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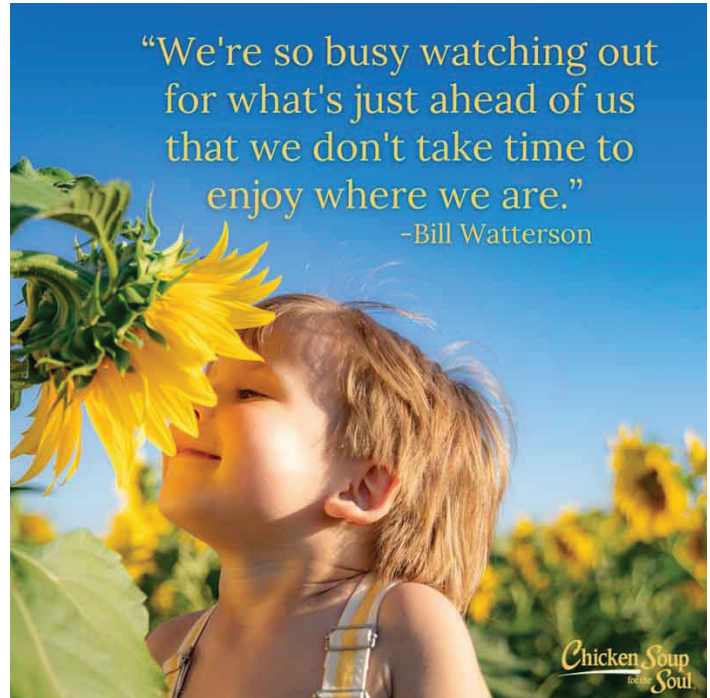
Groton Jr Legion Baseball Team "Community Send Off" to State B Tournament in Redfield

Friday, Aug. 6 at 2 p.m.

Starting at Legion Lounge down Main Street to 11th Ave. Come help cheer on our boys!!

Calendar Update

On Monday the NEC ADs will meet and we should have the final dates for the region basketball games. Version C of the calendar is now posted on-line.





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

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www.uslbm.com/careers or
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Britton

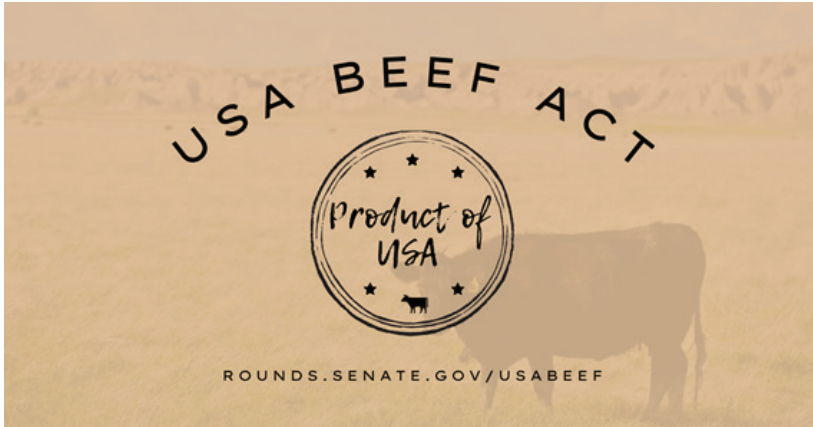
Day shift and night shift assemblers!



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

Rounds to Introduce USA Beef Act, Restoring Integrity to "Product of USA" Label



Bill outlaws foreign beef from receiving "Product of USA" label, which is allowed under current USDA rules

WASHINGTON –U.S. Senator Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) and a bipartisan group of his colleagues announced the introduction of the USA Beef Act. This Rounds-led bill limits the use of the "Product of USA" label only to beef products that are born, raised and slaughtered in the United States. Current United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) rules allow for foreign beef raised in other countries to receive this label. This bill outlaws this current practice and restores

integrity to a currently misleading, but ultimately valuable tool for consumers and cattle producers.

"It's pretty simple – only beef born, raised and slaughtered in the United States should receive the 'Product of USA' label," said Rounds. "As I continue to work with my colleagues on re-establishing mandatory country of origin labeling, we must fix the current labels to protect consumers and producers. For far too long, South Dakota producers have suffered as their high-quality, American-raised beef has lost value as it's mixed with foreign beef, raised and processed under different standards. This is wrong. Consumers deserve to know where their beef comes from and accurate, transparent labeling supports American farmers and ranchers. It's long past time we fix this once and for all."

"South Dakota cattle ranchers work hard to produce some of the highest quality beef in the world, and they deserve to proudly showcase their products with accurate labeling," said Thune. "I'm proud of this straightforward legislation that will ensure that consumers know they are getting their beef from cattle that were born right here in the U.S.A."

This legislation is endorsed by US Cattlemen's Association, R-CALF, South Dakota Farmers Union and the South Dakota Stockgrowers Association.

This bill is cosponsored by Senators John Barrasso (R-Wyo.), Cory Booker (D-N.J.), Bill Hagerty (R-Tenn.), John Thune (R-S.D.), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.), Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.) and Steve Daines (R-Mont.). Representative Matt Rosendale (R-Mont.) is introducing companion legislation in the House of Representatives.

Background:

At the urging of Senator Rounds and hundreds of ranchers in South Dakota and around the country, USDA announced in July a full-scale review of the Product of USA label. In conjunction with USDA's announcement, the Federal Trade Commission finalized a rule tightening the use of the "Made in the USA" label. The rule does not require specific actions be taken regarding beef labeling.

Since he was elected to the Senate, Sen. Rounds has led numerous efforts to provide solutions to the problems faced by independent cattle producers and beef consumers. Most recently, he:

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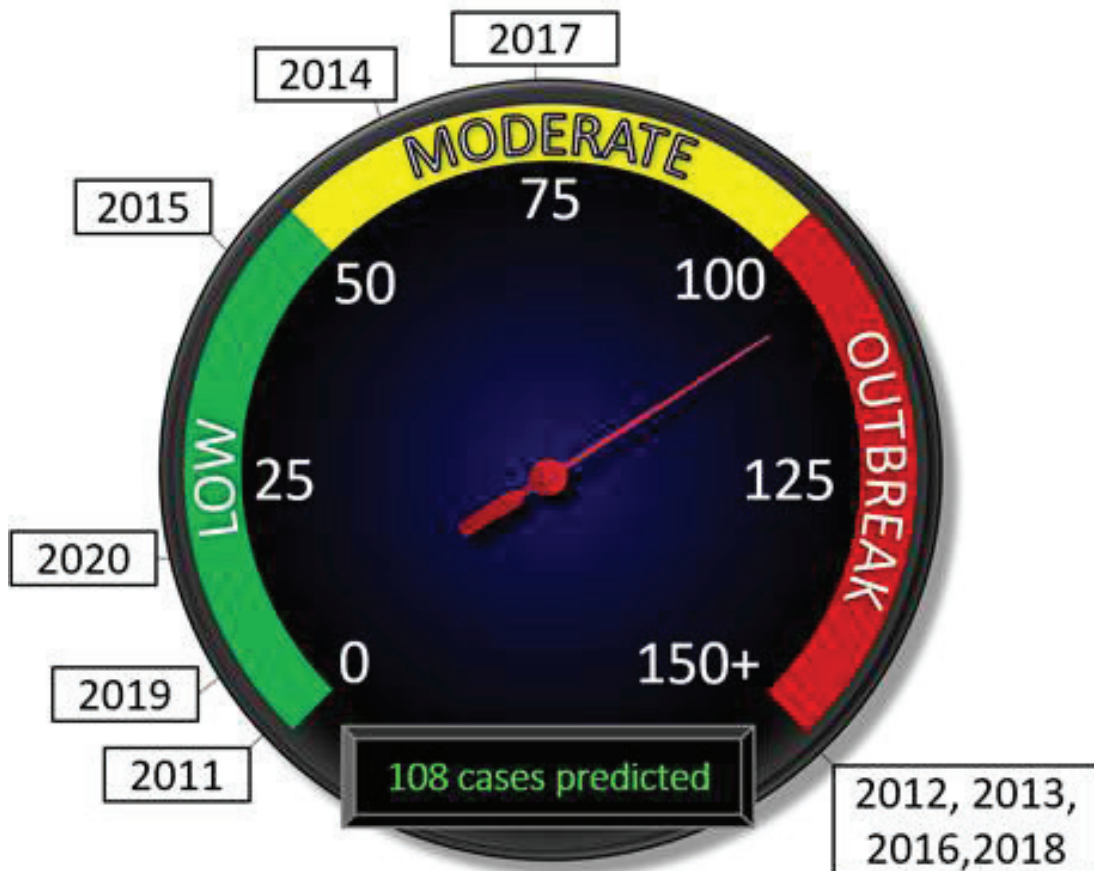
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- Introduced the Meat Packing Special Investigator Act with Sens. Tester and Grassley to give the U.S. Department of Agriculture the tools to investigate anticompetitive practices in the cattle market.
- Led a group of 26 colleagues with Sen. Tina Smith (D-Minn.) in calling on the attorney general to investigate the meatpacking industry to determine if antitrust violations exist.
- Addressed cattle producers during a virtual town hall focused on meatpacker concentration in the cattle industry.
- Reintroduced legislation with Sen. Angus King (I-Maine) to allow meat and poultry products inspected by state Meat and Poultry Inspection (MPI) programs to be sold across state lines.
- Introduced bipartisan legislation to foster more competitive cattle markets by requiring that a minimum of 50 percent of a meatpacker's weekly volume of cattle purchases take place on the open or spot market.
- Introduced legislation which would outlaw foreign beef from being labeled as a "Product of the U.S.A." and make certain that label only goes on beef and beef products exclusively derived from animals born, raised and slaughtered here in the United States.

West Nile Update – South Dakota, 5 August 2021

SD WNV (as of August 2): 3 human cases reported (Walworth, Douglas, Davison)
5 counties with positive mosquito pools (Brookings, Codington, Hughes, Lincoln, Brown)
US WNV (as of July 27): 21 cases (AR, AZ, IA, ND, NE, CA, TX) and 2 deaths

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2021, South Dakota (as of August 2)



GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

School Board Meeting

August 9, 2021 – 7:00 PM – GHS Library Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of minutes of July 15 school board meeting as drafted or amended.
2. Approval of July 2021 Financial Report, Agency Accounts, and Investments.
3. Approval of July 2021 School Lunch Report.
4. Approval of July 2021 School Transportation Report.
5. Approve open enrollments #22-05 and #22-06.

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Continued discussion and necessary action on District response to COVID-19.
 - a. Approve 2021-2022 Learn On plan with or without amendments.
 - b. Preliminary ARP ESSER Plan Progress
3. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Presentation from GHS Music Department regarding 2021-2022 music travel.
2. Review and approve 2021-22 bus routes.
3. First reading of recommended policy amendments; BD School Board Meetings, JHCDE Administration of Medical Cannabis, JHCDE-E(1) Medical Cannabis Administration Plan, JFCH Alcohol and Other Drug Use by Students, JGD Student Suspension/Expulsion, GBEC Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs by Employees, JHCD Administering Medicines to Students
4. Cast Second Runoff Ballot for SDHSAA Board of Directors West River At-Large Representative.
5. Approve inter-district transportation requests pursuant SDCL 13-29-4.
 - a. Langford Area School District
 - b. Webster Area School District
6. Approve lane changes.
 - a. Diane Kurtz from MS+45 to MS+60 (+\$900)
7. Approve volunteer assistant coaches.
 - a. Girls Soccer: Carleen Johnson and Kaylin Kucker
 - b. Boys Soccer: Garrett Wiedrick
 - c. Volleyball: Carla Tracy
 - d. Football: Dalton Locke
8. Executive Session pursuant SDCL1-25-2(1) personnel.

ADJOURN

Governor Noem Statement on Board of Regents Draft Policy Restricting CRT in Colleges, Universities

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem released the following statement in response to the South Dakota Board of Regents' approval of a draft policy restricting the teaching of Critical Race Theory at state colleges and universities:

"I am grateful the Board of Regents is taking steps to address this divisive subject and limit its application in our university classrooms. Critical Race Theory, the 1619 Project, and the works of Ibram Kendi divide students, distort their understanding of history, and seek to indoctrinate them with anti-patriotic rhetoric. Additionally, I am glad to see that so-called diversity offices, which have unfortunately become less about serving students and more about advancing leftist agendas, are being replaced by Opportunity Centers that will focus on students as individuals, rather than members of groups. The policies put forth by the Board of Regents are a step forward in our quest to resist the harmful effects this ideology can have on students and preserve honest, patriotic education throughout South Dakota. I look forward to continuing the conversation with our legislators and education leaders in the coming months."

In May, Governor Noem sent a letter to each member of the Board of Regents asking them to examine whether state funds were being used to support Critical Race Theory and its cohorts in post-secondary public institutions, as well as the operations of diversity offices. The draft policy released today by the Board took steps to align with the requests from that letter, which can be read here.

In July, the governor signed an executive order banning the state Department of Education from applying for federal grants tied to Critical Race Theory and action civics. In the order, Governor Noem signaled her intent to work with the legislature in the upcoming session to address further resistance to Critical Race Theory being taught in public schools.

Regents Adopt Student Athletes' Name-Image-Likeness Policy

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Board of Regents has adopted policy to govern the commercial use of student athletes' name, image, and likeness at the six public universities the board oversees.

The policy establishes a basic framework under which the universities and their student athletes may operate, subject to any further regulatory action on the topic. The policy applies to student athletes attending Black Hills State University, Dakota State University, Northern State University, South Dakota School of Mines & Technology, South Dakota State University, and the University of South Dakota.

Regents' officials noted that South Dakota has not enacted any state laws specific to the use of athletes' name, image, and likeness. A U.S. Supreme Court decision in June, followed by adoption of policy by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), brought about Thursday's action by the regents.

The regents' policy recognizes that student athletes are entitled to commercial use of their name, image, and likeness to externally promote their own business; promote a corporate entity; establish their own professional sports service, such as a camp or clinic; make appearances or sign autographs and receive compensation; and conduct similar activities.

The policy further states that student athletes may be represented by an agent, but must refrain from receiving compensation in exchange for their athletic performance, participation, or inducement for enrollment. Arrangements involving student athletes also may not violate existing institutional sponsorship agreements.

South Dakota Hops Harvest Approaching



Hops Row
Photo Courtesy of Mark Bonnema.

Yankton, S.D.— The 2021 season has been challenging for many farmers due to drought. For South Dakota hop growers, the conditions are nearly ideal this year. Hops require a great deal of water due to their growth rate, with the greatest need in late June and early July. Most hop farmers irrigate their hops to ensure they have enough water during their peak growing periods. A dry and hot year has the benefits of reducing mildew pressure on the hop plants and ensuring they receive plenty of sunlight for optimum growth.

“Hops are a beautiful plant. Reportedly the second fastest growing plant on earth, after bamboo, it is amazing to witness their growth. At their peak, hops can grow 10-14 inches per day, up to eight feet in a week. Amazing!” said Mark Bonnema of Hoppy Trails Hop Farm.

There are currently over 150 documented hop varieties with new varieties being developed and released to the brewing community every year. Many of the newest hop varieties were bred, developed, and released to the brewing community by private hop growers and are subject to patent and licensing agreements.

South Dakota Hop Growers currently does not have access or permission to grow many of the newest patented hop varieties. Of the varieties that are grown by S.D. Hop Growers, those with heritage native to North America have been growing the best and show the greatest potential to produce the highest yield. ‘Old World’ hops with heritage native to continental

Europe have suffered poor growth during periods of excessive heat and drought.

South Dakota Hop Growers, a Chapter of the S.D. Specialty Producers Association, currently has a campaign underway with the goal of increasing awareness of South Dakota grown hops by meeting with every South Dakota based brewery. As the S.D. Hop Growers increase the awareness of local hops, they hope to increase the sale of South Dakota grown hops to total 20% of all hops used by South Dakota Breweries.

The majority of hops farms are located in southeastern South Dakota and on the Iowa border.

Lee Anderson, head brewer of A Homestead Brew in Valley Springs, S.D., graduated from culinary school, but slightly changed his passion to farming and brewing. He still loves cooking to pair with his delicious crafted beers. Anderson began growing hops in 2012 on the same land his great grandfather built his home on in 1882. The brewing began in 2016. A Homestead Brew embraces a field to glass approach utilizing hops and fruit they grow on their farm.

“We have barrel-aged sour beers, as well as many other more traditional beers and kettle sours. We specialize in spontaneous fermentation. Stop out to our outdoor patio and enjoy a field to glass beer. Open on Fridays and Saturdays or for your special events,” Anderson said.

Ryan Heine and Michelle Donner own, operate, and live on 6th Meridian Hop Farm in Yankton, S.D. The farm is home to 5 acres of trellis with 14 varieties of hops in trial and production, contracted to brewers in

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Hops Cone
Photo Courtesy of Mark Bonnema.

multiple Midwest states. In addition to the hops, the farm is home to a commercial kitchen making fresh creations as Counterfeit Catering and Farm House Fridge, a contactless lunch room kiosk.

Hoppy Trails Hop Farm is a 3rd generation family farm just over the SD/IA border in Inwood, IA. The operation started in 2014 on a small, 1/4 acre parcel after Mark Bonnema realized this was the direction to go after watching a news feature of a Midwest farm growing hops. After a few years gaining experience growing hops, the operation expanded to 4 acres in 2016. Expansion allowed the farm to justify purchasing the specialty equipment needed for growing, harvesting, drying and processing hops.

A 'South Dakota Hop Catalog' is currently in print and making circulation. S.D. Hop Growers also has developed a website, <https://www.southdakotahopgrowers.com>, featuring all South Dakota based hop farms and each variety of hops grown in South Dakota.

Mature hop cones will dry down and be ready for harvest early in 2021 due to the heat and drought. Early maturing varieties will be harvested starting the second week of August, and late maturing varieties will be harvested around the second week of September.

It typically takes producers several weeks to pellet, package, and analyze the new crop before delivery to S.D. breweries. It is never too early to contact a local grower and reserve a portion of the upcoming harvest. Often the best prices can be secured by

pre-ordering and reserving your hops prior to harvest.

This fall the S.D. Hop Growers plans to package and distribute small packages of S.D. grown hops for the home brewing community. Watch your local home brew shop and the S.D. Hop Growers website for availability.

After hop harvest and processing has completed, the next project is to create a S.D. Hop and Beer calendar, highlighting all of the national beer holidays as well as special dates and events of South Dakota based breweries. These calendars will be available for the public to purchase in time for the holidays.

Johnson Applauds USDA Enhancement of Cattle Price Transparency

Washington, D.C. – Today, U.S. Representative Dusty Johnson (R-S.D.), Republican Leader of the Livestock and Foreign Agriculture Subcommittee, applauded the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) announcement of two new reports to enhance price discovery under mandatory price reporting for cattle. Johnson has called for increased transparency in price reporting during his time on the Agriculture Committee and introduced the PRICE Act which creates a Beef Cattle Contract Library.

Last week, the subcommittee held a hearing on the shortcomings of the supply chain. In addition to the need for greater processing capacity, the need for greater producer access to real-time data was a primary theme.

"When I talk to cattlemen across the state, they know they can compete if they have an open and transparent market. This is another step in the right direction," said Johnson. "This USDA announcement does not let Congress off the hook. We have work to do and must reauthorize mandatory price reporting by the end of September to ensure these new reports can be released in a timely and consistent manner. While this announcement is welcome news, cattlemen continue to ask for a Cattle Contract Library to give user-friendly access to contract terms being offered to other producer on a regional and national level. I'll keep pushing for full implementation of the PRICE Act to ensure this gets done."

In July, USDA implemented two of Johnson's bills aimed at increasing capacity space for small producers and curbing steep overtime fees small processing facilities incurred during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to USDA Market News, overseen by the Department's Agricultural Marketing Service, these new reports include:

The National Daily Direct Formula Base Cattle reports will enable stakeholders to see the correlation between the negotiated trade and reported formula base prices, as well as the aggregated values being paid as premiums and discounts. Daily formula base price reports will be national in scope and released in morning, summary and afternoon versions. The weekly and monthly formula base reports will be both national and regional in scope and include forward contract base purchase information.

