelmingly approved legislation that would allow an additional 8,000 visas and \$500 million in funding for the Afghan visa program.

The United States has been talking with Qatar and Kuwait about temporarily hosting thousands of other Afghan interpreters who are much further behind in their visa application process than Friday's arrivals.

But U.S. officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss negotiations, said Friday that no deal had been closed with those two countries. Concerns about housing Afghans who have not completed their security screenings and uncertainty on the American side about finding funding for the massive relocation effort have remained obstacles, the U.S. officials said.

Biden announced earlier this year the U.S. would withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan by Sept. 11, honoring a withdrawal agreement struck by former President Donald Trump. He later said the U.S. military operation would end on Aug. 31, calling it "overdue." Some administration officials have expressed surprise at the extent and speed of Taliban gains of territory in the countryside since then.

Biden said that although U.S. troops are leaving Afghanistan, the U.S. will keep supporting Afghanistan through security assistance to Afghan forces and humanitarian and development aid to the Afghan people.

The newly arrived Afghan people will join 70,000 others who have resettled in the United States since 2008 under the special visa program.

Subsequent flights are due to bring more of the roughly 700 applicants who are furthest along in the process of getting visas, having already won approval and cleared security screening.

The first arrivals were screened for the coronavirus and received vaccines if they wanted them, said Tracey Jacobson, the U.S. diplomat running the effort. They were expected to stay at a hotel on a base in Fort Lee, Virginia, for about seven days, completing medical exams and other final steps, Jacobson said. Resettlement organizations will help them as they travel to communities around the United States,

with some bound for family members already here, she said.

As China absorbs Hong Kong, why do both get Olympic teams?

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Two teams, from two Chinese cities, confronting each other on a badminton court, thwacking the shuttlecock back and forth.

Nothing unusual there. In China, teams play each other all the time. For the mixed doubles pairing from Beijing that emerged victorious, the match this week had the banality of any other domestic competition.

"Because we know each other so well," said the woman on the winning team, Huang Yaqiong. "There's nothing different."

Except this was an Olympic semifinal at the Tokyo Games. And for China, the rare privilege of being able to field two distinct teams — one from the Chinese mainland, in bright communist red, the other from its city of Hong Kong, in a royal blue — was essentially giving it two bites at the Olympic cherry. That's two routes to securing another of those shiny Olympic gold medals that China's communist leaders so crave as proof they are doing a sterling job.

China's double-teaming of the Olympics — the equivalent, say, of the United States fielding both a national team and another of athletes solely from New York — has never been much of an issue at the Olympics and isn't becoming one so far in Tokyo.

But two things are happening that could weigh on the equation.

First, Hong Kong is winning, like never before. Tokyo is the most successful games ever for the city of 7.5 million people on the south China coast. A gold medal in the men's foil event for fencer Cheung Ka Long was Hong Kong's first since the one-time British colony was reabsorbed by China in 1997. Cheung was born just 20 days before that momentous change in the city's trajectory.

When windsurfer Lee Lai Shan won Hong Kong's first and only previous gold, at the Atlanta Games in 1996, "God Save the Queen" played at the medal ceremony. In Tokyo, for Cheung, it was China's anthem, "March of the Volunteers."

Swimmer Siobhan Haughey, born in Hong Kong four months after the 1997 handover, also has two silver medals from Tokyo, becoming the city's first multiple medalist. Their combined haul of treasure outshines the one gold, one silver and one bronze that Hong Kong had accumulated through all of its previous appearances since its Olympic debut in 1952.

But such success also begs a question: Is it fair that China — with one team labeled China and the other Hong Kong, China — is getting multiple pathways to Olympic podiums? Should Hong Kong athletes instead be folded into China's national team — as, for example, athletes from Scotland, Wales and some from Northern Ireland are in Team Great Britain with the English?

One could even argue that China is extra-privileged by having three teams at the Games, if one accepts Beijing's position that the island of Taiwan is also part of its territory. To avoid a battle with Beijing, Taiwan is made to compete at the Olympics as "Chinese Taipei." That's the name of the capital of the island off China's east coast which has governed itself since 1949, when it became the refuge for China's Nationalist government that fled the communist takeover of the mainland.

Naturally, Hong Kong athletes shudder at any suggestion of losing their team.

"Hong Kong really has its own special characteristics. We have always had our own training system," said Tse Ying Suet, the female member of the "Hong Kong, China" pairing that lost to China proper in the badminton mixed doubles semis.

"It's a matter of pride for Hong Kong that from such a small place, you can get a fencing gold medal and a swimming silver medal. It's such fun that a place so small can perform so well."

The other change in any re-evaluation of whether Hong Kong still warrants its own team is how China has been treating the territory of late. In short, not kindly.

An ongoing crackdown in Hong Kong on pro-democracy voices has followed in the wake of often violent anti-government and anti-China protests that convulsed the city for months in 2019.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 55 of 76

On the same day that Haughey booked her first ticket to a Tokyo final, in the 200-meter freestyle, a court in Hong Kong found the first person guilty of secessionism and terrorism under a sweeping new national security law.

The erosion of Hong Kong's freedoms feeds in multiple ways into the question of its Olympic team.

On the one hand, every arrest, every newspaper closure, and every other blow to the liberties that set Hong Kong apart from China's other cities would seem to undermine the justification for its separate status at the Games. Beijing and Shanghai don't get Olympic teams, so the more it resembles them, why should Hong Kong?

But on the other hand, to strip Hong Kong of its team when its uniqueness is already under attack would be another morale-bashing blow to its identity.

"Hongkongers want to be represented independently at sporting events, as it helps grow their community and the sense of belonging," says Nathan Law, a Hong Kong opposition leader based in Britain. "As Hong Kong enjoys a distinct culture and community, they should continue to be represented by their own team."

Crowds have also sent that message by gathering in Hong Kong shopping malls to cheer on their medal winners. Malls were places of protest in 2019.

Videos on social media showed a mall crowd chanting "We are Hong Kong" as a giant screen broadcast the Tokyo medal ceremony for Cheung, largely drowning out China's anthem.

Kim-Wah Chung, deputy CEO of the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute, says the city's Olympic team has become "a symbol of resistance" for people who are angry and frustrated at Beijing. Rooting for Hong Kong athletes and also cheering when mainland Chinese athletes lose is "an expression of the growing antagonism," he said.

Chung added that he would not be surprised if Beijing seeks to disband Hong Kong's team in the future and incorporate its athletes into one China team, to knock away another aspect of the city's uniqueness.

"Beijing," he said, "thinks that it can do anything."

Although Hong Kong is unusual in the Olympic movement, it is not alone in being both separate but not entirely so.

Should athletes from the Pacific Island of Guam or the U.S. Virgin Islands in the Caribbean triumph in Tokyo, the anthem their Olympic champions would hear would be the U.S. one, "The Star Spangled Banner." As U.S. territories, they compete under their own flags at the Games, like Hong Kong. American Samoa and Puerto Rico also have their own teams.

Olympic historian David Wallechinsky describes Olympic organizers' position on such territories as "ambiguous and fluid."

"Hong Kong and the other colonies appear to have been allowed to continue as beneficiaries of a sort of grandfather clause, although I have never seen a document explaining the situation," said the author of "The Complete Book of the Olympics."

For the moment, then, Hong Kong's Olympic future seems solid. But for how long?

"There has been no discussion of Hong Kong's status as far as I am aware," International Olympic Committee spokesman Mark Adams said Friday. "I see no reason why it won't continue."

Biden sees shortages to stop climate-change fueled wildfires

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

President Joe Biden is sounding the alarm about the need for more resources to fight a series of wildfires in western states, as climate change has worsened the spread and ferocity of the blazes.

"Our resources are already being stretched to keep up," Biden told a bipartisan group of governors at a virtual meeting Friday. "We need more help."

The president opened the meeting with a nod to Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, who sought the Democratic nomination for president against Biden by stressing the threats from climate change. The mix of intense heat, droughts and other events tied to rising average temperatures has turned the fires into a national challenge as the smoke is worsening air quality as far away as New York City.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 56 of 76

"Jay, you're beginning to convince the American people there is a thing called climate crisis," the president said at the start of his remarks, before reeling through a series of troubling numbers.

It was the second meeting between Biden and the governors, and the situation has only worsened since the first, putting a strain on aircraft, hoses and other supplies.

"Since our last meeting, the number of large uncontained wildfires has nearly doubled to 66 fires," Biden said. "The number of firefighters on the job to battle them has tripled. Over 3.4 million acres have already burned."

The Washington governor took the opportunity to discuss the shortage of supplies to stop the fires. But he said his biggest worry is that Biden's agenda to reduce carbon emissions and limit climate change won't clear Congress.

"That's going to ultimately decide whether these forests survive in the next century," Inslee said.

Other governors attending the virtual meeting included: Oregon's Kate Brown, Montana's Greg Gianforte, Wyoming's Mark Gordon, Idaho's Brad Little, California's Gavin Newsom and Minnesota's Tim Walz.

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

By The Associated Press undefined

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

CDC encourages use of new tests that detect both COVID-19 and the flu

CLAIM: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revoked Emergency Use Authorization for coronavirus PCR tests because they were inaccurate, led to false positives and confused positive influenza cases with COVID-19.