The National Weekly Cattle Net Price Distribution report will show at what levels (price and volume) trade occurred across the weekly weighted average price for each purchase type – negotiated, negotiated grid, formula and forward contract. Currently, the market speculates whether large or small volumes of cattle trade on both sides of the price spread. And in fact, with premiums and discounts applied to the prices, the spreads shown on reports can be wide. Publishing a price distribution for all cattle net prices will offer more transparency to each of the purchase type categories. This report is a window into what producers are paid for cattle (net) and retains confidentiality by segregating volumes purchased in \$2.00 increments +/- the daily weighted average price depending upon premiums and discounts. AMS has published a similar net price distribution report for direct hogs since January 2010.

SDSU Extension to Provide Drought Resources, Water and Forage Testing at Dakotafest

Brookings, S.D. - South Dakota State University (SDSU) Extension invites crop and livestock producers to its new booth location, #216, at the 2021 Dakotafest in Mitchell, South Dakota. SDSU Extension experts will be on hand to discuss drought management resources and tools, as well as offering testing services for nitrates in forage and electro-conductivity (EC) in water for water suitability. The event is slated for Aug. 17-19.

Producers are encouraged to bring water and forage samples to the Extension booth, as each day the beef team will provide free EC water testing to determine total salts in water, as well as free Nitrate QuickTests for Forages.

For forages, take a representative sample and cut all forage plants just above ground level. The test requires the bottom node of the plant. Water can be collected in any container (water bottles, pop bottles, peanut butter jars, canning jars, etc.), however containers need to be clean. Samples do not need to be on ice.

In addition, water quality testing meters, courtesy of SDSU Extension and the South Dakota Cattlemen's Cattle Feeders Council, will be distributed. A limited number of water meters are available, so interested individuals should make sure to visit the booth early in the day.

Other Extension events and topics to be featured at this year's Dakotafest are:

- Ag Economics Dialogue — Heather Gessner, SDSU Extension Livestock Business Management Field Specialist, and Matt Diersen, Professor and SDSU Extension Risk/Business Management Specialist, will host the August session live from the booth on Thursday, Aug. 19 at 10 a.m. CDT. Their presentation is titled "Crop and Cattle Market Overview" and will examine feed management considerations.
- Drainage Water Management — John McMaine, Assistant Professor and SDSU Extension Water Management Engineer, and students will showcase a controlled drainage tabletop model along with information packets on the new nutrient loss calculator web application.
- Silage Packing Density Demonstration — Sara Bauder, SDSU Extension Agronomy Field Specialist.
- 2021 Drought in Perspective: Current Conditions and Forecasts — Laura Edwards, SDSU Extension State Climatologist.
- Utilizing Weather-Stressed Corn in Swine Diets — Bob Thaler, Distinguished Professor and SDSU Extension Swine Specialist.
- Reading for Resilience — Audrey Rider, SDSU Extension Early Childhood Field Specialist, will have available the series of nine children's books and guides to support children's coping and understanding of their feelings after experiencing a disaster, loss and/or grief.
- South Dakota Certified Seed representatives and SDSU Extension entomologists will be available daily to answer questions, along with Extension's soil fertility specialist and plant pathologist on Thursday.
- At 2 p.m. CDT each day, a SDSU ice cream social will be held, along with daily drawings for an SDSU resource book (choice of "Trees! An Illustrated Field Guide," "Grassland Plants of South Dakota and Northern Great Plains" or "Plants of the Black Hills and Bear Lodge Mountains").

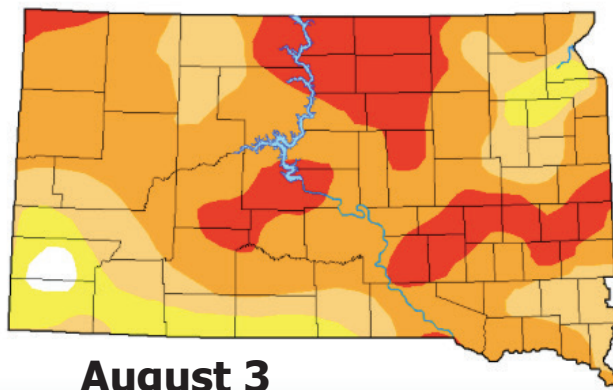
During Thursday's drawing, Extension staff will also draw for an overall grand prize drawing — a SDSU Wool Inaugural Stadium Blanket. The blanket is part of the SDSU Signature Wool Project, developed by a joint effort of the South Dakota Sheep Growers Association; SDSU College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences and the SDSU College of Education and Human Sciences; with assistance from the Center of the Nation Wool, Inc. and Faribault Woolen Mills, Inc. Net proceeds from the project are used to provide scholarship support to students in animal science and apparel merchandising. All scarves, stadium throws and blankets from the project are made of 100% South Dakota grown wool and have been processed to be cold water machine washable.

For drought resources and information, please visit the SDSU Extension Drought page (extension.sdstate.edu/drought).

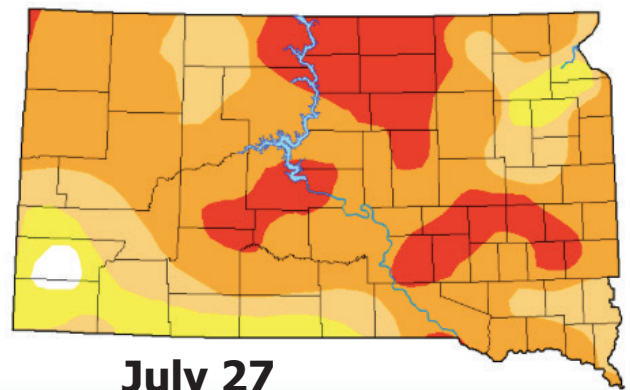
Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



August 3



July 27

High Plains

Abundant rainfall associated with the Southwest monsoon fell on the western half of Colorado, prompting widespread 1-category improvement. Exceptional drought (D4) is now confined to northwestern parts of the state and a small region in central Colorado. Areas farther north and east recorded less precipitation, allowing dryness and drought to remain intact or intensify. There was little change across Wyoming, but D0 and D1 classifications expanded from northeastern Colorado and Kansas northward into Nebraska. Deteriorating conditions were also noted across North Dakota, where drought has been evident since at least spring. Exceptional drought (D4) expanded substantially to cover much of the state's interior.

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Things that make you go, Hum!

The pedestrian crossing sign must be for all kinds of crossers with two legs. These geese were crossing the bicycle path in Plymouth, Minn. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Emergency Haying, Grazing of Conservation Reserve Program Acres Available to Help Livestock Producers Weather Drought

Options Available in Many South Dakota Counties Due to Drought Conditions

HURON, S.D. – Aug. 4, 2021 – Agricultural producers impacted by drought can now request haying and grazing on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres in certain South Dakota counties, while still receiving their full rental payment for the land.

“Drought is heavily impacting livestock producers in South Dakota and across the country, and emergency haying or grazing of lands enrolled in CRP is one more drought mitigation tool to help producers,” said Zach Ducheneaux, Administrator of USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA). “While CRP makes annual rental payments for land in conservation, under certain circumstances, FSA can allow the haying and grazing of these lands to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters without a reduction in payments. As part of our climate-smart agriculture efforts, we are working with all stakeholder groups to ensure that supplemental benefits of CRP acres, like emergency haying and grazing, can be accessed in a manner that is more universally beneficial.”

Outside of the primary nesting season, emergency haying and grazing of CRP acres may be authorized to provide relief to livestock producers in areas affected by a severe drought or similar natural disaster. The primary nesting season for South Dakota ended Aug. 1. Counties are approved for emergency haying and grazing due to drought conditions on a county-by-county basis, when a county is designated as level “D2 Drought - Severe” according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. FSA provides a weekly, online update of eligible counties.

Producers can use the CRP acreage under the emergency grazing provisions for their livestock or may grant another livestock producer use of the CRP acreage.

Producers interested in emergency haying or grazing of CRP acres must notify their FSA county office before starting any activities. This includes producers accessing CRP acres held by someone else. To maintain contract compliance, producers must have their conservation plan modified by USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Emergency CRP Haying and Grazing Option

CRP emergency haying is available as long as the stand is in condition to support such activity. Hay can be cut once between October 1, 2020 and September 30, 2021 and must be removed within 15 calendar days of being baled.

CRP emergency grazing is available as long as it does not exceed 90 days between October 1, 2020 and Sept. 30, 2021 and must be stopped when the minimum grazing height is reached, as established within the CRP conservation plan or the county is no longer eligible for emergency haying and grazing.

Non-Emergency CRP Haying and Grazing Option

For producers not in an eligible county, there are options available under non-emergency haying/grazing provisions outside of the primary nesting season, including:

Haying of all CRP practices, except for CP12 Wildlife Food Plots and several tree practices not more than

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once every three years for a 25% payment reduction.

Grazing of CRP acres not more than every other year for a 25% payment reduction.
Livestock Forage Disaster Program Provisions

If Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) triggers in a county for 2021 grazing losses due to drought, the provisions for CRP emergency haying and grazing change. There may be restrictions on grazing carrying capacity and on which CRP practices can be hayed. South Dakota currently has 53 counties where LFP has triggered and where certain CRP emergency grazing restrictions may apply.

Additional Drought Assistance

Other programs are available for livestock producers. Producers who experience livestock deaths and feed losses due to natural disasters may be eligible for the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP). This program also provides eligible producers with compensation for expenses associated with transporting water to livestock physically located in a county that is designated as level "D3 Drought - Extreme" according to the Drought Monitor.

More information on disaster assistance programs is available on farmers.gov, including the Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool, Disaster Assistance At a Glance brochure, and Farm Loan Discovery Tool can help producers and landowners determine program or loan options. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their crop insurance agent. For FSA and NRCS programs, they should contact their local USDA Service Center.

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, fairer markets for all producers, 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.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

NOTICE OF SPECIAL EXCEPTION HEARING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT The Groton Planning & Zoning Commission will be holding a public hearing on August 30, 2021 at 6:00pm CDT at City Hall, 120 N Main St., Groton, SD for a special exception of Chapter 6, Section 6.0106 of the Groton Zoning Ordinance. This application was made by Abigail Rang for an in home daycare in a Residential (R-2) District at 1502 N Broadway Lot 15, Groton, SD, legally described as BOLS #15 Cottonwood Lt A & B Doeringsfeld OL 3.

Any person wishing to present testimony for or against this special exception may appear in person or by representative at the above time and place.

Hope Block
Zoning Administrator

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BROWN COUNTY JULY 27, 2021 – GENERAL MEETING

Meeting called to order by Commission Chair Fjeldheim at 8:45 A.M. in the Commission Chambers, Courthouse Annex, Brown County, SD. Present were Commissioners Feickert, Sutton and Wiese. Commissioner Kippley was absent. Commissioner Feickert led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Wiese to approve the agenda. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

ELM LAKE CONTAINER SITE: Mike Scott, Landfill Manager, met with the Board of Commissioner to discuss the status of the elm lake container site. Previous counteroffer of \$500 has been turned down and landowner is firm with the \$2,000 fee for the county to continue using his land as a container site location. The Commission offered a county cost share of \$500 and suggested that Elm Lake Association covers the remaining \$1500 for the fee. A representative from the association present during the meeting advises that he will have it brought up on their next association's meeting. No actions taken.

MUTUAL AGREEMENT: Scott Meints (EM Director), Cody Bonn & Beth Locken (Agtegra Rescue Team), presented themselves to the Commission and briefly discussed about rescue efforts & training services Agtegra offers to our local fire and rescue department. Moved by Sutton, seconded by Feickert to authorize chair sign the Mutual Aid Agreement between Brown County and Agtegra Rescue Team. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

APPLICATION FOR OCCUPANCY: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Wiese to approve application submitted by Roger Cooper for occupancy of W Shore Dr, Brown County, South Dakota (LT 18 LUTGENS WEST ADD NE 23-124-65) with a condition that applicant is responsible for the repair of the road after. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES: Dirk Rogers, Highway Superintendent, discussed with the Commission status of current road projects. No actions taken.

MINUTES: Moved by Feickert, seconded by Wiese to approve the general meeting minutes of July 20, 2021. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

CLAIMS: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Wiese to approve the following claims: Professional Fees: Ace Refrigeration LLC \$297.84; Carlsen Funeral Home & Crematory \$648.00; Christopher A. Haar \$7,188.31; Christy Griffin-Serr Law Office \$7,070.31; Cogley Law Office, Prof LLC \$7,656.25; Dependable Sanitation Inc \$34,875.40; Dohrer Law Office \$7,656.25; GBR Interpreting & Translation Services \$60.00; Gellhaus & Gellhaus, Pc \$80.00; Heather Basham \$20.00; Jerald M. McNeary \$7,070.31; Jodi K. Hoffmann \$1,647.95; Joshua Fettig \$20.00; Kuck Law Office \$7,187.31; Lumen \$158.85; Monica Hein \$20.00; Motorola Solutions, Inc \$145,764.26; Pioneer Enterprises \$1,800.00; State Of South Dakota \$5,900.00; Stephanie Johnson \$20.00; Taliaferro Law Firm \$7,656.25; Tazewell County Sheriff's Office - Civil Process Division \$20.50; University Of North Dakota \$2,680.00; US Bank \$315.38. Publishing: Aberdeen American News \$3,847.52; Chesterman Communications, Inc. \$3,000.00; Groton Independent \$83.45; Midstates Printing \$3,546.50. Repairs & Maintenance: Ecolab Pest Elimination \$113.54; Haar Plumbing & Heating Inc \$5,300.00; Hf Jacobs & Son Construction Inc \$3,496.75; Jason's Electric Inc \$252.85; Pro Windmill Inc. \$95.00; Sewer Duck Inc \$239.00; State Of South Dakota \$2,340.00; Us Bank \$772.83; Western States Fire Co \$675.80; Woodman Refrigeration, Inc \$5,566.61. Supplies: AASLH - American Assoc of State/Local History \$155.00; Brent A Fischer \$27.00; Century Business Products \$182.77; Commtech Inc. \$405.00; Custom Sheet Metal \$105.50; Dakota Supply Group \$348.34; Fedex \$42.62; Know Ink, Llc \$48,205.00; Marco Inc \$208.87; Mb Llc \$604.70; Menards \$126.89; Midstates Printing \$2,000.00; PharmChem \$528.25; Sherwin Williams \$178.40; Truenorth Steel \$11,947.86; US Bank \$9,569.33. Travel & Conference: City of Groton \$144.72; Keith Baker \$44.00; Sd State 4-H Office \$295.00; US Bank \$4,699.43. Utilities: Dependable Sanitation Inc \$165.00; Northern Valley Communication \$3,147.62; Qwest Corporation \$742.34; Us Bank \$1,772.25.

All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

HR REPORT: Moved by Sutton seconded by Feickert to approve the HR Office Report, which includes the following: Acknowledge transfer of Samuel Hoppock from Brown County JDC Correctional Officer to

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Brown County Jail Correctional Officer effective July 25, 2011. Request to fill. Acknowledge resignation of Amber Barnett, full-time Brown County Jail Correctional Officer effective July 23, 2021. Request to fill. Acknowledge resignation of Claudia Rosales, full-time Brown County Jail Correctional Officer effective August 4, 2021. Request to fill. Approve Johann Kolb, full-time Brown County Jail Correctional Officer, wage correction of \$17.51/hour back date to June 8, 2021. Approve hiring of Keith Russel Stewart as full-time Brown County Jail Correctional Officer effective July 27, 2021 @ \$16.82/hour. Approve transfer of Makayla Jenniges from part-time to full-time Brown County JDC Correctional Officer effective July 11, 2021 @ \$16.82/hour. Approve transfer of Grant Duval from part-time to full-time Brown County JDC Correctional Officer effective August 8, 2021 @ \$16.82/hour. Approve hiring of Stephanie Morgan as full-time Brown County Equalization Office Deputy effective August 16, 2021 @ \$15.80/hour. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

SET BID DATE_WOOD WASTE GRINDING: Moved by Feickert, seconded by Sutton to set public hearing and authorize advertising for public hearing to open, read and consider sealed bids for Wood Waste Grinding. Hearing date set for August 17, 2021, at 8:47 a.m. in the Brown County Courthouse Commission Chambers. All members present voting aye. Motion Carried.

SET HEARING DATE_REZONE ORDINANCE: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Wiese to set hearing date and authorize publishing the follow request to rezone property: Application has been made by Linda Musch to the Brown County Board of Commissioners for a change of zoning. Hearing to be held in the Commissioner's Chambers, Courthouse Annex, Brown County, South Dakota on August 17, 2021, at 8:46 A.M. for the purpose of rezoning the following property from Chapter 4.06 Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) to Chapter 4.07 Mini-Ag District (M-AG): Lots 1&2, "Musch Subdivision" in the NE ¼ of Section 25-T125N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (39393 122nd St & 12207 394th Ave). The public is invited to attend the hearing and to present comments and testimony regarding the amendment to Second Revision Brown County Ordinances pertaining to rezoning the described property. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Brown County Commission may adopt first reading of Ordinance No. 201. All member present voting aye. Motion carried.

PLATS: Commissioner Sutton offered the following resolution:

RESOLUTION 41-21 MAMMENGA'S CONSERVATION EASEMENT TRACTS

"Be it resolved by the Board of County Commissioners of Brown County, South Dakota, that the plat showing Mammenga's Conservation Easement Tracts in the Southeast Quarter and the Southeast Quarter of the Northeast Quarter of Section 32, Township 125 North, Range 62 West of the 5th Principal Meridian, Brown County, South Dakota having been examined is hereby approved in accordance with the provisions of SDCL 11-3, and any amendments thereof." Seconded by Feickert. Roll call vote Commissioner Feickert-aye, Sutton-aye, Wiese-aye, Fjeldheim-aye. Resolution adopted.

RESOLUTION 42-21 KANGAS AND JAMES SUBDIVISION

"Be it resolved by the Board of County Commissioners of Brown County, South Dakota, that the plat showing Kangas and James Subdivision in the NE ¼ of Section 33-T126N-R61W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota having been examined is hereby approved in accordance with the provisions of SDCL 11-3, and any amendments thereof." Seconded by Feickert. Roll call vote Commissioner Feickert-aye, Sutton-aye, Wiese-aye, Fjeldheim-aye. Resolution adopted.

RESOLUTION 43-21 JVT STRATFORD TOWER ADDITION

"Be it resolved by the County Commission of Brown County, South Dakota, that the plat showing "JVT STRATFORD TOWER ADDITION IN THE SW ¼ OF SECTION 8, TOWNSHIP 121 NORTH, RANGE 62 WEST OF THE 5TH P.M., BROWN COUNTY, SOUTH DAKOTA" having been examined is hereby approved in accordance with the provisions of SDCL of 1967, Chapter 11-3, and any amendments thereof." Seconded by Feickert. Roll call vote Commissioner Feickert-aye, Sutton-aye, Wiese-aye, Fjeldheim-aye. Resolution adopted.

LEASES: Moved by Wiese, seconded by Sutton to approve the following leases: Bart Walker (The Celtic Fair) for the lease of the Richmond Lake Youth Camp on September 18-19, 2021; Child Evangelism Fel-

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lowship (CEF) for the lease of the Richmond Lake Youth Camp Lodge on July 19-23, 2021; Montgomery's Furniture for the lease of 8 picnic tables on July 16, 2021. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

ABATEMENT: Moved by Feickert, seconded by Wiese to approve the following abatement: Kyle Reif & Margo Loeb (paid special assessment to City of Groton) @ \$324.85. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

CLAIM ASSIGNMENT: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Wiese to authorize Auditor sign documentation to assign claim against an individual to Credit Collection Bureau for the purpose of collecting liens. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT/DISCUSSION_SERVICE ANIMALS IN THE COURTHOUSE: Erica Coughlin, HR Direction, met with the Board of Commissioner to discuss as to what animals are allowed to enter the Courthouse building. She advises the County follows ADA guidelines in allowing service animals (no emotional support) inside the building and that the county opted to continue following the same guidelines. No actions taken.

ADJOURNMENT: Moved by Feickert, seconded by Sutton to adjourn the Brown County Commission at 9:37 a.m. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

Jeannette McClain, Brown County Deputy Auditor

BROWN COUNTY AUGUST 3, 2021 – GENERAL MEETING

Meeting called to order by Commission Chair Fjeldheim at 8:45 A.M. in the Commission Chambers, Courthouse Annex, Brown County, SD. Present were Commissioners Feickert, Sutton and Wiese. Commissioner Kippley was absent. Commissioner Wiese led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Feickert to approve the agenda. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

SEALED PROPOSAL OPENING_OWNER REPRESENTATION SERVICES (COUNTY JAIL): Moved by Sutton, seconded by Feickert to defer award for Owner Representation Services on a later date for further review by the Sheriff's & State's Attorney Office. Proposal has been received from the following: HMN Architects (Overland Park, KS), Tegra Group (St Louis Park, MN), Elevatus Architecture (Fort Wayne, IN), KMS Engineering (Sioux Falls, SD), and Donlar Construction (MN, SD, ND, IA, WI). All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

APPLICATION FOR OCCUPANCY: Moved by Wiese, seconded by Sutton to approve application submitted by Midcontinent for occupancy of Brown County Highway Number 6G, in Section 13, Township 124N, Range 65W, Brown County, South Dakota (126401 N Bridge Rd) for telecommunication purpose. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

APPLICATION FOR OCCUPANCY: Moved by Feickert, seconded by Wiese to approve application submitted by Midcontinent for occupancy of Brown County Highway Number 16, in Section 18, Township 123N, Range 62W, Brown County, South Dakota. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

APPLICATION FOR OCCUPANCY: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Feickert to approve application submitted by WEB Water Development for occupancy of Brown County Highway Number 14E, in Section 27, Township 123, Range 63, Brown County, South Dakota for potable water line usage. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES: Dirk Rogers, Highway Superintendent, discussed with the Commission current road projects and department updates.

VACATION OF SERVICE ROAD RIGHT OF WAY: Moved by Feickert, seconded by Wiese to set hearing date to consider petition to vacate the following service road right of way: Petition by Linda Fordham, Darin Duvall, Michael Rohl, Christopher Galvin, Lee Goetz and Brown County Highway Department to vacate the service road right of way described as follows: 50 ft X 1098 ft Service Road Right of Way bordered on the North by 129th St and bordered on the South by Lots 14, 15 and 26 of the Replat of Lots 6,7 and 8 in Block 2 of Gederos Subdivision and Lot 1, Goetz Consolidation Subdivision in Gederos Subdivision in the NW ¼ of Section 35, Township 124N, Range 64 W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota. Hearing

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to be held August 24, at 8:48 a.m. in the Commissioner's Chambers, Courthouse Annex, Brown County, South Dakota. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

COUNTY BURN BAN: The Board of Commissioner had a brief discussion on how to go with the process of issuing controlled burn permits. No actions taken.

MINUTES: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Wiese to approve the general meeting minutes of July 27, 2021. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

CLAIMS & PAYROLL: Moved by Feickert, seconded by Wiese to approve the following claims & payroll: Payroll: Commission \$4,327.95; Auditor \$8,937.74; Treasurer \$13,663.46; SA \$23,908.49; SVAWA \$1,575.00; Maintenance \$7,801.29; Assessor \$13,504.39; Register of Deeds \$9,124.94; VSO \$2,560.75; GIS \$2,411.38; IT \$7,261.45; HR \$3,677.08; Sheriff \$38,497.50; Jail \$53,992.57; Court Security \$4,764.02; JDC \$34,304.17; Welfare \$2,982.62; Museum \$8,413.56; Parks/Fairgrounds \$5,973.21; Fair Board \$3,800.99; 4-H \$1,394.40; Weed \$4,247.88; Planning & Zoning \$4,598.71; Highway \$45,036.60; Dispatch \$31,788.18; Emergency \$4,160.96; Teen Court \$571.15; JDAI \$1,846.15; 24/7 Sobriety \$1,264.87; Landfill \$14,434.85; FICA \$22,440.61; Medicare \$5,248.20; Health Insurance \$115,978.38; Dental Insurance \$7,546.90; Life Insurance \$1,014.90. Claims: Chris Hauger \$356.80; Lisa Fedeler \$266.38; Deb Stamm \$246.64; Aberdeen Fire Rescue \$671.00; Artz Equipment Inc \$23.86; Andrew Coughlin \$19.74; Avera Medical Group \$4,203.70; DT Pharmacy \$981.29; Burdette Security \$4,798.22; MAC'S Inc. \$2,093.25; Cole Papers \$1,291.61; Cathy McNickle \$14.00; Bakken Building Maint. \$500.00; Crawford Trucks & Equip. \$3,653.40; Dakota Doors Inc \$355.20; Diamond Mowers, Inc \$836.40; Dakota Supply Group \$25.20; Ecolab Pest \$117.60; Fastenal Company \$503.11; FedEx \$20.98; Haar Plumbing \$456.79; Lawson Products Inc \$659.23; Leidholdt Tool Sales \$264.09; Lien Transportation Co \$424,475.10; LabSource \$1,093.95; Jake's Heating and Cooling \$90.00; Montana Dakota Utilites \$23.21; Midstates Printing \$740.00; Midcontinent Communications \$1,193.78; Menards \$179.94; Mark Milbrandt \$668.67; Geffdog Designs \$48.00; Northwestern Energy \$6,130.68; Performance Oil \$257.78; Sara Zahn \$74.60; SDSU Extension \$138.30; Sewer Duck \$337.50; South Dakota Public Assurance Alliance \$91.07; Share Corp \$627.00; South Brown Conservation District \$724.00; Sherwin-Williams \$74.64; Yankton County Sheriff's Office \$50.00; All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

LEASE: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Feickert to approve the following lease: NSU Focus Group for lease of Richmond Lake Youth Camp Lodge and one dorm on August 19-21, 2021. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

SHERIFF'S REPORT_JUNE 2021: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Wiese to approve June 2021 Sheriff's Report. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

LOTTERY PERMIT: Moved by Feickert, seconded by Wiese to approve the following lottery permit application: Brown County Democrats for a raffle on August 22, 2021 at the Brown County Fairgrounds. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: Moved by Wiese, seconded by Sutton to go into executive session to discuss contracts per SDCL 1-25-2(4). All members present voting aye. Motion carried. The chair declared executive session closed with no action taken.

ADJOURNMENT: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Feickert to adjourn the Brown County Commission at 10:35 a.m. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

Jeannette McClain, Brown County Deputy Auditor

NOTICE OF HEARING REGARDING A PETITION TO VACATE SERVICE ROAD RIGHT-OF-WAY

A public hearing will be held by the Brown County Commission on the 24th day of August 2021, at 8:48 a.m. in the Commissioners' Chambers, Courthouse Annex, Brown County, South Dakota, on the petition to vacate service road right-of-way filed by Linda Fordham, Darin Duvall, Michael Rohl, Christopher Galvin, Lee Goetz and Brown County Highway Department for the vacation of the service road right-of-way described as follows:

50ft x 1,098ft Service Road Right of Way bordered on the N by 129th St and bordered on the S by Lots

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14, 15, and 26 of the Replat of Lots 6, 7, and 8 in Block 2 of Gederos Subdivision and Lot 1, Goetz Consolidation Subdivision in Gederos Subdivision in the NW ¼ of Section 35, Township 124N, Range 64 W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota.

The public is invited to attend the hearing on the petition to vacate the service road right-of-way and to present comments and testimony regarding said petition. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Board of Commission may approve a resolution granting the petition to vacate the service road right-of-way. Dated this 5th day of August 2021.

ATTEST: Cathy McNickle, Brown County Auditor

New Survey Finds More Than 10 Million Students Will Experience Virtual Learning This Year

Fears of Delta Variants and Mask Mandates Make Parents Question Return to Classroom Pinkston News Service

WASHINGTON, DC-(Pinkston News Service)- New CDC mask recommendations and COVID-19 variants have many parents worried about sending their kids back to the classroom in the fall. Though school districts are preparing for in-classroom learning, online alternatives are becoming more and more attractive for parents who want to keep their kids safe.

Alternatives to in-classroom learning are both expected and wanted. The Los Angeles Times recently reported that 71% of California parents agreed that online learning should remain an option for their children, holding open the possibility that shutdowns in areas of high COVID-19 transmission rates may require further lockdowns. Stride, Inc., (www.stridelearning.com), which is the largest provider of K-12 virtual learning in the country, found in their recent survey that 30% of K-8 parents said they expect that their children will receive some degree of remote instruction this fall.

Parents who are looking for safe and quality virtual learning options are enrolling their children in virtual schools. Stride's online schools saw a 39% increase in enrollment during the pandemic and raised enrollment to more than 170,000 students.

For Isaiah Gutierrez of Destinations Career Academy of Colorado, moving to an all virtual school was a life-saver. "In grammar school, I struggled with challenges related to my ADHD. After transferring to Destinations Career Academy of Colorado, my grades improved dramatically. I found I was learning more in a virtual environment than I did in my previous school," said Gutierrez.

Research shows that students retain on average 25-60% more material when learning online compared to only 8-10% in a classroom. In a classroom setting, lessons can only be taught at the pace of the slowest learner. Meanwhile, lessons delivered through e-learning can require anywhere from 40-60% less time to learn.

Virtual learning can also be ideal for students with social anxiety, and it can also shield vulnerable or marginalized students from bullying and teasing.

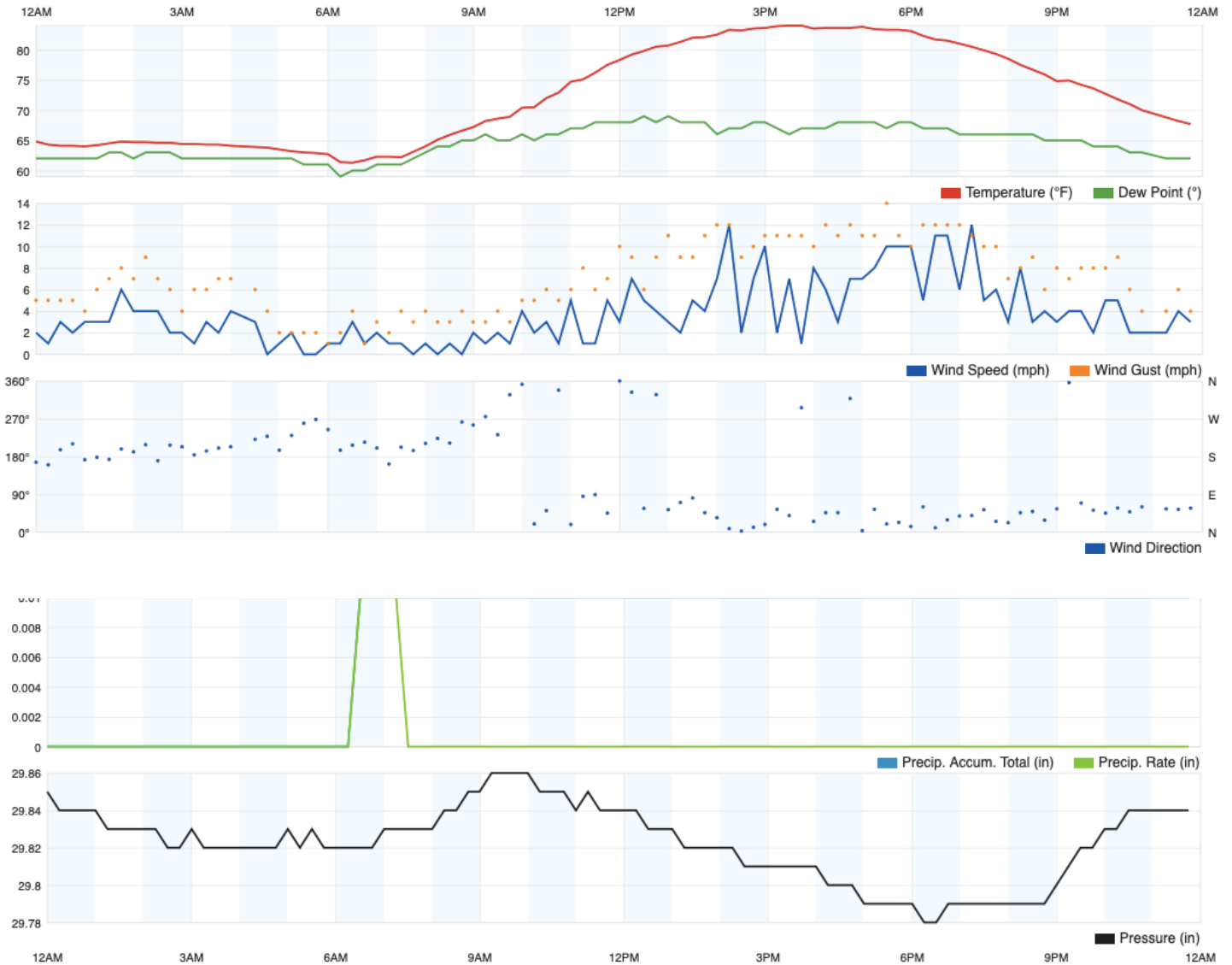
Online learning can even shield students from perceptions of racism. The Los Angeles Times has reported that 43% of Black parents said they were concerned about bullying, racism, and low academic standards. Indeed, national polling reveals that Black and Hispanic parents are far more likely than white parents to say they are keeping their children remote. Minority families stand to benefit the most from access to strong e-learning resources in the coming year.

For parents worried about COVID-19, learning loss, or even the mental health of their children, online learning provides a viable alternative. With last year's surge in virtual learning enrollment, and with another year of back-to-school worries on the horizon, virtual learning is poised to become a permanent and positive part of the educational landscape for America's schoolchildren.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Patchy Smoke

High: 86 °F

Tonight



40%

Chance
T-storms

Low: 66 °F

Saturday



40%

Chance
T-storms

High: 87 °F

Saturday
Night



30%

Chance
T-storms

Low: 64 °F

Sunday



Mostly Sunny

High: 88 °F

Today

Highs in the mid 90s across south central SD to mid 80s across northeast SD and west central MN. Breezy easterly winds west of the James River.



Tonight

Isolated showers and thunderstorms, generally low threat for severe storms.

A mostly sunny afternoon may lead to an isolated shower or thunderstorm this evening. A more organized low pressure system moves into the region Saturday, bringing additional thunderstorm chances, as well as a greater severe threat.

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Today in Weather History

August 6, 1962: Wind damaged farm buildings and hail damaged crops over a large area. The area affected was northern Faulk, portions of Spink, Northern Clark, Codington, and Grant, along with Day County.

August 6, 1969: During the day and evening hours, two relatively large storms brought destructive weather to much of Minnesota. The northern storm area moved in from North Dakota between Fargo and Grand Forks. The southern storm rapidly developed north of Wadena. These two storms combined to cause twelve tornadoes, two vast areas of wind and hail damage, and one waterspout. The storms killed 15 people, injured 106, and caused 4.8 million dollars in property and public utility damage.

August 6, 1969: The first report of high winds was southeast of Piedmont with gusts of 65 to 70 mph estimated by a National Weather Service employee. Damage in that area included several downed trees and leveled gardens. As the storm moved east, large hail was reported. The first wind gust at Ellsworth AFB was 89 mph at 1918 MST on the northwest end of the runway. By 1925 MST, sustained winds were over 50 mph for nearly 10 minutes, and the peak gust was 114 mph. The sensor on the southeast end of the runway, 2.5 miles away, recorded a wind gust of 114 mph at 1929 MST. The damage on the base included several large trees blown over and snapped in half and roof damage to base housing units. A few tents set up on the taxiways for an air show were blown around, but not significantly damaged. A survey by base meteorologists indicated the main downburst winds hit over open prairie surrounding the runway, where there are no trees or structures. Also between 1920 and 1930 MST, a meteorology student estimated winds between 70 and 80 mph at Box Elder, where gardens were leveled, and wooden fences and roofs were damaged.

1890 - Thunderstorms left four inches of hail covering the ground in Adair County and Union County in Iowa. The hail drifted into six foot mounds, and in some places remained on the ground for twenty- six days. (The Weather Channel)

1918 - Unusually hot weather began to overspread the Atlantic Coast States, from the Carolinas to southern New England. The temperature soared to an all-time record high of 106 degrees at Washington D.C., and Cumberland and Keedysville hit 109 degrees to establish a state record for Maryland. Temperatures were above normal east of the Rockies that month, with readings much above normal in the Lower Missouri Valley. Omaha NE reached 110 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1959: Hurricane Dot crossed Kauai in the Hawaiian Islands producing sustained winds of 105 mph with gusts to 125 mph. Over 6 inches of rain fell with over 9 inches on the big island of Hawaii. The sugar cane crop on Kauai sustained \$2.7 million in damages.

1959 - A bucket survey showed that thunderstorms dropped 16.70 inches of rain on parts of Decatur County IA. The total was accepted as Iowa's 24 hour rainfall record. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - Evening thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 100 mph at Winner SD damaging two hundred homes. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1987 - Afternoon thunderstorms deluged Milwaukee, WI, with 6.84 inches of rain, including more than five inches in two hours, breaking all previous rainfall records for the city. Floodwaters were four feet deep at the Milwaukee County Stadium, and floodwaters filled the basement of the main terminal at the airport. Flooding caused 5.9 million dollars damage, and claimed the life of one person. Death Valley, CA, reported a morning low of 97 degrees. A midday thunderstorm deluged Birmingham AL with nearly six inches of rain in one hour. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in Pennsylvania and New York State. A cold front crossing the northwestern U.S. produced wind gusts to 66 mph at Livingston MT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced severe weather from northwestern Texas to the Southern Appalachians, and in the northeastern U.S. There were 136 reports of large hail or damaging winds during the day and evening. Thunderstorms in the Southern Plains Region produced tennis ball size hail northwest of Buffalo OK, and wind gusts to 100 mph at Pampa TX. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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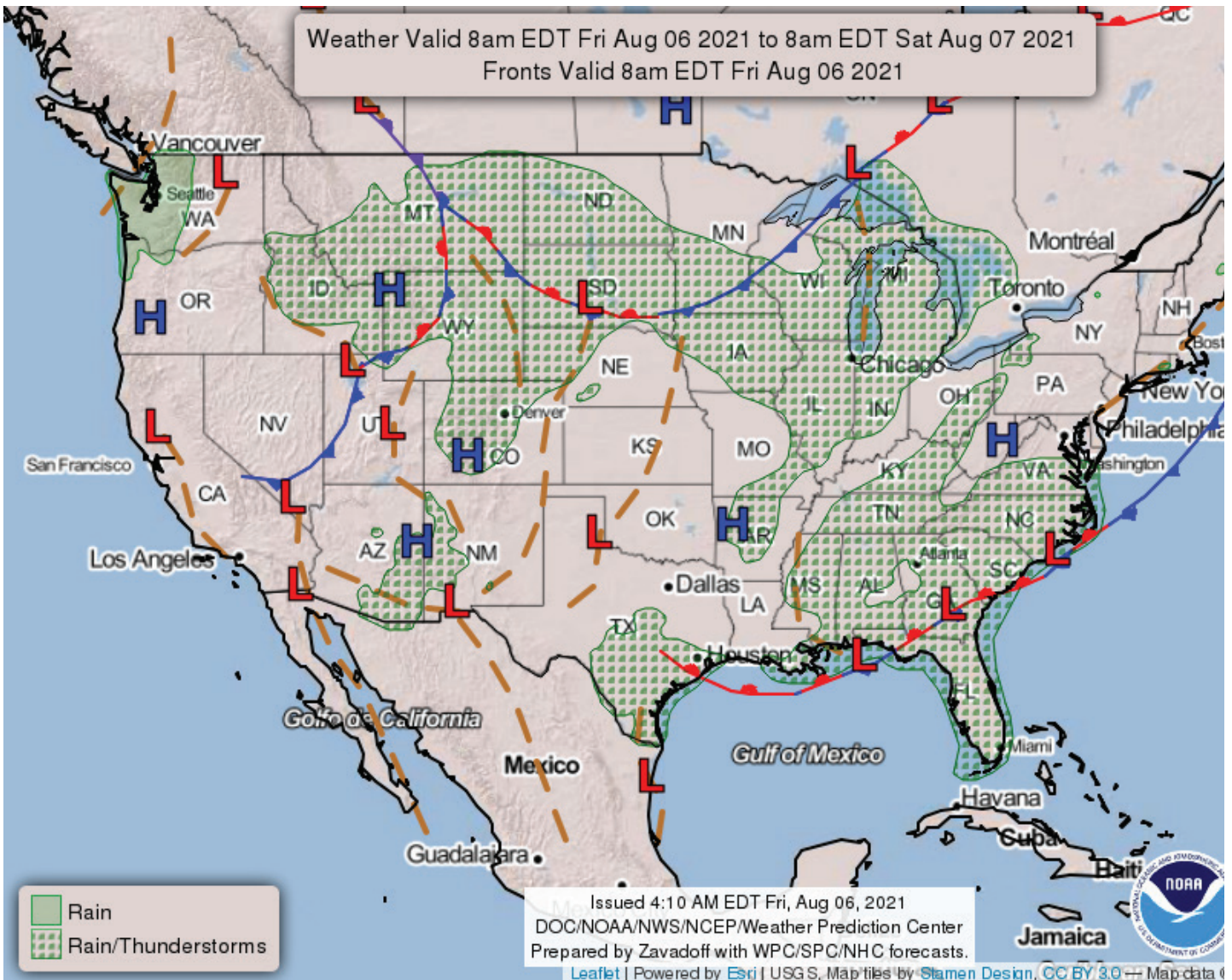
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 84 °F at 3:30 PM
Low Temp: 61.3 °F at 6:30 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 5:30 PM
Precip: 0.01

Today's Info

Record High: 108° in 1941
Record Low: 44° in 1902
Average High: 84°F
Average Low: 59°F
Average Precip in Aug.: 0.37
Precip to date in Aug.: 0.02
Average Precip to date: 14.47
Precip Year to Date: 7.29
Sunset Tonight: 8:54 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:25 a.m.