THE FACTS: The claim is false. The CDC is taking steps to phase out one coronavirus test that was developed early in the pandemic, not because of inaccurate results, but because newer tests can simultaneously test patients for influenza. The FDA has approved roughly 280 polymerase chain reaction, or PCR, coronavirus tests, which determine whether sequences from the virus's genome are present in a patient's nasal swab. Early in the pandemic, in February 2020, the CDC introduced a coronavirus PCR test, known as the "CDC 2019-Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Real-Time RT-PCR Diagnostic Panel." On July 21, the CDC announced that after this year, it would no longer request an Emergency Use Authorization from the FDA for that one test, which means laboratories will stop using it. Kristen Nordlund, health communication specialist at the CDC, told The Associated Press the agency made the move because newer PCR testing options now exist. "The CDC 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019 nCoV) Real-Time RT-PCR Diagnostic Panel met an important unmet need when it was developed and deployed and has not demonstrated any performance issues," Nordlund said. She said the agency was encouraging labs to switch to tests that can detect influenza at the same time, since it will "save both time and resources." But social media users misinterpreted and misrepresented the announcement. False claims circulated on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram that the CDC's move meant the agency and the FDA had admitted PCR tests do not work. Some posts online falsely said the test was unable to differentiate between coronavirus and influenza, leading to inflated COVID-19 counts and depressed flu counts. In fact, PCR tests are designed to detect very specific areas of the viral genome, so tests do not get confused between which virus is present, said Matthew Binnicker, director of the clinical virology lab at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. "PCR tests, including the one developed by the CDC, are highly accurate and are able to differentiate between SARS-CoV-2 and influenza," Binnicker said. "In other words, a COVID-19 test will not be positive if a person really has influenza, and vice versa." Binnicker said there are benefits to having one test that can detect both viruses, since the symptoms for both illnesses are often similar early on. Furthermore, neither the CDC nor the FDA has cast any doubt on the effectiveness of PCR technology. "PCR tests are generally considered to be the 'gold standard' for COVID-19 diagnosis," said James McKinney, a press officer for

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 57 of 76

the FDA.

— Associated Press writers Terrence Fraser in New York and Jude Joffe-Block in Phoenix contributed this report.

COVID-19 variants can be tested through genome sequencing

CLAIM: No test can identify COVID-19 variants. Tests can only determine if a person is positive or negative for the disease.

THE FACTS: Social media users are taking advantage of growing concerns around the coronavirus delta variant to push out misinformation online, including false claims that health professionals are lying to patients about contracting the variant and that a test for it does not exist. In fact, it is possible to test for variants using genome sequencing. "It's the patterns of mutations in the genome that determine the differences," said Dr. Phil Febbo, chief medical officer for Illumina, a San Diego-based company that develops genomic sequencing technologies. Viruses mutate or change as they spread, creating variants. Variants can make a virus more transmissible or lead to more severe disease. Repositories online allow medical officials to scan and see all the different sequences of the virus. Researchers sequence viruses to answer such questions as whether a given variant is more or less dangerous and whether it increases risk for people, said Dr. Angela Branche, co-director of the University of Rochester Vaccine Treatment Evaluation Unit. "It's meant to help us understand how quickly the virus changes itself and the current protection you get after you are infected," Branche said. The delta variant was first detected in India and now makes up 83% of U.S. COVID-19 cases. "We have seen cases skyrocket in the last few weeks. The vast majority of that is attributable to SARS-COV2 delta variant because we are sequencing a good chunk of all positive cases across the country," said Joseph Fauver, associate research scientist in epidemiology at Yale University's School of Public Health.

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

Schedule of 'planned COVID-19 variants' is fake

CLAIM: A table shows a list of planned COVID-19 variants and when they will be "released" to the public.

THE FACTS: As the highly transmissible delta variant of the coronavirus contributes to infection surges across the United States and the world, social media users are falsely claiming the emergence of new variants is a planned ploy by universities, nonprofits and global elites. "These are the PLANNED COVID-19 VARIANTS - just look at the dates when they will be 'released' to the media," read several posts shared on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and TikTok. The posts included an image of a table in Spanish, which listed "launch" dates between 2021 and 2023 for 21 potential COVID-19 variants named after the Greek alphabet. Next to the table, the posts included logos of universities and organizations including Johns Hopkins University, the World Health Organization, the World Economic Forum and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The table doesn't represent the work of these organizations, nor any legitimate scientific organization. The World Economic Forum and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation both responded to Associated Press queries to confirm the document wasn't real. The table also falsely claims the delta variant of the coronavirus emerged in June 2021. It was first detected in India in October 2020. Finally, the posts ignore that variants occur in the population through random mutations and are not created by humans. It is very challenging to predict when another serious variant will emerge or how many will affect the population in the years ahead, according to Dr. Christopher Murray, a public health researcher and director of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington. So far, Murray said, researchers know about four serious variants circulating in the global population. That's after about 2 billion cases of COVID-19 have been identified worldwide. Given that information, Murray said, his best guess is that a new serious variant will emerge once every 500 million infections. Still, he says, it's "impossible" to know for certain. "That's a crazy wild guess but it's what we've observed," Murray said. "The goal of predicting the next evolutions is quite hard."

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

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 58 of 76

Hydroxychloroquine cannot be made at home using citrus

CLAIM: Hydroxychloroquine can be made at home by boiling citrus peels in water.

THE FACTS: A video circulating on TikTok falsely suggests the drug hydroxychloroquine can be made at home by boiling grapefruit and lemon peels in water. "Today we're going to make our own hydroxychloroquine," says the woman in the video, who identifies herself as an intuitive healer. "This is all you need. You need three organic lemons and three organic grapefruit. You want the rinds. That's where all the healing properties are." But that's not how hydroxychloroquine is made. "Hydroxychloroquine cannot be made by boiling grapefruit and lime rinds, or any other citrus rinds," said Dr. Joseph Fortunak, professor of chemistry and pharmaceutical sciences at Howard University. "Hydroxychloroquine is made by chemical synthesis 'in the lab.' It has never been reported as a natural product from any plant or animal." Fortunak said the process of boiling citrus rinds in water isolates a natural chemical compound called limonene, which has health benefits, but is "assuredly not hydroxychloroquine." Former President Donald Trump repeatedly touted the use of hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 infection, but health experts and health agencies within his administration said the drug is not safe or effective for treating the disease, The Associated Press has reported. The drug is routinely used to treat malaria, lupus and rheumatoid arthritis.

— Terrence Fraser

Video exaggerates flowery welcome for Macron in French Polynesia

CLAIM: A video shows French President Emmanuel Macron becoming a "human wreath" during his official welcome to French Polynesia, as leis are layered over him from his head to his knees.

THE FACTS: The video was manipulated to add numerous garlands beyond those actually draped around Macron's neck as part of a traditional welcoming ceremony as he arrived in Tahiti's Faa'a International Airport on July 24 for meetings in French Polynesia. The altered video made it appear as though Macron was swamped by leis from his head to his knees. In the original footage, which was filmed by Agence France Presse, Macron can be seen with several leis draped over him but not to the extent shown in the altered video social media users shared online. The Associated Press took similar footage of Macron at the airport near Papeete, the capital of French Polynesia. "Emmanuel Macron is greeted with a welcome ceremony as he begins his first official trip to French Polynesia," read one tweet that shared the manipulated screenshot of Macron. The former French colony is made up of five archipelagos with a total of 118 islands. Since 2004, it has had autonomous status, defined as "an overseas country within the republic" which "is governed freely and democratically, by its representatives." But Macron is still its head of state, and the long-awaited visit is part of what his office calls his "Tour de France" aimed at reaffirming "our proximity to overseas territories."

— Beatrice Dupuy

Families paying off rent, food, debts with child tax credit

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

NASHUA, N.H. (AP) — Christina Darling finally replaced her 2006 Chevrolet Equinox after it broke down several times while picking her children up from day care. But the 31-year-old mother of two was struggling to keep up with the car payments.

Brianne Walker desperately wanted to take her three children and two siblings camping for the first time but wasn't sure how she could pay for it. After all, she was behind on her rent, and day care and grocery costs were adding up.

Then, the two women from New Hampshire got a surprise in their bank accounts this month. They qualified for the expanded child tax credit, part of President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package. Families on average are getting \$423 this month; the Treasury Department estimates that 35.2 million families received payments in July.

"The additional money does help alleviate the pressure," said Walker, 29, who took custody of her two

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 59 of 76

siblings last year after her mother overdosed. The \$800 credit will help make up for losses she incurred after quitting a kitchen design job to care for the five youngsters, ages 3 to 19.

Biden increased the amounts going to families and expanded it to include those whose income is so little they don't owe taxes. The benefits begin to phase out at incomes of \$75,000 for individuals, \$112,500 for heads of household and \$150,000 for married couples. Families with incomes up to \$200,000 for individuals and \$400,000 for married couples can still receive the previous \$2,000 credit.

In the past, eligible families got a credit after filing their taxes — either as a lump sum payment or a credit against taxes owed. But now six months of payments are being advanced monthly through the end of the year. A recipient receives the second half when they file their taxes. The credit is \$3,600 annually for children under age 6 and \$3,000 for children ages 6 to 17. Eligible families will receive \$300 monthly for each child under 6 and \$250 per older child.

Advocates argue the monthly payments make more sense for low-income families.

"One of the problems with the big check in a year, if your car broke six months before, that is a long time to wait," said Michael Reinke, executive director of the Nashua Soup Kitchen & Shelter, which serves many families making less than \$26,000 a year.