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WHY?

One of the most irritating, aggravating, frustrating – and yet stimulating – questions is – “Why?” It angers parents and annoys teachers. It disturbs moments of quiet reflection when we think we have the answers to “everything.” Then suddenly, we realize we don’t. It bothers us deeply when we are asked “why” did you do this or “why” did you do that. It seems to be planted deep within the brains of children to make us defensive or angry and even feel stupid.

But “Why” is an important question. It can force us to look at what we have done or what we are about to do. It can, in all reality, keep us from doing wrong or encourage us to do what is right.

David addresses the “Why” question quite frequently. In Psalm 86, however, he makes an observation and then answers it with “why.”

He wrote, “I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify Your name forever.” Then he adds the why for us: “For great is Your love toward me; You have delivered me from the depths of the grave.”

“Praise” and “glorify” are a most important part of our worship. When we look at these two verses together, we find an important reason to remind us why we worship God: it is because of His love and mercy.

We may not know what he is referring to when he said that “God delivered me from the depths of the grave.”

And, perhaps that’s good. What’s don’t matter – God does! There are many days when we feel we are about to be “buried alive.” Then, God delivers us, and it’s time to worship.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for the endless times You rescued us from disaster and defeat. May we always praise Your name for Your generous gifts. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Psalm 86:12 I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.

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2021 Community Events

- Cancelled** Legion Post #39 Spring Fundraiser (Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, every other year)
03/27/2021 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
04/10/2021 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
04/24/2021 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/25/2021 Princess Prom (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/01/2021 Lions Club Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
05/31/2021 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
6/7-9/2021 St. John's Lutheran Church VBS
06/17/2021 Groton Transit Fundraiser, 4-7 p.m.
06/18/2021 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
06/19/2021 U8 Baseball Tournament
06/19/2021 **Postponed to Aug. 28th:** Lions Crazy Golf Fest at Olive Grove Golf Course, Noon
06/26/2021 U10 Baseball Tournament
06/27/2021 U12 Baseball Tournament
07/04/2021 Firecracker Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
07/11/2021 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 10am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
07/22/2021 Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
07/30/2021-08/03/2021 State "B" American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
08/06/2021 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course
08/13/2021 Groton Basketball Golf Tournament
08/28/2021 Lions Club Crazy Golf Fest 9am Olive Grove Golf Course
08/29/2021 Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day at GHS Parking Lot (4-5 p.m.)
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

Noem settles on roomy turboprop for new state airplane

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem's purchase of an updated state airplane was completed Thursday, with the state opting for a bigger, faster and newer turboprop after some lawmakers questioned whether she was hoping to buy a jet.

The Department of Transportation completed the purchase of a 2015 Beechcraft King Air 350 for about \$4.5 million, spokesman Ian Fury confirmed. The aircraft, which holds up to nine passengers, is marketed to business executives with pull-out work tables, a built-in refreshment center and onboard Wi-Fi.

Legislators were skeptical earlier this year when the governor requested a \$5 million allocation to update the state's plane fleet. Some believed she was angling to buy a jet, especially as she has become a regular fixture at conservative conferences nationwide.

Democrats also criticized her for using the state plane to attend 2019 events held by political organizations, even though state law bars using the state plane for political or personal trips. Noem defended those trips as part of her job as "an ambassador for the state."

She also argued the state fleet needed an update, both for safety and savings on maintenance costs for the state's three planes. All were built in the 1980s and 1990s. The plane that Noem usually uses, a 1988 King Air 200, features ashtrays, a leaky coffee dispenser and overhead panels that discharge face masks if touched too heavily.

South Dakota's new plane will be one of the most luxurious state-owned planes in the region. North Dakota flies a pair of King Air 200s manufactured in 1995. Minnesota's King Air 200 is a 1993 model. And Nebraska's King Air C90 GTX, which it purchased straight from the factory in 2014 for \$3.5 million, has a cabin roughly half the size of South Dakota's new plane.

The state is selling its King Air 200 along with a 1995 King Air 90. The Department of Transportation estimated the two planes would need about \$850,000 in maintenance in the next three years. The three planes in the state's fleet were previously averaging an annual maintenance cost of \$333,000.

The Department of Transportation paid an airplane sales consultant, Verity Jet Group, \$195,000 to help navigate the purchase of the new plane and the sale of the old ones.

Fury said Noem and the DOT "trusted experts to identify the plane that made the most sense for South Dakota's needs."

Former attorney sentenced for money laundering, fraud

A former South Dakota attorney has been sentenced for wire fraud, money laundering and bank fraud. Acting U.S. Attorney Dennis Holmes said in a statement Thursday that Rena Hymans has been sentenced to 30 months in federal prison and ordered to pay nearly \$164,000 in restitution.

Hymans was indicted by a federal grand jury in August of last year. She pleaded guilty in January and was convicted on two counts of money laundering, two counts of wire fraud and one count of bank fraud.

Prosecutors say that as a licensed attorney in Sturgis, Hymans transferred unearned money from her client trust account to her own business and personal accounts, and then used the money for her personal benefit between February 2014 and January 2020.

Hymans was ordered to self-surrender to the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service on August 24.

Sanford Health targeted by cyber hackers

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A leading healthcare system based in Sioux Falls has acknowledged that its been targeted by hackers.

Sanford Health President and CEO Bill Gassen on Wednesday confirmed to the Argus Leader that the

organization was working to resolve the cyber attack.

"Sanford Health has experienced an attempted cyber security incident, and we are taking aggressive measures to contain the impact," Gassen said. "Providing patients with exceptional care is our top priority, and we are doing everything possible to minimize disruption."

Sanford Health information technology staff were alerted Tuesday evening that its cyber network was being breached.

Sanford officials did not provide details as to the nature of the cyber attack or its impact, other than to say they are not aware of any personal or financial information of patients, residents or employees being compromised by the breach.

"We have engaged leading IT security experts to assist in the response, and have notified and will be working closely with federal authorities," Gassen said.

Supreme Court orders resentencing in manslaughter case

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Supreme Court has ordered a Yankton man be resentenced for manslaughter.

Jameson Mitchell pleaded guilty to fatally shooting Lucas Smith outside a Yankton bar in April of 2019. The two had fought inside the bar and then were ejected through different doors. The 22-year-old Mitchell retrieved a handgun from his apartment and returned to the alley outside the bar. Mitchell argued the gun was for his protection.

Surveillance video showed Smith charging at Mitchell, shouting for Mitchell to shoot him.

In an agreement with prosecutors Mitchell pleaded guilty to first-degree manslaughter. Circuit Judge Cheryl Gering sentenced Mitchell to 124 years in prison, more than twice the amount of time the state recommended.

In writing for the court in its decision released Thursday, Justice Mark Salter said the circuit court "effectively treated Mitchell as solely responsible for Smith's killing without considering Smith's own criminal conduct."

Salter noted that the shooting was a "gravely serious offense" and that the justices understood the circuit court's inclination to impose a stern sentence.

"However, in order to accurately assess the nature of Mitchell's conduct, the court must consider the fact that he was reacting to a threat posed by Smith's own assaultive conduct," the justice wrote.

The Supreme Court vacated the sentence and sent the case back to the lower court for sentencing.

Hezbollah says fired rockets after Israeli airstrikes

By LAURIE KELLMAN and ZEINA KARAM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The militant Hezbollah group said it fired a barrage of rockets near Israeli positions close to the Lebanese border on Friday, calling it retaliation for Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon a day earlier.

Israel said it was firing back after 19 rockets were launched from Lebanon, and Prime Minister Naftali Bennett swiftly convened a meeting with the country's top defense officials.

The attacks were a significant escalation between Israel's new government and Iran-backed Hezbollah, and comes amid rising tensions between Israel and Iran that has played out in the Persian Gulf.

Israel's defense minister warned Thursday that his country is prepared to strike Iran, issuing the threat against the Islamic Republic after a fatal drone strike on an oil tanker at sea that his country blamed on Tehran.

The U.N. peacekeeping force deployed along the Lebanese-Israeli border said it has detected rocket launches from Lebanon on Friday, and return artillery fire by Israel.

"This is a very serious situation and we urge all parties to cease fire," the force known as UNIFIL said. Force commander Gen. Stefano Del Col, said the force was coordinating with the Lebanese army to strengthen security measures in the area and called on the parties to cease fire immediately.

Sirens blared across the Golan Heights and Upper Galilee near the Lebanon border Friday morning.

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Hezbollah said in a statement that it hit "open fields" near Israeli positions in the disputed Shebaa farms area, with "dozens" of rockets. No casualties were reported.

The group said it fired 10 rockets, calling it retaliation for Israeli airstrikes the day before. Those strikes were in retaliation to rocket fire from south Lebanon, which was not claimed by any group.

Shebaa Farms is an enclave where the borders of Israel, Lebanon and Syria meet. Israel says it is part of the Golan Heights, which it captured from Syria in 1967. Lebanon and Syria say Shebaa Farms belong to Lebanon, while the United Nations says the area is part of Syria and that Damascus and Israel should negotiate its fate.

The escalation comes at a sensitive time in Lebanon, which is mired in multiple crises including a devastating economic and financial meltdown and political deadlock that has left the country without a functional government for a full year.

Hezbollah's response, rocketing open fields in a disputed area rather than Israel proper, appeared calibrated to limit any response.

Israeli army Lt. Col. Amnon Shefler told reporters Friday that 19 rockets had been fired into Israel, of which three fell within Lebanese territory. Ten of the remaining 16 rockets were intercepted by the defense system known as the Iron Dome.

It is also a politically sensitive time in Israel. Israel's new eight-party governing coalition is trying to keep peace under a fragile cease-fire that ended an 11-day war with Hamas' militant rulers in Gaza in May.

Israel has long considered Hezbollah its most serious and immediate military threat. It estimates the group possesses over 130,000 rockets and missiles capable of striking anywhere in Israel. In recent years, it also has expressed concerns that the group is trying to import or develop an arsenal of precision-guided missiles.

The attack sparked tensions between locals and Hezbollah. Videos circulated on social media after the rocket attack showing two vehicles, including a mobile rocket launcher, being stopped by villagers in the southeastern village of Shwaya in Hasbaya region near the border with the Golan Heights.

Some angry villagers, who belong to the Druze sect, could be heard saying: "Hezbollah is firing rockets from between homes so that Israel hits us back."

Hezbollah later issued a statement saying that the rockets were fired from remote areas, adding that the fighters were stopped in Shwaya on their way back.

"The Islamic Resistance was and will always be most keen about the safety of its people and avoiding any harm to them through its acts of resistance," the statement said.

Hezbollah, which in recent years has been fighting alongside Syrian President Bashar Assad in the neighboring country's civil war, named Friday's operation after two of its fighters who were killed by Israeli fire.

Ali Mohsen was killed in July last year in an Israeli airstrike near the Syrian capital Damascus. Mohammed Tahhan was shot dead by Israeli troops along the Lebanon-Israel border in May during a protest in support of Gaza during this year's Israel-Hamas war.

Town burns to ashes in raging Northern California wildfire

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER and NOAH BERGER Associated Press

GREENVILLE, Calif. (AP) — Eva Gorman says the little California mountain town of Greenville was a place of community and strong character, the kind of place where neighbors volunteered to move furniture, colorful baskets of flowers brightened Main Street, and writers, musicians, mechanics and chicken farmers mingled.

Now, it's ashes.

As hot, bone-dry, gusty weather hit California, the state's largest current wildfire raged through the Gold Rush-era Sierra Nevada community of about 1,000, incinerating much of the downtown that included wooden buildings more than a century old.

The winds were expected to calm and change direction heading into the weekend but that good news came too late for Gorman.

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"It's just completely devastating. We've lost our home, my business, our whole downtown area is gone," said Gorman, who heeded evacuation warnings and left town with her husband a week and-a-half ago as the Dixie Fire approached.

She managed to grab some photos off the wall, her favorite jewelry and important documents but couldn't help but think of the family treasures left behind.

"My grandmother's dining room chairs, my great-aunt's bed from Italy. There is a photo I keep visualizing in my mind of my son when he was 2. He's 37 now," she said. "At first you think, 'It's OK, I have the negatives.' And then you realize, 'Oh. No. I don't.'"

Officials had not yet assessed the number of destroyed buildings, but Plumas County Sheriff Todd Johns estimated on Thursday that "well over" 100 homes had burned in and near the town.

"My heart is crushed by what has occurred there," said Johns, a lifelong Greenville resident.

About a two-hour drive south, officials said some 100 homes and other buildings burned in the fast-moving River Fire that broke out Wednesday near Colfax, a town of about 2,000. There was no containment and about 6,000 people were ordered to evacuate in Placer and Nevada counties, state fire officials said.

The three-week-old Dixie Fire was one of 100 active, large fires burning in 14 states, most in the West where historic drought has left lands parched and ripe for ignition.

The Dixie Fire had consumed about 565 square miles (1,464 square kilometers), an area larger than the size of Los Angeles. The cause was under investigation, but Pacific Gas & Electric has said it may have been sparked when a tree fell on one of the utility's power lines.

The blaze exploded on Wednesday and Thursday through timber, grass and brush so dry that one fire official described it as "basically near combustion." Dozens of homes had already burned before the flames made new runs.

No deaths or injuries were reported but the fire continued to threaten more than 10,000 homes.

On Thursday, the weather and towering smoke clouds produced by the fire's intense, erratic winds kept firefighters struggling to put firefighters at shifting hot spots.

"It's wreaking havoc. The winds are kind of changing direction on us every few hours," said Capt. Sergio Arellano, a fire spokesman.

"We're seeing truly frightening fire behavior," said Chris Carlton, supervisor for Plumas National Forest. "We really are in uncharted territory."

Heat waves and historic drought tied to climate change have made wildfires harder to fight in the American West. Scientists say climate change has made the region much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

The blaze hit Greenville from two angles and firefighters already were in the town trying to save it but first they had to risk their lives to save people who had refused to evacuate by loading people into cars to get them out, fire officials said.

"We have firefighters that are getting guns pulled out on them, because people don't want to evacuate," said Jake Cagle, an incident management operations section chief.

The flames also reached the town of Chester, northwest of Greenville, but crews managed to protect homes and businesses there, with only minor damage to one or two structures, officials said.

The fire was not far from the town of Paradise, which was largely destroyed in a 2018 wildfire sparked by PG&E equipment that killed 85 people, making it the nation's deadliest in at least a century.

Thousands flee fires in Greece, Turkey; some rescued by sea

By DEREK GATOPOULOS, ELENA BECATOROS and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Thousands of people fled wildfires burning out of control in Greece and Turkey on Friday, as a protracted heat wave turned forests into tinderboxes and flames threatened populated areas, electricity installations and historic sites.

On the Greek island of Evia, the coast guard mounted a major operation to evacuate hundreds of people by sea, using patrol boats as well as fishing and private vessels to rescue residents and vacationers from

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encroaching flames overnight and into Friday. Dozens of other villages and neighborhoods were emptied in the southern Peloponnese region and just north of the Greek capital as blazes raced through pine forests.

"We're talking about the apocalypse, I don't know how to describe it," Sotiris Danikas, head of the coast guard in the town of Aidipsos on Evia, told state broadcaster ERT, describing the sea evacuation.

Coast guard spokesman Nikos Kokkalas told ERT that 653 people had been evacuated from beaches in northeast Evia after all other means of escape were cut off by the fires.

Fires have raged in many parts of Greece as the country has been baked by a prolonged heatwave that sent temperatures soaring to 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit). Thousands of people have fled their homes or holiday accommodation, while at least 20 people, including four firefighters, have been treated for injuries. Two of the firefighters were in intensive care in Athens, while another two were hospitalized with light burns, the Health Ministry said.

In neighboring Turkey, wildfires described as the worst in decades have swept through swaths of the southern coast for the past 10 days, killing eight people.

More than 1,000 firefighters and nearly 20 aircraft are now battling major fires across Greece. Several European countries are sending or already sent firefighters, planes, helicopters and vehicles to help.

Although temperatures dipped below 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) for the first time in nearly 10 days in many parts of Greece, strong winds were predicted for Friday afternoon for much of the country, weather that could further hamper firefighting efforts.

"We are going through the 10th day of a major heat wave affecting our entire country, the worst heat wave in terms of intensity and duration of the last 30 years," Fire Service Brig. Gen. Aristotelis Papadopoulos said.

In Turkey, authorities evacuated six more neighborhoods near the town of Milas, in Mugla province, Friday as a wildfire fanned by winds raged some 5 kilometers (3 miles) from a power plant. At least 36,000 people were evacuated to safety in Mugla province alone, officials said.

Meanwhile, several excavators cleared strips of land to form firebreaks in a bid to stop flames from reaching the Yenikoy plant, the second such facility to be threatened by wildfires in the region.

On Wednesday, a fire reached the compound of the coal-fueled Kemerkooy power plant, forcing nearby residents to flee in navy vessels and cars. It was contained on Thursday after raging for some 11 hours and officials said the plant's main units were not damaged.

Wildfires that had been raging near the tourism resort of Marmaris, also in Mugla province, were largely contained by late Thursday, officials said, while at least two fires were still burning in Antalya province, another beach holiday destination.

In Greece, firefighters went door to door in areas around 20 kilometers (12.5 miles) north of Athens telling people to evacuate, while helicopters dropped water on towering flames and thick smoke blanketed the area. Authorities sent push alerts to mobile phones in the area urging residents to evacuate.

Constant flare-ups that threatened inhabited areas hampered the work of hundreds of firefighters there.

The fire halted traffic on the country's main highway connecting Athens to northern Greece Thursday and damaged electricity installations, leading the power distribution company to warn of the possibility of rolling power cuts.

In the Drosopigi area, resident Giorgos Hatzispiros surveyed the damage to his house Friday morning, the first time he was seeing it after being ordered to evacuate the previous afternoon. Only the charred walls of the single-story home remained, along with his children's bicycles, somehow unscathed in a storeroom. Inside, smoke rose from a still-smoldering bookcase.

"Nothing is left," Hatzispiros said. He urged his mother to leave, to spare her the sight of their destroyed home.

In southern Greece, nearly 60 villages and settlements were evacuated Thursday and early Friday. In addition to Evia, fires were raging in multiple locations in the southern Peloponnese region where a blaze was stopped before reaching monuments at Olympia, birthplace of the ancient Olympic Games.

A summer palace outside Athens once used by the former Greek royal family was also spared.

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The fires have also disrupted COVID-19 vaccinations. The Health Ministry announced the suspension of vaccinations at centers in areas affected by the fires, saying appointments could be rescheduled when conditions allow.

"Our priority is always the protection of human life, followed by the protection of property, the natural environment and critical infrastructure. Unfortunately, under these circumstances, achieving all these aims at the same time is simply impossible," Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said in a televised address Thursday night. The wildfires, he said, display "the reality of climate change."

In 2018, more than 100 people died when a fast-moving forest fire engulfed a seaside settlement east of Athens. Some of them drowned trying to escape by sea from the choking smoke and flames after becoming trapped on a beach.

Afghan Taliban kill head of government media department

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban shot and killed the director of Afghanistan's Government Information Media Center on Friday, the latest killing in a series of attacks on journalists and rights activists in recent months.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told The Associated Press that the groups' fighters had killed Dawa Khan Menapal, who ran the government's press operations for the local and foreign media.

In a statement Mujahid put out later, he said Menapal "was killed in a special attack of Mujahideen" and was "punished to his deeds."

Mujahid did not give any more details. Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. Several recent attacks against civilians have been claimed by the Islamic State, although the government most often holds the Taliban responsible.

2 coaches removed from Tokyo Olympics in Belarus case

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Two Belarus team coaches have been removed from the Olympics, four days after they were involved in trying to send sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya back to their country.

The International Olympic Committee said Friday it has canceled and removed the credentials of Artur Shimak and Yury Maisevich.

"The two coaches were requested to leave the Olympic Village immediately and have done so," the IOC said.

It was done as an interim measure during a formal investigation "in the interest of the wellbeing of the athletes," the Olympic body said.

Shimak and Maisevich continued to have contact with Belarusian athletes since Sunday after the IOC linked them to taking Tsimanouskaya in a car to the airport to put her on a plane to Belarus.

Tsimanouskaya had criticized team coaches on social media and is now in Poland with a humanitarian visa. The IOC said Shimak and Maisevich "will be offered an opportunity to be heard" by its disciplinary commission investigating the case.

It was unclear if the men have stayed in Japan or will leave for Belarus, an authoritarian former Soviet republic that relentlessly pursues its critics.

Belarus has been in turmoil for a year since Aleksander Lukashenko claimed a sixth presidential term after a state election widely viewed as rigged in his favor.

Lukashenko also led the Belarusian Olympic committee since the 1990s until this year. His son, Viktor, was elected to replace him.

The IOC banned both Lukashenkos in December from attending the Tokyo Olympics after investigating complaints from athletes they faced reprisals and intimidation in a security crackdown after the election.

Still, the IOC's slate of sanctions against Belarus was criticized by activists there and international groups representing athletes who urged a full suspension of the national Olympic committee.

That would have let Tsimanouskaya and the rest of the 103-member Belarus team compete as indepen-

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dents under the Olympic flag.

Asked Friday about how Olympic officials had handled Belarus, IOC President Thomas Bach said it was "not in a position to change the political system in a country."

"What our responsibility and our remit is to protect the athletes as much and as far as we can," Bach said, describing the incident in Tokyo as a "deplorable case."

Alexander Lukashenko was unable to attend the 2012 London Olympics because of a European Union visa ban imposed during a previous crackdown that followed a disputed election.

9 years on, Cameroon Olympic boxer talks of defection to UK

By SYLVIA HUI and TRISTAN WERKMEISTER Associated Press

SHEFFIELD, England (AP) — When boxer Thomas Essomba walked out of the London Olympic Village with his suitcases in 2012, he left behind his life in Cameroon to start another one from scratch in a country he knew next to nothing about.

Essomba, who was captain of his country's boxing team, disappeared with four other boxers during the Olympic Games. Of the 37 athletes Cameroon sent to London, seven — including a swimmer and a female soccer player — never went home after completing their events. In the nine years that followed, Essomba said he sometimes struggled to reconcile his yearning for his family in Cameroon and his dream of becoming a successful boxer in the U.K.

"It was a very, very difficult decision, I wasn't happy to be honest," the 33-year-old told The Associated Press in an interview Wednesday at a gym in Sheffield in central England. But he added: "The U.K. is my country now. I'm happy to be here. By the grace of God I think everything will be all right."

The stories of young athletes who defect during the Olympics often capture the world's imagination. This week, Belarusian sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya left the Tokyo Games and sought refuge in Poland, saying Belarus team officials tried to force her to fly home early after she criticized them.

The 24-year-old runner said her move was not premeditated, and it's not clear what's next for her.

Hundreds of athletes have sought asylum at global sporting events, especially during the Cold War, to flee authoritarian rule at home or to seek a better life in the West. As many as 117 athletes defected at the Munich Olympics in 1972, according to reports at the time, and Cuban athlete defections to the U.S. have been common. At the London Olympics in 2012, several other athletes from other African teams also disappeared and reportedly sought asylum.

Essomba maintained he "had a good life" back home and did not plan to escape before arriving in London. The reasons behind his decision weren't entirely clear: The boxer said he ran into trouble with the Cameroonian government's sports officials, but did not elaborate. Some on his team reportedly said at the time that they were poorly treated.

"The only thing I'm scared of was going back and stop doing boxing, because boxing is all my life," he said of his thinking at the time. "They don't like challenge. I've tried to challenge them and my life became dangerous."

Cameroon, a predominantly French-speaking nation of 26 million in Central Africa, has a high poverty rate and stark inequality between rural and urban areas. President Paul Biya has been in power since 1982, and critics accuse him of political oppression and persecuting his adversaries.

"It has for years been a corrupt, murderous and authoritarian regime, and there were often issues about athletes not being paid, then complaining and then perceiving themselves to be in danger if they went back to Cameroon," said Jackie Fearnley, a researcher and campaigner who has helped Cameroonians seeking asylum in Britain.

Rights abuses in the country are rife and some seek refuge abroad because they are seen as dissidents, said Fearnley, who has also helped many LGBT people who face routine arrest and imprisonment in Cameroon.

Essomba said it was a "very sad, very bad moment" when he left the Olympic Village with his four teammates. His mother, relatives and children back home depended on him, and he spoke next to no English.

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"Everything changed when I came here," he said. "But I said, 'Listen, my life first.' I had to protect my life." Once out of the Village the men took a bus to south London, found a place to live and stayed there for weeks while a lawyer helped them with the paperwork to apply for asylum with the British government. At the time, they all had six-month visas allowing them to stay in the U.K.

"I didn't know anything about the U.K. Even applying for asylum, I didn't know that I was supposed to do it," Essomba said. His application was granted within a year, and he became a British citizen soon after.

Essomba said he has had moments of regret when things were not going so well, and he misses his family and homeland terribly. But he's adapted to life in England. He found a girlfriend and new friends. He stays in touch daily with his family on social media, and has returned secretly to his homeland after obtaining his British citizenship.

Professionally, he held the Commonwealth flyweight champion title from 2015 to 2017. He said he's fighting to "write my name" by representing the U.K. in international competitions before he retires and goes into coaching.

"Everything in my life is in the U.K. now, so I don't think I'm going back," he said.

"I haven't reached my goal yet. My goal is to have a British title. This is my hope," the boxer added. "So that's why I keep fighting. I believe I will do it."

'Snakeman' looks to spread joys of table tennis beyond Games

By FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — The Voice of Table Tennis, aka Snakeman, isn't quite at the top of the sport he loves. Maybe three levels below the U.S. national team, he says.

But Adam Bobrow is still very good, able to hang, for some rallies, at least, with the best. More importantly, perhaps, he possesses an arsenal of tricky spin shots — including the Snake, which explains his nickname. All have been captured on YouTube and watched by millions, leaving opponents gaping and then, as the wildness sinks in, delighted.

What he really likes, though, besides his main job as lead commentator for the International Table Tennis Federation, is to travel the world as an ambassador for the sport — part earnest evangelist, part clown prince entertainer, wholly invested in showing the world the delights of what he considers the best game there is.

"There are an infinite amount of possibilities in any moment, and the spin on the ball can make the ball curve, jump, kick, bend. It's just like wizardry," Bobrow said, speaking with The Associated Press during the Olympics in between his commentary for an exciting table tennis tournament that saw powerhouse China reign supreme yet again. "It's like a puzzle in real time that involves speed and strategy."

Bobrow's passion for the game, which is infectious, comes with a certain amount of self-promotion. In fact, he's the reason this story exists. He came into the AP office in the Olympics' Main Press Center this week and said, in effect, "Write about me!"

Bobrow, an American who lives in Taiwan and who has also worked as an actor, often favors multi-colored fluorescent shirts and pants with designs that look like paint splatters on a canvas. It's part of his goal to amplify his sport — and himself.

"The more table tennis grows, I'll grow with it. I don't think of that as a bad thing," Bobrow said when asked about his push for media coverage. "If my (YouTube) channel gets a million subscribers by the end of this year, that's good for table tennis because that means more people are watching table tennis."

The featured video on Bobrow's channel, called "A Year of Ping Pong," has more than 17 million views and shows him playing against people around the world.

The games look fun, and the victims of Bobrow's spin shots are usually delighted with the wizardry. Bobrow has an endearing habit of saying "good" when trying to return an opponent's winning shot. He plays one point mostly sitting on the ground, and claims he's "No. 1 in the world for bloodshed in table tennis," pointing to head gashes from points gone wrong.

He sees his job as teasing out the personalities of the star players. The athletes need an ambassador, he

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says, because they're so busy working on their games that they have little time to develop their brands.

After losing in one video to the then-No. 7 player in the world, Lin Yun-ju, of Taiwan, Bobrow hangs out with Lin and his family, going to waterfalls, playing tennis, eating dinner. Bobrow seems genuinely delighted when someone on the street in Taiwan recognizes him.

In another video, he challenges two very skilled Japanese sisters, 6-year-old Miku Matsushima and 3-year-old Aira. He's particularly thrilled when Miku employs a deadly "reverse tomahawk" serve. After the table tennis, the girls give him a "massage" — piling clothes on his head and jumping on his back while giggling.

Bobrow has been the ITTF's main commentator since 2014, when he won an online competition looking for the "voice of table tennis."

"I don't have a very big vocabulary because I don't like to read much. So I can speak in very simple terms, and I can break down the game in a very simple way," he says. "Even if you're not a competitor, I hope I can make it exciting and engage viewers, pique their curiosity to go, 'Oh cool, interesting, I never knew that,' or, 'Oh fascinating, it's spinning as fast as a NASCAR tire.'"

Perhaps the secret to Bobrow's online success is that people simply enjoy playing the game with him. It was evident during a recent trip to a Tokyo table tennis club.

First with a reporter who couldn't remember the last time he'd played, then with the skilled club manager, finally with a young woman who'd just started playing, he seemed to bring out the best in each of his opponents. His play encouraged long, hypnotic, satisfying rallies that would often end with one of his amazing trick shots, followed by a laugh or a stunned look of wonder from the victim.

"I can hit a ball that goes up in the air in one direction, comes down in the opposite direction and bounces back in another direction. Now, physics can explain that, but most people don't believe that when they see it," Bobrow says. "The pros, at any given moment, can hit a ball in a way that will make it curve, kick, dip and dive."

When the pandemic allows, Bobrow, who describes himself as "extremely social," plans to keep traveling the world, both for ITTF commentary and to meet people. He wants to add to the more than 45 countries he's been to and the tens of thousands of games he's played. Until then, as the Snakeman likes to say in his videos, he'll keep on pongin'.

Senators struggle to amend, finish \$1T infrastructure bill

By KEVIN FREKING and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearing decision time, senators were struggling to wrap up work on the bipartisan infrastructure plan despite hopes to expedite consideration and voting on the nearly \$1 trillion proposal.

The package had appeared on track for eventual Senate passage, a rare accord between Republicans and Democrats joining on a shared priority that also is essential to President Joe Biden's agenda. But senators hit new problems late Thursday as they worked late into the night on amendments. A procedural vote was set for Saturday.

"We've worked long, hard and collaboratively, to finish this important bipartisan bill," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., just before midnight. In announcing Saturday's schedule, he said "We very much want to finish."

Called the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the thick bill is a first part of Biden's infrastructure agenda, and would inject billions of new spending on roads, bridges, waterworks, broadband and other projects to virtually every corner of the nation.

If approved by the Senate, it would next go to the House.

The late-night session stalled out as new debates emerged over proposed amendments to change the 2,700-page package. Senators have processed nearly two dozen amendments, so far, and none has substantially changed the framework of the public works package. With more than a dozen amendments still to go, senators struggled to reach agreements.

One of the amendments generating the most attention Thursday involved cryptocurrency.

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The bill would raise an estimated \$28 billion over 10 years by updating IRS reporting requirements for cryptocurrency brokers, just as stockbrokers report their customers' sales to the IRS.

Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., and others are concerned that crypto miners, software developers and others would be subject to the new IRS reporting requirement. Toomey led efforts to narrow the definition of who must file the reporting forms to the IRS.

"If we were not to adopt this amendment, then we could be doing a lot of damage," Toomey said. "We could have a very chilling effect on the development of this technology, and that's what I am most concerned about."

A top Republican negotiator, Sen. Rob Portman of Ohio, who had written the provision, tweeted that he agreed with the amendment sponsors that more can be done to clarify the intent of the provision and the Senate should vote on their amendment.

But that vote has yet to occur and the White House weighed in late Thursday, suggesting it favored a different approach from Portman and other senators.

White House deputy press secretary Andrew Bates said the compromise amendment "would reduce tax evasion in the cryptocurrency market."

He said the administration believes "this provision will strengthen tax compliance in this emerging area of finance and ensure that high income taxpayers are contributing what they owe under the law."

The Senate came to a standstill for nearly two hours late into the night as senators privately debated next steps.

The bill's top Democratic negotiator, Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, said, "While we were unable to agree on additional amendments today, I do also look forward to us reconvening together on Saturday and proceeding under regular order to finish what will be a historic piece of legislation — both in its bipartisan nature and the impact it will have in our country."

Overall, the infrastructure package calls for \$550 billion in new spending over five years above projected federal levels for a nearly \$1 trillion expenditure, what could be one of the more substantial investments in the nation's roads, bridges, waterworks, broadband and the electric grid in years.

A much anticipated analysis of the bill from the Congressional Budget Office concluded that the legislation would increase deficits by about \$256 billion over the next decade.

It's unclear if the budget office's assessment could peel away support, particularly from Republican senators who have been wary of using what some view as gimmicks to pay for the package. The bill drafters had said the package would be paid for, but the budget office said in some cases they counted savings that would have occurred regardless of whether the infrastructure bill passes.

For example, the CBO did not count the \$53 billion that is expected to be saved because more than two dozen states cut off expanded unemployment compensation before the benefit was set to expire. The bipartisan negotiators had also claimed \$56 billion in savings through economic growth, while the CBO did not take that into account.

But the bill's backers sprang to defend the overall package, and said it included additional savings and would boost economic growth in ways the CBO does not measure.

If senators wrap up work on the bipartisan bill, they will turn to the much more partisan undertaking on the next phase of Biden's agenda: a \$3.5 trillion proposal for what the White House calls human infrastructure — child care support, home health care, education and other expenditures that are Democratic priorities that Republicans have pledged to reject. Debate will extend into the fall.

Schumer wants the Senate to pass both the bipartisan package and a budget blueprint for the bigger proposal before senators depart for an August recess.

The Senate was expected to be quiet Friday as many lawmakers attend funeral services for former Sen. Mike Enzi in Wyoming. But senators are bracing for another weekend session as they push ahead on both pieces of legislation.

Hiroshima marks 76th anniversary of US atomic bombing

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By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Hiroshima on Friday marked the 76th anniversary of the world's first atomic bombing, as the mayor of the Japanese city urged global leaders to unite to eliminate nuclear weapons, just as they are united against the coronavirus.

Mayor Kazumi Matsui urged world leaders to commit to nuclear disarmament as seriously as they tackle a pandemic that the international community recognizes as "threat to humanity."

"Nuclear weapons, developed to win wars, are a threat of total annihilation that we can certainly end, if all nations work together," Matsui said. "No sustainable society is possible with these weapons continually poised for indiscriminate slaughter."

The United States dropped the world's first atomic bomb on Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, destroying the city and killing 140,000 people. It dropped a second bomb three days later on Nagasaki, killing another 70,000. Japan surrendered Aug. 15, ending World War II and its nearly half-century of aggression in Asia.

But countries stockpiled nuclear weapons in the Cold War and a standoff continues to this day.

The global Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons took effect in January after years of civil effort joined by the atomic bombing survivors, or hibakusha. But while more than 50 countries have ratified it, the treaty notably lacks the U.S. and other nuclear powers as well as Japan, which has relied on the U.S. nuclear umbrella for its defense since the war's end.

Matsui renewed his demand that his own government "immediately" sign and ratify the treaty and join the discussion, to live up to the long-cherished wish of atomic bombing survivors. He also demanded Japan provide productive mediation between nuclear and non-nuclear weapons states.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who attended the ceremony in Hiroshima, did not mention the treaty and instead stressed the need for a more "realistic" approach to bridge the nuclear and non-nuclear weapons states and by strengthening the NPT. Later at a news conference, Suga said he had no plan to sign the treaty.

"The treaty lacks support not only from the nuclear weapons states including the United States but also from many countries that do not possess nuclear arms," Suga said. "What's appropriate is to seek a passage to realistically promote the nuclear disarmament."

Suga also apologized for inadvertently skipping parts of his speech including a pledge to pursue efforts toward achieving a nuclear-free world as head of the world's only country to have suffered atomic attacks and fully aware of its inhumanity.

Many survivors of the bombings have lasting injuries and illnesses linked to the bombs and radiation exposure and faced discrimination in Japanese society. □

The government began to medically support certified survivors in 1968 after more than 20 years of effort by the survivors. □

As of March, 127,755 survivors, whose average age is now almost 84, are certified as hibakusha and eligible for government medical support, according to the health and welfare ministry.

Suga announced last month the medical benefits would be extended to 84 Hiroshima survivors who had been denied aid because they were outside a government-set boundary. The victims were exposed to radioactive "black rain" that fell in the city after the bombing and fought a long legal battle for their health problems to be recognized.

Matsui urged Suga's government to further widen support and have generous assistance quickly reach all those still suffering physical and emotional effects of radiation, including the black rain survivors who were not part of the lawsuit.

Thursday's ceremony at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park was significantly scaled down because of the coronavirus pandemic and was also eclipsed by the Olympics being held in Tokyo, where even national NHK television quickly switched to the games after the main speeches.

At river where Tigrayan bodies floated, fears of 'many more'

By MOHANED AWAD and CARA ANNA Associated Press

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WAD EL HILU, Sudan (AP) — From time to time, a body floating down the river separating Ethiopia's troubled Tigray region from Sudan was a silent reminder of a war conducted in the shadows. But in recent days, the corpses became a flow.

Bloated, drained of color from their journey, the bodies were often mutilated: genitals severed, eyes gouged, a missing limb. The Sudanese fishermen who spotted them, and the refugees from Tigray who helped pull them to shore, found many corpses' hands bound. Some of them had been shot.

The Associated Press reported dozens of bodies floating down the Tekeze River earlier this week and saw six of the graves on Wednesday, marking the first time any reporters could reach the scene. Doctors who saw the bodies said one was tattooed with a common name in the Tigrinya language and others had the facial markings common among Tigrayans, raising fresh alarm about atrocities in the least-known area of the Tigray war.

"They are from Tigray," said Garey Youhanis, a Tigrayan who helped bury several bodies found on Sunday. With a piece of red cord, he demonstrated how their hands were tied behind their backs. He squatted on the rock-strewn shore, crossed himself and prayed.

The deaths are the latest massacre in a nine-month war that has killed thousands of civilians and is now spilling into other regions of Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous country and the anchor of the often-volatile Horn of Africa. Though Tigray forces in June reclaimed much of the region as Ethiopian and allied forces retreated, western Tigray is still controlled by authorities from Ethiopia's neighboring Amhara region, who have cleared out many ethnic Tigrayans while saying the land is historically theirs. Witnesses have told the AP of watching mass expulsions.