"When people have money over a consistent period of time, it's easier to make sure it's going to the expenses you really need," he said. "Sometimes, if you get it all at once, it's hard to budget."

Robin McKinney, co-founder and CEO of the CASH Campaign of Maryland, a Baltimore nonprofit organization that helps low-income residents file taxes, said the credit is providing people money in their pockets now, when they need it most.

"We know right now that peoples' hours are down or they're still struggling to get back to the same level of income that they had before, and this will create some stability for those families to know that over the next six months that they're going to be getting this payment," McKinney said.

If all the money goes out, the expectation is that could significantly reduce poverty — with one study estimating it could cut child poverty by 45%. And it comes at a time when unemployment benefits are being phased out and the federal eviction moratorium is set to expire Saturday.

The payments are also a test case of sorts. Biden ultimately would like to make them permanent — and the impact they have could go a long way to shaping that debate later this year.

"It infuses money into the family home," said Suzanne Torregano, director of Family Services at Kingsley House in New Orleans, who estimated that 85%-90% of the parents the group serves are getting the monthly payments.

Still, some advocates argue the money may never reach the neediest because their incomes are so low they aren't required to file a tax return, they don't have a fixed address or bank account, or don't have the internet savvy to apply.

"What we are finding is that homeless families ... while many of them are eligible for the tax credit, they have significant barriers to obtaining it," said Larry Seamans, president of FamilyAid Boston, which serves 900 families daily.

"We have some counter-intuitive struggles of families who may be unfamiliar with tax forms, tax laws and the fact that by filing a tax return, you can actually get money to support your family," Seamans said.

"Many families ... are not on the tax rolls. They now have to find sufficient documentation to prove that they are eligible."

Families who do receive the credit are mostly spending it on rent, child care and groceries, as well as catching up on cellphone and other bills. For Darling, the \$550 she gets will go to car payments, more fresh produce and a babysitter so she can attend Nashua Board of Education meetings. She is running for a seat on the board. Eventually, she hopes to put money aside to save for a home with a yard.

"Every step closer we get to a livable wage is beneficial. That is money that gets turned around and spent on the betterment of my kids and myself," said Darling, a housing resource coordinator who had been supplementing her \$35,000-a-year salary with monthly visits to the Nashua Soup Kitchen and Shelter's food pantry.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 60 of 76

McKinney, who is married with a 5-year-old son and qualifies for the tax credit, is getting \$167 a month. She said it's all going to help pay for child care, which costs \$288 a week.

"Right now, it's out-of-school time because it's the summer, so people have to pay for camps and babysitting support so that the parents can go to work," said McKinney, of Columbia, Maryland. "I know a lot of people who are like: 'This money is coming at just the right time, because this summer is more expensive for me for child care.'"

Many families in higher-income brackets who receive less money are socking it away for things like a family trip, school supplies or Christmas gifts.

Carleigh Steele, who received several hundred dollars, said the money is giving her peace of mind a month after she moved into a house in Baltimore with the help of Habitat for Humanity.

"It's sitting in my bank account for all the home-buying things that I need, and for the rainy day fund for my house — just to make sure that I can keep myself economically stable," said Steele, who has a 6-year-old daughter.

Brianne Epps, a mother of four from Jackson, Mississippi, is using the money to pay bills but also to finance her dream of opening a soul food catering business. "It will help me, for one, to promote my catering business — to get that off the ground," she said.

Molly Vigeant, of East Hartford, Connecticut, a 25-year-old single mother who works as a special needs paraprofessional in a high school, hopes to spend the money to repair or replace her car. But she's had trouble accessing a portal aimed at helping applicants and hasn't yet received anything.

"It doesn't hurt yet," she said of the delayed payment. "But, it's a 20-year-old car with over 200,000 miles on it and I make 20 grand a year. A new one is not going to fall from the sky, when your debt-to-income ratio is garbage and you know you can't finance a car."

Justice says IRS must give Trump tax returns to Congress

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department, in a reversal, says the Treasury Department must provide the House Ways and Means Committee former President Donald Trump's tax returns, apparently ending a long legal showdown over the records.

In a memo dated Friday, Justice's Office of Legal Counsel said the committee chairman "has invoked sufficient reasons for requesting the former President's tax information" and that under federal law, "Treasury must furnish the information to the Committee."

The 39-page memo is signed by Dawn Johnsen, installed by the Biden administration as the acting head of the legal counsel office.

During the Trump administration, then-Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said he wouldn't turn over the tax returns because he concluded they were being sought by Democrats who control the House of Representatives for partisan reasons.

The committee sued for the records under a federal law that says the Internal Revenue Service "shall furnish" the returns of any taxpayer to a handful of top lawmakers. The committee said it needed Trump's taxes for an investigation into whether he complied with tax law.

Trump's Justice Department defended Mnuchin's refusal and Trump himself also intervened to try to prevent the materials from being turned over to Congress. Under a court order from January, Trump would have 72 hours to object after the Biden administration formally changes the government's position in the lawsuit.

Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. already has obtained copies of Trump's personal and business tax records as part of an ongoing criminal investigation. Trump tried to prevent his accountants from handing over the documents, taking the issue to the Supreme Court. The justices rejected Trump's argument that he had broad immunity as president.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said the tax returns remain of interest to lawmakers. "Access to former President Trump's tax returns is a matter of national security. The American people deserve to know the

facts of his troubling conflicts of interest and undermining of our security and democracy as president," Pelosi said in a statement.

The issue has its roots in the 2016 presidential campaign, when Trump claimed that he could not release his taxes due to an IRS audit.

Russia blames space station lab incident on software failure

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — A Russian space official on Friday blamed a software problem on a newly docked science lab for briefly knocking the International Space Station out of position.

The space station lost control of its orientation for 47 minutes on Thursday, when Russia's Nauka science lab accidentally fired its thrusters a few hours after docking, pushing the orbiting complex from its normal configuration. The station's position is key for getting power from solar panels and for communications with space support teams back on Earth. The space station's communications with ground controllers also blipped out twice for a few minutes on Thursday.

Vladimir Solovyov, flight director of the space station's Russian segment, blamed the incident on a "short-term software failure." In a statement released Friday by the Russian space agency Roscosmos, Solovyov said because of the failure, a direct command to turn on the lab's engines was mistakenly implemented.

He added the incident was "quickly countered by the propulsion system" of another Russian component at the station and "at the moment, the station is in its normal orientation" and all its systems "are operating normally."

Roscosmos director Dmitry Rogozin later Friday suggested that "human factor" may have been at play.

"There was such euphoria (after Nauka successfully docked with the space station), people relaxed to some extent," Rogozin said in a radio interview. "Perhaps one of the operators didn't take into account that the control system of the block will continue to adjust itself in space. And it determined a moment three hours after (the docking) and turned on the engines."

NASA said Thursday that the incident moved the station 45 degrees out of attitude, about one-eighth of a complete circle, but the complex was never spinning, there was no immediate damage or danger to the crew.

The incident caused NASA to postpone a repeat test flight for Boeing's crew capsule that had been set for Friday afternoon from Florida. It will be Boeing's second attempt to reach the 250-mile-high (400-kilometer-high) station before putting astronauts on board. Software problems botched the first test.

Russia's long-delayed 22-ton (20-metric-ton) lab called Nauka arrived earlier Thursday, eight days after it launched from the Russian launch facility in Baikonur, Kazakhstan.

The launch of Nauka, which will provide more room for scientific experiments and space for the crew, had been repeatedly delayed because of technical problems. It was initially scheduled to go up in 2007.

In 2013, experts found contamination in its fuel system, resulting in a long and costly replacement. Other Nauka systems also underwent modernization or repairs.

Stretching 43 feet (13 meters) long, Nauka became the first new compartment for the Russian segment of the outpost since 2010. On Monday, one of the older Russian units, the Pirs spacewalking compartment, undocked from the station to free up room for the new lab.

Nauka will require many maneuvers, including up to 11 spacewalks beginning in early September, to prepare it for operation.

According to Solovyov, on Friday the crew was busy equalizing the pressure in Nauka and planned to open the hatch to the lab later in the day.

The space station is currently operated by NASA astronauts Mark Vande Hei, Shane Kimbrough and Megan McArthur; Oleg Novitsky and Pyotr Dubrov of Russia's Roscosmos space corporation; Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Akihiko Hoshide and European Space Agency astronaut Thomas Pesquet.

In 1998, Russia launched the station's first compartment, Zarya, which was followed in 2000 by another big piece, Zvezda, and three smaller modules in the following years. The last of them, Rassvet, arrived at the station in 2010.

Belarus leader ready to invite Russian troops 'if necessary'

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Belarus' authoritarian president said Friday he's prepared to invite Russian troops into the country if such a move is necessary to ensure the security of both Belarus and Russia.

But, President Alexander Lukashenko said, at the moment "there is absolutely no need" to do that.

In remarks carried by the state-run Belta news agency, Lukashenko stressed that he had dealt with last year's anti-government protests without involving other countries' armed forces, but added that he would not hesitate to bring in Russian troops if necessary.

Belarus is able to quickly deploy 500,000 of its own personnel, but "if it is not enough, all Russian armed forces will be brought in," Lukashenko said, according to Belta. "If it is necessary, we won't hesitate."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday that Moscow hasn't received any official requests from Belarus to deploy troops, and the move "is possible only after an official request from the leadership of one country to the leadership of other."