More than 60,000 Tigrayans fled to Sudan, where thousands remain in makeshift camps a short walk from the river in the hope of hearing news from those who still arrive. Some scrutinized the bodies in the river for clues, and they have asked Sudanese police and the United Nations to exhume them for autopsies.

"In the last one week, 43 bodies were buried around this river," the surgeon from the nearby Tigray town of Humera, Tewodros Tefera, told the AP. He and other refugees believe the bodies were dumped into the river at Humera, which has seen some of the worst violence since the war began in November.

"Some had amputated limbs and legs," Tewodros said. "There was a man which we buried yesterday, his genital area was completely severed. ... So this is the kind of trauma that we're seeing of western Tigray."

He told the AP they hadn't heard of any new bodies since Tuesday, when at least seven were found. But he believes an active search along the river could reveal "many, many more," perhaps hundreds.

Ethiopia's government has accused the rival Tigray forces of dumping the bodies themselves for propaganda purposes. A "fake massacre," the spokeswoman for Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, Billene Seyoum, told reporters on Thursday.

But the discovery has increased international pressure on the prime minister, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, at a time when his government is already accused by the U.N., the United States and the European Union of besieging Tigray and blocking food and other aid to millions of people. Hundreds of thousands face famine conditions in the world's worst hunger crisis in a decade.

Ethiopia's prime minister in recent days referred to the Tigray forces as "weeds" and a "cancer," bringing a warning from the U.N. special envoy on genocide prevention that such dehumanizing language "is of utmost concern." Ethiopia's government has said such talk is not meant to describe ordinary Tigrayans.

But the bodies in the river brought new fears of ethnic cleansing, or the forcing of a population from a region through expulsions and other violence.

"We are deeply concerned by the latest developments," the U.N. refugee agency in Sudan said on Thursday. It confirmed seeing one of the bodies pulled from the river along with "what appear to be several fresh graves." It said it was unable to confirm the identifies of the dead or how they died.

Like other international aid organizations, the U.N. agency said it has no access on the Ethiopian side of the border region. Underlining that absence, the U.N. humanitarian agency on Wednesday tweeted a map showing no foreign aid group active in western Tigray. One that had worked there, the Dutch section of Doctors Without Borders, had its operations suspended by Ethiopia on July 30, accused by the

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government of spreading "misinformation" and illegally using satellite radio equipment.

Ethiopia's government has alleged that aid groups are arming and supporting the Tigray forces, without evidence.

"Those who want corridors for weapons and non-humanitarian goods to be brought into them continue to try to manipulate the realities on the ground in an attempt to convince the world that unfettered access is not happening" in Tigray, the prime minister's spokeswoman said. She called the Tigray forces, who dominated Ethiopia's repressive government for years but were sidelined when Abiy took office, a "terrorist organization that has hijacked the well-being of the people of Tigray."

Phone, internet and banking services remain down across the Tigray region of some 6 million people, and the U.N. says more than 5 million need help now. The Tigray forces, who have pushed into the neighboring Afar and Amhara regions and displaced more than 200,000 people, have said restoring basic services is a precondition to negotiations to end the war.

Tigray forces on Thursday entered the Amhara town of Lalibela, a UNESCO World Heritage site for its rock-hewn churches, a resident told the AP. While they entered peacefully, "yeah, we're scared," he said, worried about damage to what residents call the "new Jerusalem." He estimated thousands of fighters were there and "many people are running away." He spoke on condition of anonymity for his safety.

With the Tigray forces pushing south after threatening to go as far as the capital if needed, the U.N. humanitarian chief and the USAID administrator in visits to Ethiopia this week urged a cease-fire and talks. Sudan has offered to play a role in mediation. Sudan also could be a direct aid corridor to Tigray.

But the prime minister's spokeswoman called Ethiopia's relationship with Sudan "a bit tricky," pointing to a border dispute. "That element needs to be thoroughly addressed before Sudan can be entertained as a credible party in negotiations," she said.

For the refugees in Sudan, each body found in the river is a reminder of loved ones trapped in the fighting.

Horrified, refugees in the Sudanese border community of Hamdayet spotted one body that looked familiar. Like most of the Tigrayans killed in the war, it was a young man.

"How can I not feel the death of my brother and friend?" said one of the Tigrayans who buried him, Awet, who gave only his first name. "I'm very sorry."

The dead man's name was Robel, the surgeon Tewodros said. By the water's edge, his fingers tapping his graying temple in anxiety, he checked his phone for news of other bodies found.

Potential military vaccine mandate brings distrust, support

By JULIE WATSON Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Since President Joe Biden asked the Pentagon last week to look at adding the COVID-19 vaccine to the military's mandatory shots, former Army lawyer Greg T. Rinckey has fielded a deluge of calls.

His firm, Tully Rinckey, has heard from hundreds of soldiers, Marines and sailors wanting to know their rights and whether they could take any legal action if ordered to get inoculated for the coronavirus.

"A lot of U.S. troops have reached out to us saying, 'I don't want a vaccine that's untested, I'm not sure it's safe, and I don't trust the government's vaccine. What are my rights?'" Rinckey said.

Generally, their rights are limited since vaccines are widely seen as essential for the military to carry out its missions, given that service members often eat, sleep and work in close quarters.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has said he is working expeditiously to make the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory for military personnel and is expected to ask Biden to waive a federal law that requires individuals be given a choice if the vaccine is not fully licensed. Biden has also directed that all federal workers be vaccinated or face frequent testing and travel restrictions.

Lawyers say the waiver will put the military on firmer legal ground so it can avoid the court battles it faced when it mandated the anthrax vaccine for troops in the 1990s when it was not fully approved by the federal Food and Drug administration.

The distrust among some service members is not only a reflection of the broader public's feelings about

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the COVID-19 vaccines, which were quickly authorized for emergency use, but stems in part from the anthrax program's troubles.

Scores of troops refused to take that vaccine. Some left the service. Others were disciplined. Some were court martialed and kicked out of the military with other-than-honorable discharges.

In 2003, a federal judge agreed with service members who filed a lawsuit asserting the military could not administer a vaccine that had not been fully licensed without their consent, and stopped the program.

The Pentagon started it back up in 2004 after the FDA issued an approval, but the judge stopped it again after ruling the FDA had not followed procedures.

Eventually the FDA issued proper approvals for the vaccine, and the program was reinstated on a limited basis for troops in high-risk locations.

Military experts say the legal battles over the anthrax vaccine could be why the Biden administration has been treading cautiously. Until now, the government has relied on encouraging troops rather than mandating the shots. Yet coronavirus cases in the military, like elsewhere, have been rising with the more contagious delta variant.

If the military makes the vaccine mandatory, most service members will have to get the shots unless they can argue to be among the few given an exemption for religious, health or other reasons.

According to the Pentagon, more than 1 million service members are fully vaccinated, and more than 237,000 have gotten at least one shot. There are roughly 2 million active-duty, Guard and Reserve troops.

Many see the COVID-19 vaccine as being necessary to avoid another major outbreak like the one last year that sidelined the USS Theodore Roosevelt and resulted in more than 1,000 crewmember cases and one death.

An active-duty Army officer said he would welcome the vaccine among the military's mandatory shots. The soldier, who asked not to be named because he was not authorized to speak to the media, said he worries unvaccinated service members may be abusing the honor system and going to work without a mask.

He recently rode in a car with others for work but didn't feel like he could ask if everyone was vaccinated because it's become such a political topic. Commanders have struggled to separate vaccinated and unvaccinated recruits during early portions of basic training across the services to prevent infections.

Accommodating unvaccinated troops would burden service members who are vaccinated since it would limit who is selected for deployment, according to active-duty troops and veterans.

"The military travels to vulnerable populations all over the world to be able to best serve the U.S.," said former Air Force Staff Sgt. Tes Sabine, who works as a radiology technician in an emergency room in New York state. "We have to have healthy people in the military to carry out missions, and if the COVID-19 vaccine achieves that, that's a very positive thing."

Dr. Shannon Stacy, who works at a hospital in a Los Angeles suburb, agreed.

"As an emergency medicine physician and former flight surgeon for a Marine heavy helicopter squadron, I can attest that COVID-19 has the potential to take a fully trained unit from mission ready to non-deployable status in a matter of days," she said.

The biggest challenge will be scheduling the shots around trainings, said Stacy, who left the Navy in 2011 and did pre-deployment, group immunizations.

Army Col. Arnold Strong, who retired from the military in 2017, said he believes it's not anything the U.S. military cannot overcome: Troops working in the farthest corners of the Earth have access to medical officers. Given that most people sign up to follow orders, he thinks this time will be no different.

"I think the majority of service members are going to line up and get vaccinated as soon as it is a Department of Defense policy," he said.

Strong has lost five friends to the virus, three of whom were veterans.

His hope is that the military can set the example for others to follow.

"I would hope if people see the military step up and say, 'Yes, let's get shots in arms,' it will set a standard for the rest of country," he said. "But I don't know because I think we face such a strong threat of disinformation being deployed daily."

In New York City, impending vaccination rules prompt concern

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Michael Musto can't bring himself to ask his regulars at his Staten Island restaurant, Cargo Cafe, to prove they've been vaccinated against the coronavirus.

So if New York City presses on with its plans to require eateries, bars, gyms and many other public gathering places to require patrons to show proof of vaccination before coming indoors, he will again shutter his dining room and move operations outside.

"I just don't see myself doing that, asking for proof," Musto said. Barely half of his neighborhood's residents have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, according to city statistics. Some remain defiant about getting vaccinated, even amid a new surge in infections in the city.

"But now do I have to turn my customers away? Do I have to turn business away?" Musto asked.

Mayor Bill de Blasio announced Tuesday that later this month the city will begin requiring anyone dining indoors at a restaurant, working out a gym or grabbing cocktails at a bar to show proof they've been inoculated. Workers at such establishments would also have to prove that they've had at least one shot of an approved vaccine.

The move is being closely watched by other U.S. communities — perhaps as a model but also as a possible example of governmental overreach.

For months, the country has been forced into a reckoning over whether — and how — to curtail public life, including how and where people gather, whether they should be required to wear masks and how far to push them into getting vaccinated.

"Anything less than vaccination isn't going to get us where we need to go," the mayor, a Democrat, said earlier in the week.

"It's pretty straightforward," de Blasio said. "You check their vaccination status. If they have it, great. If they don't, turn around."

City officials said details are still being worked out, including enforcement and consequences for businesses that refuse to comply. Inspections would not begin until at least Sept. 13. When the city health department mandated masks, violations carried fines of up to \$1,000.

Some business owners could try to challenge the policy in court, perhaps arguing that the city overstepped its authority or is applying the rule inequitably. Some religious groups, for example, successfully challenged state pandemic rules that put capacity limits on houses of worship, but not on other liquor stores or bicycle shops.

Law professor Scott Burris, the director of Temple University's Center for Public Health Law Research, said while legal challenges are possible, there is probably enough precedent for New York City's impending vaccination rules to past muster with courts.

"It's really like a no shirt, no shoes, no service thing," he said. Proof of vaccinations would be added to the list of conditions necessary to receive service.

New York City is not mandating that residents be vaccinated but is goading them into doing so by preventing them from partaking in some aspects of public life. Already, most children are required to show proof of vaccinations against a host of childhood diseases to enroll in public schools.

"We're not going to see vaccination wagons out on Fifth Avenue lining people up," Burris said. "We're not going to see government order people to be vaccinated. It's going to be delegated to employers and restaurants and gyms and so on."

New York City has mostly reopened its economy after being roiled by the outbreak. Bars and restaurants have welcomed customers back inside their establishments.

Tourists like Vasu Pabbaraju, visiting from San Jose, California, are also returning. He and his family were snapping photos at Times Square before grabbing a table at a nearby Olive Garden.

If asked for proof of vaccination — he has an image of his card on his phone — he'd readily comply. "I won't get offended by it. In fact, it puts me at ease knowing that I'll be eating around other people who have been vaccinated," he said.

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Sarah Dubois, a visitor from Las Vegas, agreed. "I'd rather get things back to normal as quick as we can," she said.

But her companion, Mitch Silver, from Waterbury, Connecticut, saw things differently.

"I don't like the idea of it," he said. "I don't think it should be made mandatory by the government."

Still, Silver said he would produce his vaccination card if asked.

Already, Broadway is requiring all audience members to show proof of vaccination to watch performances. The cast and crew would also have to be vaccinated.

But worry continued. On Wednesday, organizers cancelled this year's New York International Automobile Show because of the surge in the delta variant of COVID-19 and "the increased measures announced recently by state and local officials to stop its spread."

Musto, the Staten Island restaurateur, said he would follow the rules and hopes it will help move the city forward in its goal to persuade more New Yorkers to get vaccinated.

"It's a scare tactic maybe. Hopefully it will work," said Musto, who said he and his employees have been vaccinated.

Musto had taken over the business just months before the outbreak prompted the city to shutter restaurants, bars and many other public places.

"I can't afford to have everything shut down again," he said. "If that happens, I might have to close permanently. I'm in no position to move backward."

DeSantis feuds with Biden White House as COVID cases rise

By WILL WEISSERT and BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — It didn't take much for the White House to set Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis off. As coronavirus cases rise across the Sun Belt, President Joe Biden asked GOP governors to "get out of the way" of efforts to contain the virus.

DeSantis fired back that he did not want to "hear a blip about COVID from you, thank you," adding, "Why don't you do your job?"

The exchange was unusually direct and bitter, particularly for politicians dealing with a crisis that is killing Americans in rising numbers. But it was a sign that the now-familiar cudgels of virus politics — debates pitting "freedoms" against masks and restrictions — remain potent weapons. And DeSantis, in particular, appears eager to carry that fight into next year's midterms election, and beyond.

"He has become, I would argue, the leading voice of opposition to the Biden administration," said Rob Bradley, a Republican who recently left the Florida Senate because of term limits. "It's not a surprise to see Biden and DeSantis going at it."

The strategy comes with risks. DeSantis is up for reelection next year and is frequently mentioned as a 2024 presidential contender. His national profile has risen in large part because he spent the early part of the pandemic pushing a message that prioritized his state's economy over sweeping restrictions to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

But his state is now an epicenter of the latest surge. Florida has repeatedly broken records for hospitalized patients this week, and it and Texas accounted for a third of all new cases nationwide last week, according to the White House.

DeSantis has responded by banning mask mandates in schools and arguing that vaccines are the best way to fight the virus while new restrictions amount to impediments on liberty.

"Florida is a free state, and we will empower our people," DeSantis said in a fundraising email keying off his hitting back at the president. "We will not allow Joe Biden and his bureaucratic flunkies to come in and commandeer the rights and freedoms of Floridians."

Biden's willingness to call out the Republican governor of Florida — as well as his colleagues in other hot spots like Texas — marks a new confrontational turn for him as well. For months, the White House has tried to minimize the perception of distance between the president and governors in hopes of depoliticizing the vaccination process.

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It had sought to prevent a nationwide panic over the spread of the delta variant and to make good on the promise that the nation was ready to move past the pandemic. But with new cases averaging more than 70,000 a day — above the peak last summer before vaccines were available — the messaging has shifted.

The White House is now casting what's occurring as a more localized concern primarily affecting areas of the country that have lagging vaccination rates and that have not followed federal guidance recommending face masks in areas with high case rates. But the hardest-hit areas tend to be run by Republicans like DeSantis.

Biden is proving more reticent than DeSantis to continue the feud. When asked Thursday about DeSantis' response to his comments, Biden simply asked, "Governor who?" and grinned.

Still, that didn't stop White House press secretary Jen Psaki from turning up the administration's criticism, saying it was a "fact" that DeSantis "has taken steps that are counter to public health recommendations."

"Frankly, this is too serious, deadly serious, to be doing partisan name calling," Psaki said.

She added that administration officials remained in touch with Florida's public health officials, despite DeSantis' posture. Psaki also said the White House was focused on ensuring Floridians know what steps they should be taking to safeguard their health, "even if those are not steps taken at the top of the leadership in that state."

Republican governors attacking Democratic presidents and vice versa is nothing new, meanwhile. And even heated partisan back-and-forth as the coronavirus rages has happened before.

During the early months of the pandemic last year, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's daily press briefings were carried live on national television and cheered by Democrats across the country as a science-based antidote to then-President Donald Trump's own daily sessions with the media.

One day when Cuomo was holding his briefing, Trump tweeted that the New York governor was doing too much "complaining" and should "get out there and get the job done. Stop talking." Cuomo was asked about that and shot back, "If he's sitting home watching TV, maybe he should get up and go to work."

Cuomo is now under intense pressure to resign after an investigation found he sexually harassed nearly a dozen women and worked to retaliate against one of his accusers. But his state is no longer the virus hot spot that Florida is.

Biden also rarely channels his predecessor's combative tactics, underscoring how strange the political dynamics of the latest virus surge are becoming.

Another indication that the back-and-forth between Biden and DeSantis could foreshadow similar future clashes as the midterms loom is that the governor and president recently put aside their differences and appeared together after the deadly collapse of a condo building in Surfside, Florida. That's a far cry from what's happening now.

"He's only telling us what he's against," Bernard Ashby, a Miami cardiologist who leads the Florida chapter of the Committee to Protect Health Care, said of DeSantis. "I think it's up to him, as leader of our state, to actually do something to decrease the amount of people that we see getting infected, hospitalized, ending up in the ICU and ultimately dying."

DeSantis is nonetheless doubling down. His harsh words for Biden have already caused a stir in conservative online circles, and the governor has since appeared on Fox News to reiterate them.

"That's been his strategy his entire existence ... whatever plays on Fox News is where he's going," said Kevin Cate, a Florida-based Democratic strategist and veteran of Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign.

Cate, a campaign consultant for Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried, who is running for governor and has been an outspoken DeSantis critic, said if the Florida loss of life now occurring because of the coronavirus had been a hurricane, the governor would have "suited up" for disaster response without worrying about the political optics.

"If Ron DeSantis had one-tenth of the vitriol against the virus that he spews about Joe Biden," he said, "people would not be dying in Florida."

Senators struggle to amend, finish \$1T infrastructure bill

By KEVIN FREKING and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearing decision time, senators struggled late Thursday to wrap up work on the bipartisan infrastructure plan despite hopes to expedite consideration and voting on the nearly \$1 trillion proposal.

The package had appeared on track for eventual Senate passage, a rare accord between Republicans and Democrats joining on a shared priority that also is essential to President Joe Biden's agenda. But senators hit new problems as they worked late into the night on amendments. A procedural vote was set for Saturday.

"We've worked long hard and collaboratively, to finish this important bipartisan bill," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., just before midnight. In announcing Saturday's schedule, he said "We very much want to finish."

Called the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the thick bill is a first part of Biden's infrastructure agenda, and would inject billions of new spending on roads, bridges, waterworks, broadband and other projects to virtually every corner of the nation. If approved by the Senate, it would next go to the House.

The late-night session stalled out as new debates emerged over proposed amendments to change the 2,700-page package. Senators have processed nearly two dozen amendments so far, and none has substantially changed the framework of the public works package. With more than a dozen amendments still to go, senators struggled to reach agreements.

One of the amendments generating the most attention Thursday involved cryptocurrency.

The bill would raise an estimated \$28 billion over 10 years by updating IRS reporting requirements for cryptocurrency brokers, just as stockbrokers report their customers' sales to the IRS.

Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., and others are concerned that crypto miners, software developers and others would be subject to the new IRS reporting requirement. Toomey led efforts to narrow the definition of who must file the reporting forms to the IRS.

"If we were not to adopt this amendment, then we could be doing a lot of damage," Toomey said. "We could have a very chilling effect on the development of this technology, and that's what I am most concerned about."

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But that vote has yet to occur and the White House weighed in late Thursday, suggesting it favored a different approach from Portman and other senators.

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Overall, the infrastructure bill calls for \$550 billion in new spending over five years above projected federal levels for a nearly \$1 trillion package, what could be one of the more substantial investments in the nation's roads, bridges, waterworks, broadband and the electric grid in years.

A much anticipated analysis of the bill from the Congressional Budget Office concluded that the legislation would increase deficits by about \$256 billion over the next decade.