Russia and Belarus have close military and defense ties. Two Russian radar stations communicating with nuclear submarines in the Atlantic and Indian oceans and parts of the Pacific are based in Belarus. In September, the two ex-Soviet nations are scheduled to conduct large-scale joint military exercises.

Until recently, Lukashenko's government had resisted Moscow's attempts to expand military presence in Belarus and rejected requests to open an airbase and station additional troops in the country.

But amid the political crisis that unfolded in Belarus after Lukashenko's reelection to a sixth term in August 2020 was met with huge protests, Russia promised its neighbor military support and allocated a \$1.5 billion loan for Belarus' ailing economy.

Lukashenko faced months of protests that were triggered by his being announced the winner of an August 2020 presidential vote that the opposition and the West saw as rigged. He responded to demonstrations with a massive crackdown that saw more than 35,000 people arrested and thousands beaten by police.

The United States and the European Union have imposed multiple sanctions targeting the Belarusian leadership and key sectors of its economy in the wake of the crisis.

Belarusian political analyst Valery Karbalevich told The Associated Press that Lukashenko's statements on Friday were a clear attempt to scare the West.

"For the first time, he threatened with the deployment of Russian troops to Belarus. However, the Kremlin is no hurry to support these initiatives," Karbalevich said.

Lukashenko has accused the West of attempting to orchestrate a revolution in the country he has ruled with an iron fist for decades and of plotting a coup, including by pressuring Belarus with sanctions. His challenger in the election fled to Lithuania and Lithuanian officials say authorities in Belarus are now flooding Lithuania's border with migrants to put that EU nation under pressure.

"They seem to seek out our sore spots. They hit primarily the export sectors of the Belarusian economy: petrochemistry, mechanical engineering, potash, and so on. But the main goal is to leave the people without pensions, salaries, benefits, education, medical care and cause discontent among Belarusians," Lukashenko said.

The Belarusian president called for further action against the country's human rights groups, alleging that behind them are foreign masterminds, and said government pressure on independent media would continue.

"Freedom of speech that we're protecting under the constitution today has turned into extremist activities," Lukashenko charged, urging state officials to closely control every journalist and blogger. "It's one thing to criticize the authorities. We have always took criticism adequately ... It's a different thing to call for a rebellion and massacre of those who don't support these so-called revolutionary, thuggish sentiments."

Belarusian authorities in recent weeks have ramped up the pressure against non-governmental organizations and independent media, conducting more than 200 raids of offices and apartments of activists and journalists this month alone, according to the Viasna human rights center.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 63 of 76

The Belarusian Association of Journalists said raids and detentions targeting reporters continued Friday in Minsk and other cities. Earlier this week, the authorities declared the Polish-funded Belsat TV channel an extremist group.

A total of 28 Belarusian journalists remain in custody either awaiting trial or serving their sentences. Journalist groups on Thursday demanded that authorities give urgent hospital care to a leading journalist who has been in pre-trial detention.

Rapinoe converts and US gets past Netherlands on penalties

By ANNE M. PETERSON AP Sports Writer

YOKOHAMA, Japan (AP) — When Megan Rapinoe stepped up to take her penalty, she was just trying to stay as calm as possible in the moment.

"You can either take one and lose it, or take one and win it," she said. "It's going to go one of two ways."

This one was a winner.

Rapinoe converted the deciding penalty in a shootout and the United States advanced to the semifinals of the women's Olympic soccer tournament 4-2 following a 2-2 draw with the Netherlands on Friday.

U.S. goalkeeper Alyssa Naeher stopped Vivianne Miedema's opening attempt in the shootout and then saved a shot from Aniek Nouwen before Rapinoe put her penalty away.

After Rapinoe converted, she turned to her teammates, folded her arms and grinned in triumph.

Afterward, she joked about the pressure.

"I just try to stay calm. I always say to myself, 'The worst that's going to happen is you're going to lose the whole thing,'" she smiled.

Miedema scored a pair of goals in regulation time for the Netherlands, giving her 10 goals for the tournament — an Olympic record. But the Dutch are headed home.

Miedema put the Netherlands ahead in the 18th minute but the Americans equalized when Sam Mewis headed in a goal off a feed from Lynn Williams in the 28th. Williams then gave the Americans the lead in the 31st.

Miedema, who was playing in her 100th game for the Netherlands, made it 2-2 in the 54th. Naeher stopped Lieke Martens' penalty in the 81st minute and the game went to overtime.

"I felt amazing. I should have taken the penalty in the game," Miedema said. "I should have just stuck with my plan and go from there. But it's life. It's football and I just need to move on."

Naeher was as cool following the game as she was during it, playing down her own performance while lauding her teammates.

"This team just kept pushing for 90 minutes, 120 minutes, and we just kept believing that we were going to find a way to get it done," Naeher said. "Very proud of the four players to step up and score their four penalties to go 4 for 4. That is huge."

The United States will next face familiar foe Canada in Kashima on Monday. The Canadians advanced to the semifinals 4-3 on penalties after a scoreless draw with Brazil in Rifu.

The Americans went to a shootout for the fifth time in a major tournament. The previous time was at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, when the U.S. was bounced by Sweden in the quarterfinals.

"It's such a cruel way to end a game," Rapinoe said. "It sucks to miss one, it sucks to be on the losing end of that. But that was not us today."

Friday's game at the International Stadium brought together the two teams that played in the World Cup final two years ago in France. The U.S. women won that 2-0 and afterward the crowd chanted "Equal Pay!" in support of the team's legal fight for equity with the men's national team.

United States coach Vlatko Andonovski tinkered with his lineup for Friday's match, with Rapinoe, Alex Morgan, Christen Press and Rose Lavelle on the bench at the start.

The grueling game was the latest hurdle in what has been a particularly uncharacteristic tournament for the United States. The normally stalwart Americans lost to Sweden 3-0 in its opener before beating New Zealand 6-1. They then advanced to the knockout round following a 0-0 draw with Australia.

The United States hadn't been shutout since 2017.

The Netherlands, meanwhile, poured on the offense in the group stage with an Olympic record 21 goals — smashing the previous record of 16 set by the United States in 2012.

Miedema, who plays for English club Arsenal, is only 25 and is already the all-time scoring leader for the Netherlands with 84 goals in 100 appearances. She is also the leading scorer in the Women's Super League in England.

The United States also played the Netherlands in Breda in November, winning 2-0. The Americans were unbeaten in 44 straight matches before the loss to Sweden at the Tokyo Games.

In Rifu, Canada goalkeeper Stephanie Labbe stopped Rafaelle's attempt and was rushed by her teammates. Canada has won bronze medals at the past two Olympics.

Australia earned its first trip to the semifinals by beating Britain 4-3 in extra time in Kashima. The Matildas will face Sweden, who beat host Japan 3-1 in Saitama.

Brutal killing spotlights violence against women in Pakistan

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Noor Mukadam's last hours were terror-filled. Beaten repeatedly, the 27-year-old jumped from a window but was dragged back, beaten again and finally beheaded. A childhood friend has been charged with her killing.

The gruesome death last week in an upscale neighborhood of the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, is the latest in a series of attacks on women in Pakistan, where rights activists say such gender-based assaults are on the rise as the country barrels toward greater religious extremism.

Mukadam was the daughter of a diplomat, and her status as a member of the country's elite has shone a spotlight on the relentless and growing violence against women in Pakistan, said prominent rights activist Tahira Abdullah. But the majority of women who are victims of such violence are among the country's poor and middle classes, and their deaths are often not reported or, when they are, often ignored.

"I could give you a list longer than my arm, only in one week" of attacks against women, said Abdullah. "The epidemic of sexual crimes and violence against women in Pakistan is a silent epidemic. No one sees it. No one is talking about it."

Still, Pakistan's Parliament this month failed to pass a bill that seeks to protect women from violence in the home, including attacks by a husband. Instead, it asked an Islamic ideology council to weigh in on the measure — the same council that previously said it was OK for a husband to beat his wife.

Data collected from domestic violence hotlines across the country showed a 200% increase in domestic violence between January and March last year, according to a Human Rights Watch report released earlier this year. The numbers were even worse after March, when COVID-19 lockdowns began, according to the report.

In 2020, Pakistan was near the bottom of the World Economic Forum's global gender index, coming in at 153 of 156 countries, ahead of only Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan, which held the last spot despite billions of dollars spent and 20 years of international attention on gender issues there.

Many of the attacks in Pakistan are so-called honor killings, where the perpetrator is a brother, father or other male relative. Each year, more than 1,000 women are killed in this way, many of them unreported, say human rights workers.

"The authorities have failed to establish adequate protection or accountability for abuses against women and girls, including so-called 'honor killings' and forced marriage," according to the HRW report.

Rights groups have been sharply critical of Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan and his government, saying he panders to the religious right and excuses the perpetrators of attacks on women.

A former cricket star who has married three times, Khan once had a reputation as a womanizer but has now embraced a conservative Islam. He keeps close ties with a religious cleric who blamed COVID-19 on "the wrongdoing of women." He once appeared to blame women for attacks by men saying, "if you raise temptation in society ... all these young guys have nowhere to go, it has consequences in the society."

His information minister, Fawad Chaudhry, says Khan's statements have been taken out of context and

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 65 of 76

denied violence against women is on the rise, without offering evidence. He said his government encourages women in politics and sports and in provinces where Khan's party dominates human rights legislation has been strengthened.

"I think this perception is not really close to reality, that in Pakistan women are not safe or maybe that there's a misogyny in practice in Pakistan," Chaudhry said in an interview.

Yet last week, one of Khan's Cabinet ministers, Ali Amin Gandapur, told a rally of thousands of mostly male supporters, that he would "slap and slap" a female opposition political leader.

Last September, a senior police officer blamed a woman who was ambushed and gang raped in front of her two children, saying she should not have been travelling at night and without a man.

Such remarks reflect an increase in ultraconservative and even extremist religious values in Pakistan, said Amir Rana of the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies.

The country has seen an explosion of religious organizations and religious political parties, many with extreme beliefs, said Rana, whose organization tracks and documents extremism in Pakistan.

These organizations have tremendous reach in most cities and towns, where they provide services from education to health care, and thus have extensive ability to influence social values, said Rana.

The history of religious extremism in Pakistan is complicated, and Chaudhry, the information minister, argued that America shares responsibility for the role it played in the region in the 1980s. At that time, Pakistan's military dictator aided by the U.S. used religious fervor to inspire Afghans to fight an invading Soviet Union. Many of those Afghans ended up in Pakistan as refugees.

"And very conveniently now, the U.S. media and U.S. authorities ... blame everything on Pakistan and have left the region," he said.

But Abdullah, the rights activist, said Pakistan cannot shirk its own responsibility, noting that same dictator, Gen. Mohammad Zia-ul Haq, introduced Islamic laws that, among other things, reduced women's rights to inheritance, limited the value of their testimony in court and made reporting a rape almost impossible by requiring four male witnesses.

In Mukadam's assault, police have charged Zahir Jaffar, the son of a wealthy industrialist, with murder. Initial reports say she was killed after spurning his marriage proposal. It's not clear whether Jaffar has a lawyer.

The brutality of the assault — the attacker used so-called brass knuckles — and the fear that his high social status means he could be freed, galvanized many in Pakistan to speak out. They have held protests and a candlelight vigil and launched a social media campaign #justicefornoor to preempt attempts to use influence and money to whisk the accused out of the country.

In one petition circulating online, the author demanded the country's judicial system "hold perpetrators of violence responsible. We demand justice. We demand it swiftly. We demand it for Noor. We demand it for all women."

Zarqa Khan, a student who attended a candlelight vigil for Mukadam, bemoaned how religion now pervades so much of life in Pakistan and how today she fears walking alone on the streets.

"I just didn't feel safe outside anymore," said Khan. "And that shouldn't be the scenario."

After mudslide, priest builds a new town on narco land

By ALBERTO ARCE and RODRIGO ABD Associated Press

MISSION SAN FRANCISCO DE ASIS, Honduras (AP) — First came Hurricane Eta. Then, Hurricane Iota, unleashing rains of biblical proportions on the hillside community of La Reina.

As Iota hammered La Reina for four days, residents kept watch on the mountain above their 300 homes for signs that they should flee. Some left quickly when the downpour ceased. Ivan Varela resisted, hoping to protect the seven houses he and his brothers had built over the years with money they earned in the United States.

On the last night, as his parents prayed, Varela shot his pistol into the air to scare off thieves stalking the properties of those who already had evacuated. But soon he realized the battle was lost. Water was

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 66 of 76

gushing out of the ground and the earth was starting to tremble. He called his brother in Florida.

"The town is going to disappear. We are losing everything," Varela said.

"The important thing is that you survive," his brother responded. "Leave!"

This story is part of a series, *After the Deluge*, produced with support from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.

Varela hid his tools in the hopes he would be able to recover them one day. He released his farm animals and the family dog and joined the exodus.

By nightfall, La Reina was gone, buried in an epic mudslide, its families among nearly half a million Central Americans displaced by the hurricanes. Bathed in tears and shaking with cold, the frightened and disoriented residents of La Reina wandered the main road at the bottom of the valley looking for help.

That's when the Rev. Leopoldo Serrano arrived in his Franciscan robes like an answer to their prayers, ready to take charge -- and ready, it would turn out, to make a deal with the devil to save the people of La Reina.

Serrano, a friar who ran a nearby drug rehabilitation center, understood they would have to act quickly if they were to keep families intact and the community from disintegrating. Something had to be done for the more than 1,000 people stranded in a valley marked by the poverty and drug violence that have driven so many Hondurans to the United States.

As often happens in Latin America, the priest stepped into the void.

"I don't want people to go to the United States. Families are broken, the suffering is immense," Serrano said. "Rebuilding the community helps to stop migration".

Serrano turned schools into shelters, looked for borrowed houses and organized a census of victims. He made hundreds of phone calls looking for help. Bags of food, clothes and medicine trickled in from relatives and churches abroad, but "the Honduran government did not even give us a tent," Serrano said.

In any case, they would need more than tents. To rebuild their houses and replant their crops, the villagers needed land -- and Serrano knew that much of that land was in the hands of drug traffickers.

So, the agent of God became a broker with agents of the underworld, many of whom were fighting each other for control of the land and lucrative drug routes from South America to Mexico and the United States. The pastor of souls turned into a project manager and construction foreman for the families of La Reina, building them a new town at Mission San Francisco de Asís.

"If we had to wait for the government to act, it could take forever, it may never happen and these people would be forced to leave," Serrano said. "Eight months later, they haven't built a house."

This was a ravaged land long before Hurricanes Eta and Iota washed away La Reina in November 2020 -- the first time in recorded history that successive Category 4 and 5 Atlantic hurricanes slammed the same place.

It was a slow-moving devastation. Ivan Ríos, 70, remembers how deer used to eat grass in front of their houses when he was a boy. Back then, they planted coffee without cutting the trees in keeping with Mayan teaching passed down through generations that severed roots rotted in tropical soil and would no longer hold it to the slopes.

But the cedar and cinnamon trees high in the surrounding mountains were as valuable as coffee, and outsiders started cutting the trees. Those who complained -- "whoever had a long tongue" -- were killed, Ríos said.

Residents of La Reina soon followed suit, cutting more trees to expand their coffee plantations and get timber to build their homes. The population grew and land prices rose. Husbands and sons began heading north about 20 years ago, so that today about 15% of the population of La Reina lives in the United States, most of them sending money back to buy land and houses.

As the trees came down and houses went up, climate change increased the rainfall in La Reina. Eta and Iota each dumped six times the average annual rainfall on the area.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 67 of 76

There is an old tale that grandparents here tell: A snake living in a mountain cavern drinks rainwater. It grows and grows and grows until it is too large for the cave, and the mountain cracks open -- unleashing a flood.

No snake was responsible for what happened in La Reina. When the Earth gave way, humans were at fault.

Serrano arrived here in 2009, after spiritual missions in New York and the Mosquitia region of Honduras. He found himself in a cursed and disputed land where violent drug traffickers ruled with impunity. In the area around his first house, corpses appeared hanging from trees.

Located on the border of the departments of Santa Barbara and Copan, his sprawling mission straddles the road that is one of the main drug trafficking corridors in the region. It starts in San Pedro Sula, on the Caribbean coast, where drugs from Venezuela and Colombia arrive in Central America, and ends at the border with Guatemala, en route to Mexico and the United States.

In between, it winds through a tropical green valley full of sugar cane, beneath the mountains that produce the best coffee in Honduras; dozens of little roads spread out like capillaries to Guatemala.

These routes have long been used by convoys belonging to various capos, the local mafia run by the Valle family and other cartels run by Alexander Ardón and Tony Hernández -- the brother of President Juan Orlando Hernández. All of the leaders have been arrested, extradited, convicted and imprisoned in the United States since 2014, and now there is a battle for succession.

Serrano surveyed the landscape from a lookout over the valley. "Half of all the land and businesses you see from here belong to drug traffickers," he said.

Since moving to the mission, Serrano has preached the Bible, organized protest marches against violence, negotiated drug-free events such as soccer matches, and promoted religious celebrations and social work.

Serrano built the rehab center for addicts in 2014 on land that was donated to him from a person related to illicit activities, he said. "I tell drug traffickers to convert to the faith, to use the money earned by destroying lives to rebuild them ... Drug addicts are used as a money-making machine by drug traffickers. Let them convert, repent and ask for forgiveness."

He convinced at least one young man to join his crusade, 21-year-old Oveniel Garcia, a recovered addict once close to the traffickers who would turn out to be key to their pursuit of land for the residents of La Reina.

But Serrano's message is not widely popular. He has sought protection for his mission, which is routinely observed by men passing by in oversized SUVs with tinted windows. Honduran police and military units also stop by several times a week, and Serrano's complaints to the prosecutor's office led to the installation of surveillance systems.

"They tell me that they are going to finish me off, one by one, killing the Franciscan brothers working with me," said Serrano, who is in poor health after heart surgery.

Several of the Franciscan friars living in the rehabilitation center are visibly traumatized by the threats. A year ago, Brother Santos, who used to go out to pray on the road, was kidnapped, beaten, doused with gasoline and subjected to a simulated hanging. He still is not able to talk about it.

But that has not deterred Serrano, who disparages the narcos and the government in equal measure. The people of La Reina needed help, and he didn't trust Honduran officials to do the job. He knew what had to be done.

Twenty-five years ago, the powerful local cartel run by Arnulfo Valle bought the 70 acres adjacent to the mission where Father Serrano hopes to put those displaced from La Reina.