It's unclear if the budget office's assessment could peel away support, particularly from Republican senators who have been wary of using what some view as gimmicks to pay for the package. The bill drafters

had said the package would be paid for, but the budget office said in some cases they counted savings that would have occurred regardless of whether the infrastructure bill passes.

For example, the CBO did not count the \$53 billion that is expected to be saved because more than two dozen states cut off expanded unemployment compensation before the benefit was set to expire. The bipartisan negotiators had also claimed \$56 billion in savings through economic growth, while the CBO did not take that into account.

But the bill's backers sprang to defend the overall package, and said it included additional savings and would boost economic growth in ways the CBO does not measure.

If senators wrap up work on the bipartisan bill, they will turn to the much more partisan undertaking on the next phase of Biden's agenda: a \$3.5 trillion proposal for what the White House calls human infrastructure — child care support, home health care, education and other expenditures that are Democratic priorities that Republicans have pledged to reject. Debate will extend into the fall.

Schumer wants the Senate to pass both the bipartisan package and a budget blueprint for the bigger proposal before senators depart for an August recess.

The Senate was expected to be quiet Friday as many lawmakers attend funeral services for former Sen. Mike Enzi in Wyoming. But senators are bracing for another weekend session as they push ahead on both pieces of legislation.

US likely enjoyed hiring spree in July as economy rebounds

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Despite an uptick in COVID-19 cases and a shortage of available workers, the U.S. economy likely enjoyed a burst of job growth last month as it bounced back with surprising vigor from last year's coronavirus shutdown.

The Labor Department's July jobs report Friday is expected to show that the United States added more than 860,000 jobs last month, topping June's 850,000, according to a survey of economists by the data firm FactSet.

Economist Lydia Boussour at Oxford Economics is expecting even more — 1.02 million — partly because seasonal factors will swell the number of those hired to teach at public schools and work in restaurants and hotels.

Economists also expect the unemployment rate dropped to 5.7% from 5.9% in June, FactSet says.

The coronavirus triggered a brief but intense recession last spring, forcing businesses to shut down and consumers to stay home as a health precaution. The economy lost more than 22 million jobs in March and April 2020. Since then, though, it has recovered nearly 16 million jobs, leaving a 6.8 million shortfall compared to February 2020.

The rollout of vaccines has encouraged businesses to reopen and consumers to return to shops, restaurants and bars that they had shunned for months after the pandemic struck. Many Americans are also in surprisingly strong financial shape because the lockdowns allowed them to save money and bank relief checks from the federal government.

As a result, the economy has bounded back with unexpected speed. The International Monetary Fund expects U.S. gross domestic product — the broadest measure of economic output — to grow 7% this year, its fastest pace since 1984.

Employers are advertising jobs — a record 9.2 million openings in May — faster than applicants can fill them.

Some businesses blame generous federal unemployment benefits — including an extra \$300 a week tacked on to regular state jobless aid — for discouraging Americans from seeking work. In response, many states have dropped the federal unemployment assistance even before it is scheduled to expire nationwide Sept. 6.

Many Americans may be staying out of the job market because of lingering health fears and trouble obtaining childcare at a time when many schools are closed.

Another problem: Many of those thrown out of work by the coronavirus recession can't go back to their old jobs.

Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics, notes, for instance, that about 80,000 restaurants have closed since March 2020. So those displaced workers must find new employers and often new careers.

"Matching the unemployed to job openings will likely be a more prolonged process, given that finding a new job, perhaps in a new industry, will be a challenge," Farooqi wrote in a research report.

Farooqi also said the labor market may face longer-term struggles once temporary labor shortages sort themselves out. This is because many businesses adjusted to working with fewer employees during the pandemic, often using technology that reduced the need for human labor.

Also clouding the outlook for jobs is a resurgence of COVID-19 cases caused by the spread of the highly contagious delta variant. The United States is reporting an average of more than 75,000 new cases a day, up from fewer than 12,000 a day in late June — although still well below the 250,000 levels of early January.

Oxford Economics' Boussour says the spread of the delta variant might have "have dampened workers' willingness and ability to rejoin the workforce."

But she doubts it will have a big impact on the July numbers because virus worries didn't escalate until after the Labor Department had collected its hiring data for last month.

Survivors of acid attacks in Mexico unite to push for change

By MARÍA VERZA and GINETTE RIQUELME Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Elisa Xolalpa has had three daughters and found a job she enjoys since a former boyfriend tried to destroy her life by tossing acid on her when she was 18. Two decades later, she is still seeking justice.

Survivors of acid attacks like Xolalpa are banding together and raising their voices in Mexico despite the country's sky-high violence — especially toward women and staggering levels of impunity.

"I thought I was the only one," said the 38-year-old, who grows flowers on Mexico City's south side. "But we're not alone anymore."

Earlier this year, the Carmen Sánchez Foundation formed here to provide support and lobby for legal reforms for survivors of acid attacks. It has registered 29 such attacks so far, five already in 2021, but believes that is only a fraction of the real number.

Survivors want the attacks classified as attempted femicide, aid with the innumerable surgeries that follow and psychological support. They want to be seen even though their faces hurt.

"Mom, what is acid?" 9-year-old Daniela asked Xolalpa one day. For a moment Xolalpa was silent. Then she told her daughter that it was a liquid they used in the greenhouse that is dangerous. Another day Daniela left school in tears. "Some kids told me you're ugly, Mom, and it's not true," Xolalpa said her daughter told her.

Xolalpa has a sweet gaze. She enjoys growing flowers in the chinampas — fertile islands interlaced by canals in the capital's Xochimilco borough — like her ancestors did. She recognizes that one day she will have to explain to her three daughters, product of another relationship, the attack that changed her life and for a time left her wanting to die.

These days she is focused on preparing herself mentally for a new court hearing for her attacker, who was finally arrested in February. She has made three complaints to authorities and suffered constant threats from him. For now he only faces a domestic violence charge, but Xolalpa hopes that will hold him long enough to pursue an attempted femicide charge.

Her attacker's lawyer has been dismissive. "He says I'm alright because I was able to have a family," she said indignantly. She entered the relationship with the father of her three daughters "to feel that I could please someone despite the scars," Xolalpa said. "It was a mistake, I'm still damaged."

Dousing someone in acid means wanting to dissolve a person physically and psychologically. It is always premeditated, according to the United Nations.

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In Xolalpa's case, she was tied to a post. The acid dissolved the ropes, but also her clothes and her body as she ran half-naked for help. She has had 40 surgeries to repair her body.

Carmen Sánchez, who started the foundation that bears her name, was eating breakfast with her mother and sisters at home in 2014 when her partner entered and threw acid on her face. He fled with a driver who was waiting outside as Sánchez's chin melted to her chest and her cell phone dissolved in her hand. It took years before Sánchez turned to activism.

One day in 2017, Sánchez called Gina Pontes, a Colombian survivor, whose collective "Rebuilding Faces" helps other women who have survived attacks. Pontes happened to be on her way to a doctor's appointment.

"She told me about all her pain, she cried, she talked to me about her surgeries," Pontes recalled. When Pontes got to the doctor, "I told Carmen, 'Look, I'm going to strip, but we'll keep talking, don't worry.'"

Seeing Pontes bare her scars without any shyness shook Sánchez. She understood that trying to hide what had happened didn't help. So while she sought justice in her case and underwent operation after operation — she's up to 61 — she began to talk with other survivors, seek out donors, psychologists and doctors.

"From the beginning I only had two options: let myself die, something she considered many times, or look at my scars, inside and out, and understand that that was my new reality," Sánchez told lawmakers in late July when she received a prize from Mexico's lower congressional chamber.

Sánchez made it clear to the lawmakers that women like her face not only violence from their aggressors, but also the "indifference and impunity of the state, revictimization by the media and social and labor exclusion and discrimination."

There are children and men among the victims of acid attacks, but 80% are women, according to The Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI).

They are usually attacked by partners or former partners or people paid by them out of jealousy or revenge, according to U.N. Women, the United Nations' gender equality entity.

ASTI documents about 1,500 acid attacks per year, but says the real number could be higher.

Acid attacks aren't limited to any particular part of the world, certain religions or cultures, but rather to conservative institutions and "the deep economic and social inequalities of gender that exist," said Jaf Shah, the organization's director.

"Many attacks may not be reported," Shah said. "If they are reported there is a chance that they could be classified under a different offense."

Sayuri Herrera, Mexico City's special prosecutor for femicides, said that more acid attacks are being registered in Mexico. Her office is currently reviewing older cases that were originally classified as serious injuries to see if they can be reclassified as attempted femicide like Xolalpa's.

Only three of Mexico's 32 states have classified acid attacks on women as attempted femicide. Violence against women in Mexico extends far beyond acid attacks making it more difficult to gain attention.

In the first half of the year, 1,879 women were murdered in Mexico and more than 33,000 injured, according to federal government data. More than 10,000 rapes were reported and nearly 24,000 cases of domestic violence.

"They consider us their property and act under the reasoning that 'if you're not going to be mine, you're not going to be anyone's,'" Herrera said.

In June, Xolalpa and other women protested in front of the capital's prosecutor's office to pressure for resolution of their cases. Meanwhile, new cases keep surfacing.

Ximena Canseco, a co-founder of the Carmen Sánchez Foundation, recalled one day, July 29, when a survivor from an attack 30 years ago contacted them and they found a message asking for help on Facebook from the mother of a girl who had just had acid tossed on her from someone on a passing motorcycle. That same day, Canseco learned a 30-year-old woman who had recently shared her story had died of COVID-19.

"She never made it public, she had lost everything and was still receiving threats," Canseco said. "We talked for an hour."

Xolalpa said we can't allow the violence to be normalized and that's a message she wants to teach her daughters.

"I have to turn this pain into something else," she said. For now, that means demanding justice and not being silent.

Coast Guard: 6 dead in Alaska sightseeing plane crash

By BECKY BOHRER and MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — A sightseeing plane crashed Thursday in southeast Alaska, killing all six people on board, the U.S. Coast Guard said.

The plane's emergency alert beacon was activated around 11:20 a.m. when the plane crashed in the area of Misty Fjords National Monument, near Ketchikan, the Coast Guard and Federal Aviation Administration said. A helicopter company reported seeing wreckage on a ridgeline in the search area, and Coast Guard crew members found the wreckage around 2:40 p.m. A Coast Guard helicopter lowered two rescue swimmers to the site, and they reported no survivors, the agency said.

The identities of those killed in the crash were not immediately released. The Alaska State Troopers and volunteers from the Ketchikan Volunteer Rescue Squad will coordinate recovery efforts Thursday and Friday.

The plane involved Thursday, a de Havilland Beaver, was owned by Southeast Aviation LLC.

"Our hearts are shattered at the loss of six people today. We are thinking of and grieving with the families of the five passengers and our dear friend and pilot aboard the aircraft," the company said in a statement. "We are cooperating with the first responders and agencies involved, including the U.S. Coast Guard, National Transportation Safety Board and Alaska State Troopers."

The five passengers on the flight were from the Holland America Line cruise ship Nieuw Amsterdam, the company said in a statement. The ship stopped in Ketchikan on Thursday and delayed its afternoon departure after the plane crash. The company said it was making counseling services available to guests and crew.

"The float plane excursion was offered by an independent tour operator and not sold by Holland America Line," the statement said.

Ketchikan is a popular stop for cruise ships visiting Alaska, and cruise ship passengers can take various sightseeing excursions while in port.

Popular among them are small plane flights to Misty Fjords National Monument, where visitors can see glacier valleys, snow-capped peaks and lakes in the wilderness area.

In 2019, two sightseeing planes collided in midair, killing six of the 16 people on board the two planes.

Southeast Aviation on its website says it provides sightseeing tours to Misty Fjords National Monument and bear-viewing sites, along with air charters to other communities in southeast Alaska.

The Coast Guard was told by the plane's operator that five passengers and a pilot were on board, Wadlow said.

Wadlow did not have details on when the plane took off. Weather conditions were a cloud ceiling of 900 feet (274.32 meters) with mist and light rain. Visibility was 2 miles (3.22 kilometers) and winds were 8 mph (12.87 kph), the Coast Guard said.

The National Transportation Safety Board is sending a crew to investigate the crash. The team is expected to arrive in Alaska on Friday.

The FAA is also investigating.

'We lost Greenville': Wildfire decimates California town

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER and NOAH BERGER Associated Press

GREENVILLE, Calif. (AP) — A 3-week-old wildfire engulfed a tiny Northern California mountain town, leveling most of its historic downtown and leaving blocks of homes in ashes as crews braced for another explosive run of flames Thursday amid dangerous weather.

The Dixie Fire, swollen by bone-dry vegetation and 40 mph (64 kph) gusts, raged through the northern

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Sierra Nevada community of Greenville on Wednesday. A gas station, church, hotel, museum and bar were among the fixtures gutted in the town dating back to California's gold rush era where some wooden buildings were more than 100 years old.

The fire "burnt down our entire downtown. Our historical buildings, families' homes, small businesses, and our children's schools are completely lost," Plumas County Supervisor Kevin Goss wrote on Facebook.

Plumas County Sheriff Tom Johns, a lifelong resident of Greenville, said that "well over" 100 homes were destroyed, as well as businesses.

"My heart is crushed by what has occurred there," he said.

"We lost Greenville tonight," U.S. Rep. Doug LaMalfa, who represents the area, said in an emotional Facebook video. "There's just no words."

As the fire's north and eastern sides exploded Wednesday, the Plumas County Sheriff's Office issued an urgent warning online to the town's approximately 800 residents: "You are in imminent danger and you MUST leave now!"

A similar warning was issued Thursday as flames pushed toward the southeast in the direction of another tiny mountain community, Taylorsville, about 10 miles (16 kilometers) southeast of Greenville.

To the northwest, crews were protecting homes in the town of Chester. Residents there were among thousands under evacuation orders or warnings in several counties.

No injuries or deaths were immediately reported.

Margaret Elysia Garcia, an artist and writer who has been in Southern California waiting out the fire, watched video of her Greenville office in flames. It's where she kept every journal she's written in since second grade and a hand edit of a novel on top of her grandfather's roll-top desk.

"We're in shock. It's not that we didn't think this could happen to us," she said. "At the same time, it took our whole town."

Firefighters had to deal with people reluctant to leave on Wednesday. Their refusals meant that firefighters spent precious time loading people into cars to ferry them out, said Jake Cagle, an incident management operations section chief.

"We have firefighters that are getting guns pulled out on them, because people don't want to evacuate," he said.

The blaze that broke out July 14 is the largest burning in California and had blackened over 504 square miles (1,305 square kilometers), an area larger than Los Angeles. The cause was under investigation. But Pacific Gas & Electric has said it may have been sparked when a tree fell on one of its power lines.

The fire was near the town of Paradise, which was largely destroyed in a 2018 wildfire that became the nation's deadliest in at least a century and was blamed on PG&E equipment.

Ken Donnell left Greenville on Wednesday, thinking he'd be right back after a quick errand a few towns over, but couldn't return as the flames swept through. All he has now are the clothes on his back and his old pickup truck, he said. He's pretty sure his office and house, with a bag he had prepared for evacuation, is gone.

Donnell remembered helping victims of 2018's devastating Camp Fire, in which about 100 friends lost their homes.

"Now I have a thousand friends lose their home in a day," he said.

By Thursday, the Dixie Fire had become the sixth largest in state history, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said. Four of the state's other five largest fires happened in 2020.

The fire forced Lassen Volcanic National Park to close to visitors.

Dozens of homes had already burned before the flames made a new run Wednesday. The U.S. Forest Service said initial reports show that firefighters saved about a quarter of the structures in Greenville.

"We did everything we could," fire spokesman Mitch Matlow said. "Sometimes it's just not enough."

About 100 miles (160 kilometers) south, officials said between 35 and 40 homes and other buildings burned in the fast-moving River Fire that broke out Wednesday near Colfax, a town of about 2,000. Within hours, it ripped through nearly 4 square miles (10 square kilometers) of dry brush and trees. There was no

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containment and about 6,000 people were ordered to evacuate in Placer and Nevada counties, Cal Fire said.

In Colfax, Jamie Brown ate breakfast at a downtown restaurant Thursday while waiting to learn if his house was still standing.

He evacuated his property near Rollins Lake a day earlier, when "it looked like the whole town was going to burn down." Conditions had calmed a bit and he was hoping for the best.

After firefighters made progress earlier this week, high heat, low humidity and gusty winds erupted Wednesday and were expected to remain a threat.

Winds were expected to change direction multiple times Thursday, putting pressure on firefighters at sections of the fire that haven't seen activity in several days, officials said.

The trees, grass and brush were so dry that "if an ember lands, you're virtually guaranteed to start a new fire," Matlow said.

Heat waves and historic drought tied to climate change have made wildfires harder to fight in the American West. Scientists say climate change has made the region much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

About 150 miles (240 kilometers) west of the Dixie Fire, the lightning-sparked McFarland Fire threatened remote homes along the Trinity River in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest. There was little containment of the fire after it burned nearly 33 square miles (85 square kilometers) of drought-stricken vegetation.

Risky weather also was expected across Southern California, where heat advisories and warnings were issued for inland valleys, mountains and deserts for much of the week.

More than 20,000 firefighters and support personnel were battling 97 wildfires covering 2,919 square miles (7,560 square kilometers) in 13 U.S. states, the National Interagency Fire Center said.

Appeals court upholds murder conviction of ex-Dallas officer

DALLAS (AP) — A Texas appeals court on Thursday upheld the murder conviction of a former Dallas police officer who was sentenced to prison for fatally shooting her neighbor in his home.

A panel of three state judges ruled that a Dallas County jury had sufficient evidence to convict Amber Guyger of murder in the 2018 shooting of Botham Jean.

The decision by the 5th Texas Court of Appeals in Dallas means Guyger, who turns 33 on Monday, will continue to serve her 10-year prison sentence and largely dashes her hopes of having the 2019 conviction overturned. She will become eligible for parole in 2024, under her current sentence.

The ruling comes in a case that drew national attention because of the strange circumstances and because it was one in a string of shootings of Black men by white police officers.

The appeals court justices did not dispute the basic facts of the case. Guyger, returning home from a long shift, mistook Jean's apartment for her own, which was on the floor directly below his. Finding the door ajar, she entered and shot him, later testifying that she thought he was a burglar.

Jean, a 26-year-old accountant, had been eating a bowl of ice cream before Guyger shot him. She was later fired from the Dallas Police Department.

Guyger's appeal hung on the claim that her mistaking Jean's apartment for her own was reasonable, and therefore, so too was the shooting. Her lawyer asked the appeals court to acquit her of murder or substitute in a conviction for criminally negligent homicide, which carries a lesser sentence.

Dallas County prosecutors countered that the error was not reasonable, that Guyger acknowledged intending to kill Jean and that "murder is a result-oriented offense."

The court's chief justice, Robert D. Burns III, and Justices Lana Myers and Robbie Partida-Kipness concurred with prosecutors, disagreeing that Guyger's belief that deadly force was needed was reasonable.

In a 23-page opinion, the justices also disagreed that evidence supported a conviction of criminally negligent homicide rather than murder, and they pointed to Guyger's own testimony that she intended to kill.

"That she was mistaken as to Jean's status as a resident in his own apartment or a burglar in hers does not change her mental state from intentional or knowing to criminally negligent," the judges wrote. "We decline to rely on Guyger's misperception of the circumstances leading to her mistaken beliefs as a basis to reform the jury's verdict in light of the direct evidence of her intent to kill."

Defense attorneys could still ask the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals — the state's highest forum for criminal cases — to review the appeals court's ruling. A message to Guyger's attorney was not immediately returned.

What Gov. Andrew Cuomo's accusers felt, in their own words

By THALIA BEATY Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Violated, demeaned, humiliated, a horror movie: Those are some of the words 11 women used to describe how Gov. Andrew Cuomo made them feel when he touched, kissed or hugged them or asked invasive questions.

Many of these women who spoke to investigators hired by the New York attorney general's office were state employees. Others encountered Cuomo in professional settings or at public events.

Unwelcome sexual conduct that makes workers feel humiliated or uncomfortable is barred under New York's sexual harassment law.

Cuomo has denied that he harassed or inappropriately touched anyone. He has said he did not intend to make anyone feel uncomfortable, saying instead he touched and kissed people to put them at ease and his actions were misunderstood because of generational or cultural differences.