When capos are arrested, the government confiscates whatever land is in their name and holds it in a byzantine bureaucracy. Heirs fight for control over hidden assets -- land that has been put in the name of front men and women, sometimes without their knowledge. "The land itself is not worth that much, but the message of who is in control is everything," Serrano explains.

Two weeks after the disaster, Serrano was publicly asking for land donations during Masses he broad-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 68 of 76

casts on Facebook. The way he tells it, Arnulfo Valle's son, José Luis, contacted him and they arranged for a legal donation.

"My responsibility was only to legalize the situation. I hired a lawyer to identify the legal owner and we got them to donate it to the National Agrarian Institute," which in turn would give houses and lots to La Reina's people and common areas to the mission, Serrano said.

But the story is a little more complicated than that. It all turned on an intermediary with Jose Luis Valle: the young friar, Oveniel Garcia.

Garcia, who ran away from home at the age of 12 and became a drug addict, is a street-smart survivor. At 16, he got a job cleaning floors in a discotheque frequented by traffickers, where he met Jose Luis Valle.

"Bodyguards, women, weapons, drugs," he recalls. "That same day I already knew who he was. The connection was immediate ... He paid the owner of the place so that I could dedicate myself only to him." They would spend many nights talking.

The closer they became the more Garcia learned about the Valle family business. He resisted Valle's request to work for him, but eventually found himself carrying a weapon. He was well aware that almost no one gets out of the drug business alive, and he was scared.

He had heard Serrano's call to drug traffickers to turn from evil to good, and he reached out. "The only way they could believe that I really wanted to disassociate myself and was not going to betray them was through a conversion," he explains. "Otherwise they would have killed me."

Garcia left Valle's orbit and entered Serrano's rehab center for seven months. Over the next few years, he became Serrano's right-hand man in the mission. He largely kept his distance from Valle until December 2020.

It was then that Serrano told Garcia, "We need land. Call your friend."

Valle agreed to give them the land, but he didn't have the titles. "He had to put pressure on those who occupied it, they were usurpers. He would go there with weapons. There were deaths," Garcia recounted, cryptically.

The signing and official transfer of the land took place on the last day of the year. On May 7, the first measurements were taken to mark out plots for houses.

And on May 28, the new inhabitants entered the farm to find narco squatters still occupying part of the land.

To evict them, men from La Reina moved in, armed only with machetes. Ivan Varela was among them. They moved the squatters' cattle out to the main road and, bit by bit, took possession of the land where they planned to build their new houses as part of the mission.

"We know that the father has put his life at risk for us," Varela said. "One reaches a limit where one cannot lose any more. We have lost everything, even fear."

Then, the government got involved -- or at least it said it was getting involved.

Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández visited the area in February, promising that his government would build "2,500 houses, a whole new town on a piece of land confiscated from traffickers." Construction companies had been hired, and they'd start in May, he said.

That wasn't quite accurate. "The president speaks three or four times a day in different places about different topics," explained Ramon Lara, minister of the National Agrarian Institute. "His advisors do not (always) give him good information."

He said there was no need for that many homes for the residents of La Reina, and some ensuing delays were due to the violence in the area.

May passed. At the end of June, seven months after the hurricanes, dozens of townspeople put on their best donated clothes to attend a ceremony with officials of the Project Coordination Unit of the government of Honduras. They'd come to open the envelopes containing the bids from companies seeking to build the houses at San Francisco de Asís Mission.

Now they promised to build in 100 days -- which would be in mid-October, the middle of the next hur-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 69 of 76

ricane season.

Serrano was skeptical and remains so. After Mass the previous day, he had warned the community to be wary: "In Honduras we live a daily storm more damaging than hurricanes, the storm of corruption. The authorities deceive us with false promises. That is why I tell you that I still have doubts about the construction of these houses."

At the ceremony, Serrano opened the blue folding chair he often carries with him and sat at a distance. He watched as officials handed out donated used toys to hundreds of children. Raul Raudales, project director sent by the government, thanked Serrano for his leadership and said the project would never have launched without him.

"He obtained the land and has guaranteed the order of the process" Raudales said. "Without him, without his pressure, without his daily phone calls, without his presence, this would take twice as long to happen, at least."

He asked Serrano to say a few words or bless the ceremony. The priest declined.

Each morning now, Serrano goes out to inspect the mission construction sites. A few men and women from La Reina have already begun to build three new homes and a group of apartments for widows with funds donated by churches. He checks on the type of stone they are using, takes measurements and coordinates the crews.

The workers put up windows, lay bricks and make cement. Each family must send one person to work on the construction of their home. They do not receive wages and if they don't work, they must pay into a kitty about \$6 a day (150 lempiras.)

A road is being built from the mission that goes directly up to the arable land on the mountain. "They neither want to nor should they stop being farmers," Father Serrano explains.

Despite his efforts, two dozen residents of La Reina have left for the United States; the number of Hondurans caught crossing the border into the U.S. was 180,000 in the first five months of this year, up more than 600% from the same period in 2020. Others would like to go but can't afford the \$12,000 price tag that coyotes are charging for the illegal journey across borders. They no longer have houses and land to put up as collateral.

Ivan Varela, who is camped out at his parents' house, is debating what to do. He spent eight years working two and three jobs a day in West Palm Beach, Florida, to earn the \$16,000 he needed to build a house in La Reina and buy a bit of land to process his family's coffee beans.

"What I earned in eight years was lost in one night," Varela said.

One thing's for sure, he said. If he goes again, this time he will take his 2-year-old son, and this time he will plan to stay for good.

Another La Reina resident, Obdulio Girón, said at the government ceremony that the only reason he has not left for the United States with his 7-year-old son is because he trusts that Serrano will get funds to build the houses.

But if this project fails, he said, he will have no choice.

Serrano and Garcia are determined to succeed.

The man who provided the land, Garcia's friend José Luis Valle, died in what Serrano and Garcia suggest was a suicide. "He did things knowing it would get him killed," Serrano explained. "In the history of the promised land there have always been wars."

Garcia says he is prepared to dedicate his life to service, starting with helping the people of La Reina and is hoping to be ordained soon.

"The father has made me a servant of God," Garcia said. "I have discovered that there is good, that I can help others to live in justice."

Serrano, meanwhile, soldiers on -- raising money, advocating construction over migration, training the next generation of priests. He preaches good farming over evil drug trafficking.

He shared a WhatsApp message from an army coroner who urged him to be cautious: "Don't keep talk-

ing about these people, Father, they will hurt you.”

Serrano was defiant. “They have weapons,” he replied, “if they wanted to kill me they would have done it already.”

And even his death would not stop the new town that was rising at Mission San Francisco de Asís, he insisted.

The friars he is training “can continue my work when I die.”

‘I feel so terrible’: Djokovic’s Golden Slam bid is over

By ANDREW DAMPF AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — With his Golden Slam bid over for at least another three years, Novak Djokovic rested his head on Alexander Zverev’s shoulder as his German opponent and friend consoled him.

“I told him that he’s the greatest of all time,” Zverev said. “I know that he was chasing history.”

Djokovic, the top-ranked Serb who had seemed invincible in all of the biggest tournaments this year, lost to Zverev 1-6, 6-3, 6-1 Friday in the semifinals of the tennis tournament at the Tokyo Olympics.

Djokovic was attempting to become the first man to win all four Grand Slam tournaments and Olympic gold in the same year. He won the Australian Open, the French Open and Wimbledon this year and needed the Olympic and U.S. Open titles to complete the Golden Slam collection.

“I feel so terrible right now,” Djokovic said. “I can’t be positive right now.”

Steffi Graf in 1988 remains the only tennis player to achieve the Golden Slam. But Djokovic can still go after the calendar-year Grand Slam by winning the U.S. Open — something no man has accomplished since Rod Laver in 1969.

“He won 20 Grand Slams,” Zverev said. “So you can’t have everything.

“At the end of the day he’s the greatest of all time, because he’s going to win the most Grand Slams, he’s going to win the most Master Series, he’s going to be the longest at the world No. 1, and I’m sure 99% that this is the case when it’s all said and done,” Zverev said.

Zverev’s opponent in the gold-medal match will be Karen Khachanov. The Russian beat Pablo Carreno Busta of Spain 6-3, 6-3.

Djokovic will play two bronze-medal matches on Saturday. He’ll face Carreno Busta in singles then will team with Serbian partner Nina Stojanovic in mixed doubles against Ash Barty and John Peers of Australia.

On a humid and muggy evening, Djokovic committed a series of uncharacteristic errors after a strong start as the 6-foot-6 (1.98-meter) Zverev started to win free points with his big serve.

Djokovic was up a set and a break in the second before Zverev won 10 of the final 11 games.

“It’s just sport. He played better,” Djokovic said. “I got to give him credit for turning (the) match around. He served extremely well. I mean I was not getting too many looks on the second serve. My serve just drastically dropped. I didn’t get any free points from 3-2 up in the second. My game fell apart.”

Djokovic hadn’t lost since getting beaten by Rafael Nadal at the Italian Open final 2½ months ago.

“He’s gone these last few months without any losses and for him it’s a big loss ... just collapsing in the end,” said Marin Cilic of Croatia, who won silver in doubles.

Cilic noted that the extreme heat and humidity at the Ariake Tennis Park throughout the tournament may have caught up with Djokovic.

“It’s very unfortunate for him but still he’s an unbelievable champion and he still has so many years ahead of him to achieve many great things,” Cilic said.

When Zverev hit a backhand winner down the line that Djokovic didn’t move for to close it out, Djokovic walked to the net where he received a warm hug from Zverev as the pair exchanged some words.

“Of course I’m happy that I’ve won, but in the end of the day I also know (how) he feels,” Zverev said.

Djokovic’s only Olympic medal was bronze in singles at the 2008 Beijing Games — his first.

Djokovic came back on the court little more than an hour later with Stojanovic in the mixed semifinals and lost that match, too, getting beaten by the Russian duo of Elena Vesnina and Aslan Karatsev 7-6 (4), 7-5.

“I feel terrible right now in every sense but tomorrow hopefully fresh start I can recover and at least

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 71 of 76

win one medal for my country," Djokovic said.

It was the third consecutive day that Djokovic played two matches.

Viktor Troicki, Serbia's Olympic team coach, told The Associated Press on Thursday that the entire team was against Djokovic playing mixed doubles because they didn't want the event to tire him out with so much on the line in singles.

"I'm sure he'll get stronger after this and hopefully learn a few things," Troicki said Friday.

The 34-year-old Djokovic is the first man since Laver that year to win the first three major tournaments in a season.

He also matched his longtime rivals Roger Federer and Nadal by winning Wimbledon this month for his 20th Grand Slam title. He was the only member of the Big Three to travel to Tokyo and Djokovic has been soaking in the Olympic experience like few other athletes.

Without Djokovic, though, the gold-medal match in singles will be lacking star power. Zverev's best career result was reaching the final of last year's U.S. Open, while the 25th-ranked Khachanov is coming off a quarterfinal appearance at Wimbledon and is now in the biggest final of his career.

Zverev called it "maybe the proudest moment of my career so far.

"Because I'm not only playing for myself I'm not only playing for my parents, for my brother, for my family," he added. "But I'm also playing for everybody, all the (German) athletes here back at the base and everybody back at home watching."

In men's doubles, the top-seeded pair of Nikola Pietrangeli and Mate Pavic beat Cilic and Ivan Dodig 6-4, 3-6, 10-6 in an all-Croatian final. It was Croatia's first gold and first silver in Olympic tennis, previously having won three bronzes.

The New Zealand team of Marcus Daniell and Michael Venus took bronze by beating Austin Krajicek and Tennys Sandgren of the United States 7-6 (3), 6-2.

Daniell and Venus became the first New Zealand players to win a medal in tennis since 1912, when Anthony Wilding took bronze in singles while representing Australasia. Wilding, New Zealand's only Grand Slam singles champion with six titles, was killed during World War I in 1915 at the age of 31.

Worker pay rises strongly as businesses fight to fill jobs

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Wages and salaries rose at a healthy pace in the three months ended in June as employers competed to find enough workers to fill millions of available jobs.

Pay increased 1% in the second quarter for workers in the private sector, the Labor Department said Friday. That's down slightly from 1.1% in the first three months of the year but still the second-highest reading in more than a decade.

In the year ending in June, wages and salaries jumped 3.5% for workers in the private sector, the largest increase in more than 14 years. That increase was driven by sharp rise in pay for restaurant and hotel workers of more than 6%.

Total compensation for all employees rose at a slower pace, increasing just 0.7% in the second quarter and 2.9% in the past year. That figure was held back by weaker wage growth in state and local governments, and an unexpected slowing in the growth of benefits, such as health care. Benefits provided by companies rose just 0.3% in the second quarter, down from 0.6% in the first.

Friday's data comes from the Labor Department's Employment Cost Index, which measures pay changes for workers that keep their jobs. Unlike some other measures of Americans' paychecks, it isn't directly affected by mass layoffs such as the pandemic job losses that occurred in the spring of 2020.

Separately, the government also reported Friday that consumer spending remained strong in June, rising 1%, and overall incomes ticked up 0.1%. That figure includes incomes from other sources besides wages and salaries, such as government benefits and investment income.

Both reports suggest steady hiring and rising pay should continue to fuel economic growth, though the ongoing spread of the delta variant poses a threat to the recovery. If consumers become more cautious

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 72 of 76

and pull back on travel, eating out, and visiting entertainment venues, growth could slow.

Businesses are being forced to offer higher compensation to attract workers, as customer demand has soared in the spring as the pandemic faded. Companies, particularly in the restaurant and retail industries, are offering sign-on bonuses, wages as high as \$15 an hour, and benefits such as retirement plans and pet insurance.

The unemployment rate is elevated at 5.9% and millions of Americans are out of work, yet there are also a record number of job openings. Economists say it will take time for the unemployed to match with the right jobs.

Several trends are likely keeping some workers on the sidelines, adding to the pressure on companies to offer higher pay. Many people are worried about COVID-19 and are reluctant to work in jobs that require them to interact with the public. Others may be caring for children and unable to work until schools reopen.

And an extra \$300 a week in unemployment benefits is likely allowing some of those out of work to hold out for higher-paying jobs. About 22 states have ended that benefit and it will expire nationwide Sept. 6.

European economy grows 2%, ending double-dip recession

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Europe emerged from a double-dip recession in the second quarter with stronger-than-expected growth of 2.0% over the quarter before, according to official figures released Friday, as pandemic restrictions eased, consumers started spending built-up savings and major companies showed stronger results.

But the economy in the 19 countries that use the shared euro currency still lagged behind pre-pandemic levels and trailed the faster recoveries in the U.S. and China, as the highly transmissible delta virus variant cast a shadow of uncertainty over the upturn.

The growth figure for the April-June quarter announced by the European Union's statistics agency Eurostat compared to a drop of 0.3% in the first quarter of 2021, as eurozone nations endured a double-dip recession after a rebound in mid-2020. The second-quarter growth figure was stronger than the 1.5% foreseen by market analysts.

Much of the improvement came from southern European countries that had earlier been hit hard by large COVID-19 outbreaks and a loss of tourism revenue.

Italy, which endured 128,000 pandemic deaths and a deep recession, was a major positive surprise in the last quarter, growing 2.7% as consumer spending revived. Portugal boomed with 4.9% growth. Meanwhile, growth returned in Germany, the EU's largest economy, which saw output increase by 1.5% after a sharp drop of 2.1% in the first quarter.

German auto companies in particular have shown strong profits despite a shortage of semiconductor components as global auto markets recover, particularly for the higher-priced vehicles sold by Mercedes-Benz and by Volkswagen's Audi and Porsche luxury brands.

In another sign of rebounding activity, European plane maker Airbus this week raised its outlook for deliveries this year.

Yet over the long haul, the eurozone recovery lags the one in the U.S., where the economy surpassed its pre-pandemic level during the second quarter in 2021 with growth of 1.6% over the previous quarter.

Friday's figures leave the eurozone 3% smaller than before the virus outbreak, according to Capital Economics. China, which was hit first by the outbreak of coronavirus, was the only major world economy to continue growing during the pandemic year of 2020.

The stronger performance in southern Europe may be the result of households increasing their spending as restrictions are eased, said Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist at Capital Economics.

Spain, with growth of 2.8% and consumer outlays up 6.6%, illustrated the rebound as well as underlining how far it has to go. Gross domestic product there remains 6.8% below where it was before the pandemic.

A slow vaccination rollout held back the European economy in the first months of the year. But Europe has made steady progress since, in recent days passing the U.S. in total vaccinations adjusted for population.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 73 of 76

Still, the spread of the highly contagious delta variant has led to predictions that it may slow, though not derail, Europe's economic upturn. Travel and tourism are recovering but remain subdued.

"Given its reliance on tourism, the Spanish economy looks especially vulnerable to the delta variant that is forcing several regions in the country to impose new restrictions, while foreign governments are discouraging trips to the Iberian Peninsula," said Edoardo Campanella, economist at UniCredit Bank in Milan.

Other figures released Friday showed eurozone unemployment at 7.7% in June, down from 8.0% in May. Inflation rose to 2.2% in July from 1.9% in June.

The eurozone economy has been sustained by heavy government spending on pandemic relief, including subsidies for companies that keep furloughed workers on the payroll.

The European Central Bank is adding monetary support by keeping interest rate benchmarks at record lows and by purchasing 1.85 trillion euros (\$2.2 trillion) in government and corporate bonds through at least March 2022. That step drives down longer-term borrowing rates and helps keep credit flowing to businesses and governments.

AP-NORC poll: Democrats optimistic but divided on compromise

By BILL BARROW and EMILY SWANSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Six months into Democrats' unified control of Washington, most Democrats are on board with President Joe Biden and where he's trying to take the country — even if they're divided on how to get there.

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds 6 in 10 Democrats say they're optimistic about their party's future, and Democrats nearly universally — 92% — approve of the way Biden is handling his job. The Democratic president is viewed favorably by both liberals and moderates.

But the party is divided over the best strategy for accomplishing its agenda. About half say Democrats should compromise with Republicans, even if it means giving up things they want. The other half say Democrats should stick to their positions no matter what, even if it means they would have to find a way to pass laws without Republican support.

The numbers reflect a division playing out on Capitol Hill, as Biden and other Democratic leaders prioritize a bipartisan infrastructure bill over other Democratic initiatives less ripe for compromise — including voting rights, immigration and climate change. Although Biden has faced criticism over the strategy, the numbers suggest even displeased Democrats aren't turning on him.

"He's started an agenda that, if he succeeds, will move us forward so much and help most people," said Anjanette Anderson, a 47-year-old Democrat in Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

But Anderson argued party leaders shouldn't let Republican opposition slow them down. "Republicans didn't want to work across the aisle time and time again," she said of recent years. "If we're going to continue to move in a direction that helps the many instead of the few, Democrats are going to have to push."

Despite the strong approval for Biden and two-thirds of Democrats saying the country is headed in the right direction, the poll finds 53% of Democrats say they are pessimistic about U.S. politics generally. Just 27% say they are optimistic, while another 19% hold neither view.

Interviews with Democratic voters show those concerns are rooted in a deep distrust of Republicans, especially in the wake of the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol by supporters of then-President Donald Trump as Congress convened to certify Biden's victory.

Those Democrats cast the GOP as a threat to democracy. They pointed especially to Republican obstruction of federal election and voting rights bills, the lack of GOP participation in an official inquiry into the Jan. 6 insurrection and the struggle to pass an infrastructure program -- though a bipartisan breakthrough on infrastructure could now be on the cusp of clearing the 50-50 Senate.

"We could have another Jan. 6 kind of event" after the next presidential election, Anderson said. "Or we could have states that just say, 'Hey, we know how our people voted, but we're going to give our electoral votes to another guy anyway.' That's scary."

The poll comes after a relative honeymoon period at the outset of Biden's presidency. Democrats passed

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 74 of 76

a nearly \$2 trillion pandemic response package without any Republican votes, and the administration, working with state governments, dramatically expanded distribution of COVID-19 vaccines developed while Trump was in office.

Democrats interviewed by the AP cited those accomplishments, along with displacing Trump's bombastic leadership style, as reasons for their optimism about the party.

Diana Hilburn, a 56-year-old in College Park, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta, praised the health insurance aid included in the American Rescue Plan.

"I was able to get on an exchange plan because of that," she said, recounting how she lost health insurance after being laid off as an Atlanta airport shuttle driver at the outset of the coronavirus pandemic. She didn't qualify for Medicaid because Georgia is one of 12 Republican-run states that still hasn't expanded Medicaid since Democrats passed the Affordable Care Act in 2010.

Hilburn hasn't been rehired for her driver job yet, but she's confident about the economy long term and Democrats' stewardship of it. Still, she warned there's no guarantee of success for all Americans, including those who've found work.

"Everything's picking up, but so many places want to pay \$9 an hour, \$10 an hour -- and my rent is up to \$650 a month. A lot of folks have to pay more than that," she said of businesses around her in Clayton County.

That's why Hilburn doesn't think Democrats should waste time trying to compromise with Republicans in Congress. She noted that Democrats want to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour but face GOP opposition and that many Republican governors, including her own, suspended weekly unemployment insurance boosts Congress initially approved during the pandemic.

"Do what they've been doing to us. Just move it through," said Hilburn, noting Sen. Mitch McConnell's success in blocking Democratic priorities as minority leader and speeding through judicial confirmations when he had a GOP Senate majority. "Voters," Hilburn said, "will understand" a Democratic turnabout.

Eric Staab, a 43-year-old Democrat who teaches high school government in Topeka, Kansas, argues for a less confrontational approach.

"We're just so angry and divided and partisan," said Staab. Democratic leaders should "have hard deadlines" for "good-faith negotiations," he said, but "you have to put out the olive branch."

So far, Democrats remain positive in their assessments of the party's leadership on Capitol Hill. Besides high ratings for Biden, 81% of Democrats have a favorable view of Vice President Kamala Harris. They're more likely to have a favorable than unfavorable opinion of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (67% to 23%) and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (53% to 16%).

Party faithful, meanwhile, more harshly assess Sen. Joe Manchin, the West Virginia Democrat who opposes changing the Senate filibuster rule that allows Republicans to block any bill that doesn't have 60 votes. A third of Democrats view Manchin negatively, compared with about 2 in 10 with a positive view; about half say they don't know enough to say.

"It's one thing to watch the Republicans do this, but now we have Joe Manchin out there basically helping them," said Walter Russell of Olanta, South Carolina, referring to the blockade of Democrats' agenda.

A 70-year-old military veteran, Russell described himself as a moderate but argued the GOP has escalated its opposition beyond acceptable levels. "I don't understand how Manchin doesn't see that," he said.

But in Manchin's home state, Baron Walker, a 43-year-old Democrat from Davisville, summed up the political calculations that Democrats are depending on: Democratic voters aren't likely to blame them first.

Walker is critical of Manchin but far more so of Republicans. Lies about the results of the 2020 elections have done "lasting damage" to democracy, he said.

"There's so many conspiracy theories around everything," he said.

And no matter how disappointed he is with Manchin, Walker said that's his only option in West Virginia. "I don't see any scenario where I'd vote anything other than Democrat," Walker said, "including staying home."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 75 of 76

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, July 31, the 212th day of 2021. There are 153 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 31, 1991, President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in Moscow.

On this date:

In 1715, a fleet of Spanish ships carrying gold, silver and jewelry sank during a hurricane off the east Florida coast; of some 2,500 crew members, more than 1,000 died.

In 1777, during the Revolutionary War, the Marquis de Lafayette, a 19-year-old French nobleman, was made a major-general in the American Continental Army.

In 1919, Germany's Weimar (VY'-mahr) Constitution was adopted by the republic's National Assembly.

In 1933, the radio series "Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy," made its debut on CBS radio station WBBM in Chicago.

In 1945, Pierre Laval, premier of the pro-Nazi Vichy government, surrendered to U.S. authorities in Austria; he was turned over to France, which later tried and executed him.

In 1954, Pakistan's K2 was conquered as two members of an Italian expedition, Achille Compagnoni (ah-KEE'-lay kohm-pahn-YOH'-nee) and Lino Lacedelli (LEE'-noh lah-chee-DEHL'-ee), reached the summit.

In 1964, country singer-songwriter Jim Reeves, 40, and his manager, Dean Manuel, were killed when their private plane crashed in bad weather near Nashville.

In 1970, "The Huntley-Brinkley Report" came to an end after nearly 14 years as co-anchor Chet Huntley signed off for the last time; the broadcast was renamed "NBC Nightly News."

In 1971, Apollo 15 crew members David Scott and James Irwin became the first astronauts to use a lunar rover on the surface of the moon.

In 1972, Democratic vice-presidential candidate Thomas Eagleton withdrew from the ticket with George McGovern following disclosures that Eagleton had once undergone psychiatric treatment.

In 2003, the Vatican launched a global campaign against gay marriages, warning Catholic politicians that support of same-sex unions was "gravely immoral" and urging non-Catholics to join the offensive.

In 2014, the death toll from the worst recorded Ebola outbreak in history surpassed 700 in West Africa.

Ten years ago: Ending a stalemate, President Barack Obama and congressional leaders announced an agreement on emergency legislation to avert the nation's first-ever financial default.

Five years ago: Pope Francis told young people who had flocked by the hundreds of thousands to a Catholic jamboree near Krakow, Poland, that they needed to "believe in a new humanity" stronger than evil, and cautioned against concluding that one religion is more violent than others.

One year ago: A federal appeals court overturned the death sentence of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev in the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, saying the judge who oversaw the case didn't adequately screen jurors for potential biases. (The Supreme Court has agreed to consider reinstating the death sentence.) Mexico became the country with the third most COVID-19 deaths in the world, behind the United States and Brazil. Even as Florida reached a new daily high in coronavirus deaths, the imminent arrival of Hurricane Isaias forced the closure of some outdoor testing sites. With six Major League teams sidelined by the pandemic, Commissioner Rob Manfred spoke to union leader Tony Clark about the importance of players following the coronavirus protocols. British filmmaker Alan Parker, whose movies included "Bugsy Malone," "Midnight Express" and "Evita," died in London at the age of 76.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Don Murray is 92. Jazz composer-musician Kenny Burrell is 90. Actor France Nuyen is 82. Actor Susan Flannery is 82. Singer Lobo is 77. Actor Geraldine Chaplin is 77. Former movie studio executive Sherry Lansing is 77. Singer Gary Lewis is 76. Actor Lane Davies is 71. Actor Susan Wooldridge is 71. International Tennis Hall of Famer Evonne Goolagong Cawley is 70. Actor Barry Van Dyke is 70. Actor Alan Autry is 69. Jazz composer-musician Michael Wolff is 69. Actor James Read is 68.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, July 31, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 024 ~ 76 of 76

Actor Michael Biehn is 65. Rock singer-musician Daniel Ash (Love and Rockets) is 64. Actor Dirk Blocker is 64. Entrepreneur Mark Cuban is 63. Rock musician Bill Berry is 63. Actor Wally Kurth is 63. Actor Wesley Snipes is 59. Country singer Chad Brock is 58. Musician Fatboy Slim is 58. Rock musician Jim Corr is 57. Author J.K. Rowling (ROHL'-ing) is 56. Actor Dean Cain is 55. Actor Jim True-Frost is 55. Actor Ben Chaplin is 52. Actor Loren Dean is 52. Actor Eve Best is 50. Actor Annie Parisse (pah-REES') is 46. Actor Robert Telfer is 44. Country singer-musician Zac Brown is 43. Actor-producer-writer B.J. Novak is 42. Actor Eric Lively is 40. Singer Shannon Curfman is 36. NHL center Evgeni Malkin is 35. Hip-hop artist Lil Uzi Vert is 27. Actor Reese Hartwig is 23. Actor Rico Rodriguez is 23.