Here, in their own words, is what each woman felt about how the governor treated her:

STATE TROOPER NO. 1

After being promoted to the governor's protection unit, a state police trooper told investigators Cuomo subjected to her to "flirtatious" and "creepy" behavior.

One time, in an elevator, he traced his finger from her neck to her back. Another time, he asked to kiss her in the driveway outside his Mt. Kisco home, she said.

"I remember just freezing, being — in the back of my head, I'm like, oh, how do I say no politely?" she told investigators.

At an event on Long Island, Cuomo ran his hand across her stomach and hip as she held a door open for him.

"I felt completely violated," she said. But she also felt like she couldn't say anything.

"I'm a trooper, newly assigned to the travel team. Do I want to make waves? No," she said. "I've heard horror stories about people getting kicked off the detail or transferred over like little things ... I had no plans to report it."

CHARLOTTE BENNETT

"The way he was repeating 'You were raped and abused and attacked and assaulted and betrayed,' over and over again while looking me directly in the eyes was something out of a horror movie."

That's what Charlotte Bennett texted a coworker in 2020 about a conversation she'd just had where Cuomo gave feedback about a speech on sexual assault she was giving at her alma mater, she told investigators. She had confided in him that she had been assaulted.

Bennett said it was one of a number of uncomfortable conversations she had with Cuomo when she worked for him as a low-level aide. He asked whether she was monogamous and what she thought of age differences in relationships, said he needed a hug and told her he was looking for a girlfriend — anyone over age 22. She was 25.

In a text exchange at the time, a friend asked her if something had happened and she replied, "No but it was like the most explicit it could be," and said she was shaking, writing: "I'm so upset and so confused."

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT NO. 1

"I felt that (the Governor) was definitely taking advantage of me. He was taking advantage. The fact that he could tell that I was nervous. He could tell that I wasn't saying anything because he had gotten away with it before."

This executive assistant described how Cuomo frequently hugged her, held her close and rubbed her back and gave her kisses.

"Any time he touched me I felt like it was inappropriate. He was my boss, let alone the Governor of the State of New York, so I definitely felt he abused his power and definitely knew that he had this presence

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about him, very intimidating," she told investigators.

This executive assistant also told investigators that Cuomo had reached under her blouse and grabbed her breast in November last year. She is still an employee of the governor's office.

STATE ENTITY EMPLOYEE NO. 1

At an event in September 2019, this employee and her boss went to meet Cuomo and took a photo with him. She told investigators Cuomo touched her butt while the photo was being taken.

"I felt deflated and I felt disrespected and I felt much like smaller and almost younger than I actually am because kind of the funny part of it all is I was making this project happen. So we were there because, you know, the work that I had been doing and have continued to do... so it was just very, yeah, a moment of like, disempowerment."

In an email written after the event that she sent to herself to document Cuomo's action, she wrote, "I then felt a lot of emotions around Cuomo's inappropriate touching of my body, mostly shock and anger."

VIRGINIA LIMMIATIS

An energy company employee, Virginia Limmiatis extended her hand to the governor while at an event in 2017. Instead of taking her hand, Cuomo slid his fingers across her chest, over letters printed on her shirt, and leaned in so their cheeks touched.

She told investigators she felt, "absolutely humiliated. It's very difficult even talking about it. I was absolutely profoundly humiliated and appalled. I was in shock. Very negative feelings is the best way to describe it."

While she told people at her company about what happened, she did not report it out of "trepidation and fear."

"How do you explain to someone what the Governor did in public, such an egregious act, heinous act. I was very fearful ... how does someone believe that this happened to me?"

LINDSEY BOYLAN

In an online post from February, Lindsey Boylan, a former aide who served in various roles, said Cuomo once kissed her on the lips after a meeting.

"I was in shock, but I kept walking," she wrote.

Boylan told investigators it was "deeply humiliating on some level."

"I think a lot of people are, like, of course this happened to young women who have no power. Well, I was really senior and I had worked my whole life to get to a point where I would be taken seriously and I wasn't being taken seriously and I worked so hard to be some little doll for the Governor of New York and that was deeply humiliating."

ALYSSA MCGRATH

A young aide working for the governor, McGrath said Cuomo made sexually suggestive comments, held her uncomfortably close in photos and once looked down her blouse while she was taking notes.

But she didn't feel like she could complain about his behavior, partly because some coworkers had already commented on how the governor liked pretty faces around.

"I wanted to believe that I'm up there and helping out because of my good work. And I felt like if I said that to them, not only would I be embarrassed. I would, like, almost discredit myself," she told investigators.

KAITLIN

A woman only identified by her first name told investigators that after she was hired as an aide in Cuomo's office, he told her to soak up information and referred to her as "sponge." She said she found the nickname "embarrassing... , condescending (and) demeaning."

She later transferred to work for another state agency and cried in an interview when explaining that she did not want to have contact with the governor in her new role.

ANA LISS

Ana Liss worked in Cuomo's office as an aide on a prestigious fellowship for two years. Liss told investigators she felt "sort of icky because it sucked that (she) was nominally there on this Fellowship that was supposed to be recognizing (her) intellect and (her) credentials and (she) was supposed to be influencing

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policy according to this Fellowship program, but then like in practice, (she) was eye candy.”

She told WROC-TV in March that when she left the position, she felt she had failed professionally.

“My family and loved ones observed that I was not doing so well. I left to go work for Cornell on my own accord. I applied for the job, I didn’t seek out any help from the administration to help me secure a position somewhere else to escape. And at the time I viewed it as a lateral move and that I had failed, I couldn’t survive.”

STATE ENTITY EMPLOYEE NO. 2

“You make that gown look good,” Cuomo told this employee as she swabbed his nose for a coronavirus test on television in March 2020.

She was shocked.

“I felt that in my situation it was very, very brief,” she later told investigators. “I did not have typical interactions with the Governor and I felt I had a lot of professional opportunities otherwise. I felt that in my professional standing I should share these facts, whatever they are, in order to support if there are any other women.”

ANNA RUCH

A vomit emoji was how Anna Ruch ended a text message in which she shared photos of Cuomo holding her face at a wedding in September 2019. She had never met him previously and said he touched her back and asked to kiss her.

“I’m so pissed / I lost the photographers (sic) card but don’t want the photo of us on the wedding photos. Yuck,” she wrote.

Lawmakers give Cuomo deadline in impeachment probe

By MARINA VILLENEUVE Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — State lawmakers told Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Thursday that their ongoing investigation of his conduct in office is almost done and gave him a deadline of Aug. 13 to provide additional evidence as they moved toward what seemed like an increasingly inevitable impeachment battle.

Since March, the Assembly’s judiciary committee has been investigating whether there are grounds to impeach the Democratic governor over sexual harassment allegations, misleading the public about COVID-19 outbreaks at nursing homes and using state resources and staff for his \$5 million book deal.

In a letter sent Thursday, the law firm leading the investigation, Davis Polk & Wardwell, reminded Cuomo’s legal team that it has subpoenaed certain documents and expects “full compliance from the governor,” but that his time to respond was almost up.

“We write to inform you that the Committee’s investigation is nearing completion and the Assembly will soon consider potential articles of impeachment against your client,” they wrote. “Accordingly, we invite you to provide any additional evidence or written submissions that you would like the Committee to consider before its work concludes.”

The letter was released publicly by Assembly Judiciary Committee Chair Charles Lavine, a Long Island Democrat.

Cuomo’s spokesman, Rich Azzopardi, said in a statement that the governor would cooperate.

“The Assembly has said it is doing a full and thorough review of the complaints and has offered the Governor and his team an opportunity to present facts and their perspective,” he wrote. “The Governor appreciates the opportunity.”

The Judiciary Committee has scheduled its next meeting on the matter for Monday.

Findings from an independent investigation overseen by state Attorney General Letitia James released earlier this week said Cuomo sexually harassed at least 11 women, and that his administration retaliated against at least one of them for going public with her allegations.

Cuomo has denied making any inappropriate sexual advances and insists the findings don’t reflect the facts. He’s resisted numerous calls for his resignation from most of New York’s top Democrats and from national figures like President Joe Biden.

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The governor has not made himself available to reporters since the report's release Tuesday and hasn't appeared in public. Photos published by the New York Post showed him working Thursday from a lounge chair by the pool at the Executive Mansion in Albany.

His office continued to churn out press releases about various administration initiatives, as if to project a sense that Cuomo was continuing to govern as usual, but his political isolation was clear.

At least 97— of the Assembly's 150 members said they would impeach Cuomo if he doesn't resign, according to a tally by The Associated Press based on interviews and public statements. Only a simple majority is needed to begin an impeachment trial.

Asked whether Cuomo could try to horse-trade his way out of impeachment or call in favors, Sen. Brad Hoylman, a New York City Democrat, said there wasn't a pathway for that.

"I know the political animal he is. I'm sure if he could do that, he would, but I don't think anybody's even talking to him," he said. "This is someone who's cornered politically with nowhere to go but out the door. The sooner he comes to that realization, the better."

Dozens of lawmakers told The Associated Press in recent days that they're worried that Cuomo is too distracted to lead.

Thursday afternoon, the state's education commissioner, Betty Rosa, sent a letter to the state health commissioner suggesting the administration had let the scandal get in the way of important policy decisions about reopening schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Health Commissioner Howard Zucker had announced earlier in the day that the state would not release long-promised reopening guidance and would instead leave the matter to local school districts. Rosa asked him to reconsider.

"The circumstances enveloping the Executive Chamber this week should not prevent the Department of Health from the execution of its responsibilities to the public, as has been promised by the Governor's office for months," her department said in a press release.

District attorneys in Manhattan, suburban Westchester, and Nassau counties and the state capital of Albany said they asked for investigative materials from the inquiry to see if any of the allegations could result in criminal charges.

Oswego County District Attorney Greg Oakes added himself to the list of interested prosecutors Thursday, telling WSYR-TV that he will begin investigating an incident involving a woman who testified that Cuomo ran two fingers across her chest and grazed the area between her shoulder and breasts at an upstate conservation event in May 2017.

One of Cuomo's accusers said he groped her breast. Others have said he gave them unwanted kisses or touched parts of their bodies in ways that made them uncomfortable.

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said the Assembly's judiciary committee will first wrap up its probe "as quickly as possible" before the chamber votes on articles of impeachment.

But it's far from clear how long that will take: Several judiciary committee members estimate weeks or even a month.

Clark has asked legislative leaders whether the Assembly could submit articles of impeachment on harassment first and add more findings later. But committee member Tom Abinanti, a Democrat, said he supports waiting to end the probe and drawing up comprehensive articles that could hold up to legal scrutiny.

Cuomo also faces scrutiny from the state ethics commission, which can impose civil penalties for violations of state ethics law or refer criminal matters to prosecutors.

The New York State Joint Commission on Public Ethics is looking into sexual harassment allegations against Cuomo, his administration's handling of COVID-19 outbreaks at nursing home, his use of state resources and staff for his \$5 million pandemic book deal and his administration's efforts to rush COVID-19 tests for members of Cuomo's circle during spring 2020 when testing was scarce, according to agency spokesperson Walt McClure.

McClure couldn't confirm whether JCOPE has opened a formal investigation, but said that "investigative matters" concerning the governor are pending before the agency.

US automakers pledge huge increase in electric vehicles

By TOM KRISHER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Declaring the U.S. must “move fast” to win the world’s carmaking future, President Joe Biden on Thursday announced a commitment from the auto industry to produce electric vehicles for as much as half of U.S. sales by the end of the decade.

Biden also wants automakers to raise gas mileage and cut tailpipe pollution between now and model year 2026. That would mark a significant step toward meeting his pledge to cut emissions and battle climate change as he pushes a history-making shift in the U.S. from internal combustion engines to battery-powered vehicles.

He urged that the components needed to make that sweeping change — from batteries to semiconductors — be made in the United States, too, aiming for both industry and union support for the environmental effort, with the promise of new jobs and billions in federal electric vehicle investments.

Pointing to electric vehicles parked on the White House South Lawn, the president declared them a “vision of the future that is now beginning to happen.”

“The question is whether we lead or fall behind in the race for the future,” he said, “Folks, the rest of the world is moving ahead. We have to catch up.”

In obvious good spirits, the president hopped into a plug-in hybrid Jeep Wrangler Rubicon that can run solely on batteries and took a quick spin around the driveway after the ceremony.

Earlier Thursday, the administration announced there would be new mileage and anti-pollution standards from the Environmental Protection Agency and Transportation Department, part of Biden’s goal to cut U.S. greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030. It said the auto industry had agreed to a target that 40% to 50% of new vehicle sales be electric by 2030.

Both the regulatory standards and the automakers’ voluntary target were included in an executive order that Biden signed as a gathering of auto industry leaders and lawmakers applauded.

The standards, which must go through the regulatory process, would reverse fuel economy and anti-pollution rollbacks done under President Donald Trump. At that time, the mileage increases were reduced to 1.5% annually through model year 2026.

The new standards would cut greenhouse gas emissions and raise fuel economy by 10% over the Trump rules in car model year 2023. They would get 5% stronger in each model year through 2026, according to an EPA statement. That’s about a 25% increase over four years.

The EPA said that by 2026, the proposed standards would be the toughest greenhouse emissions rules in U.S. history.

Still, it remains to be seen how quickly consumers will be willing to embrace higher-mileage, lower-emission vehicles over less fuel-efficient SUVs, currently the industry’s top sellers. The 2030 EV targets ultimately are nonbinding, and the industry stresses that billions of dollars in electric-vehicle investments in legislation pending in Congress will be vital to meeting those goals.

Only 2.2% of new vehicle sales were fully electric vehicles through June, according to Edmunds.com estimates. That’s up from 1.4% at the same time last year.

Biden has long declared himself “a car guy,” his blue collar political persona intertwined with support for union workers and his role, as vice president, in steadying the auto industry after the economic collapse in 2008. He told General Motors CEO Mary Barra that he wanted to reserve a certain test drive.

“I have a commitment from Mary: When they make the first electric Corvette, I get to drive it,” Biden said. “Right, Mary? You think I’m kidding. I’m not kidding.”

Dave Cooke, senior vehicles analyst for the Union of Concerned Scientists, said the new rules are close to matching the final year of standards enacted when Barack Obama was president that were rolled back by Trump.

But Cooke said he is concerned that the regulations extend the number of years automakers get double credit toward complying with the standards for every electric vehicle they sell. That allows more emissions

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from internal combustion vehicles, he said.

Last week, The Associated Press and other news organizations reported that the Biden administration was discussing weaker mileage requirements with automakers, but they since have been strengthened. The change came after environmental groups complained publicly that they were too weak.

Transportation is the single biggest U.S. contributor to climate change.

The deal with automakers defines electric vehicles as plug-in hybrids, fully electric vehicles and those powered by hydrogen fuel cells.

Environmental groups welcomed the movement but also said the administration should move faster.

"Given how climate change has already turned our weather so violent, it's clear that we need to dramatically accelerate progress," said Simon Mui of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Scientists say human-caused global warming is increasing temperatures, raising sea levels and worsening wildfires, droughts, floods and storms globally.

Several automakers already have announced electric vehicle sales goals similar to those in the deal with the government. Last week Ford's CEO said his company expects 40% of its global sales to be fully electric by 2030. General Motors has said it aspires to sell only electric passenger vehicles by 2035. Stellantis, formerly Fiat Chrysler, also pledged over 40% electrified vehicles by 2030.

The Trump rollback of the Obama-era standards would require the fleet of new vehicles to get a projected 29 mpg in "real world" driving by 2026. Cooke said under the Biden EPA proposal, the mileage should be similar to the 37 mpg that the Obama rules were to achieve.

General Motors, Stellantis and Ford said in a joint statement that their recent electric-vehicle commitments show they want to lead the U.S. in the transition from combustion vehicles.

They said such a "dramatic shift" from the U.S. market today can only happen with policies that include incentives for electric vehicle purchases, adequate government funding for charging stations and money to expand electric vehicle manufacturing and the parts supply chain.

The United Auto Workers union, which has voiced concerns about being too hasty with an EV transition because of the potential impact on industry jobs, did not commit to endorsing the 40% to 50% EV target. But UAW said it stands behind the president to "support his ambition not just to grow electric vehicles but also our capacity to produce them domestically with good wages and benefits."

Biden on Thursday repeatedly extolled the virtues of American union workers and said that the challenges of climate change could present an opportunity for "good paying union jobs."

Under a shift from internal combustion to electric power, jobs that now involve making pistons, fuel injectors and mufflers will be supplanted by the assembly of lithium-ion battery packs, electric motors and heavy-duty wiring harnesses.

Many of those components are now built overseas, including in China. Biden has made the development of a U.S. electric vehicle supply chain a key part of his plan to create more auto industry jobs.

In a bipartisan infrastructure bill awaiting Senate passage, there is \$7.5 billion for grants to build charging stations, about half of what Biden originally proposed. He wanted \$15 billion for 500,000 stations, plus money for tax credits and rebates to entice people into buying electric vehicles.

Brazil forest fire season underway and raising concern

By DIANE JEANTET and DÉBORA ÁLVARES Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — The season of Brazilian forest fires has begun, and early data plus severe drought is sparking concern that nationwide destruction in 2021 will stay at the high levels recorded in the past two years, despite efforts to tamp down the blazes.

The government space agency that uses satellites to monitor fires reported more area burned in the month of July than in any July since 2016, according to data released Thursday. The same was true for June.

Most Brazilian blazes are manmade, often started illegally by land-grabbers clearing forest for cattle or crops. Fires tend to begin increasing in June and peak in September, according to historical data. They can easily get out of control during the dry season, burning large swaths of forest to the ground.

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Brazil is home to the world's largest rainforest and tropical wetlands — the Amazon and Pantanal — which saw dramatic fires in 2019 and 2020, respectively, that caused the greatest annual forest loss since 2015. That drew global criticism of the response from the administration of President Jair Bolsonaro, who has repeatedly called for development of the region.

This year, it's the Cerrado savanna stretching across Brazil's center-west region that is suffering more than usual. An area almost as big as Connecticut and New Jersey burned there in the first seven months of 2021.

Ane Alencar, science director at the Amazon Environmental Research Institute, said in a July 27 online panel that there have been fewer Amazon fires this year due to cool weather, which limits fire's potential to spread. But deforestation remains on par with the last two years, so much dry material remains on the ground waiting to be burned, she added.

"I am afraid about the coming months," said Alencar, who is also coordinator of MapBiomas Fogo, which compiles data on deforestation and fires across the region. "When this cold front goes away, the vegetation will be drier and then we will have warmer temperatures. ... I'm not sure that the people who cut down the forest will not light it."

Citing heightened hazard due to Brazil's worst drought in nine decades, the Justice and Environment ministries on July 22 announced a task force to prevent and investigate fires in 11 states of the Amazon, Pantanal and Cerrado biomes. Some 6,000 people, including federal and state police and firefighters, as well as state public security and environmental officials will participate in the effort, according to a statement.

On June 29, Bolsonaro decreed redeployment of soldiers to the Amazon to combat fires and deforestation, and also issued a 120-day ban on unauthorized outdoor fires.

Similar measures in previous years didn't prevent illegal fires, however. More than 90% of the Pantanal hot spots detected in 2020 came after a similar presidential ban, according to Vinícius Silgueiro, coordinator of territorial intelligence at the Center of Life Institute in Mato Grosso state.

"The sense of impunity is very high. Enforcement is well below what is necessary," Silgueiro said.

In Mato Grosso state, half of whose territory is in the Amazon, the federal and state governments last year began coordinating actions to put an end to overlap that frequently left other areas unmanned and vulnerable, according to Mauren Lazzaretti, the state's environment secretary.

The state is also purchasing a helicopter and plans to deploy dozens of planes loaned by Pantanal farmers and businesses to drop fire retardant onto blazes.

Last year, over 4 million hectares (about 15,000 square miles) of the Pantanal went up in flames, or about 27% its area — by far the most since official record-keeping began in 2003. While the biome regenerates quickly, unlike rainforest, fires often kill local wildlife, such as jaguars, caimans and giant otters.

"The size of the fires last year drew society's attention to the component of individual responsibility," Lazzaretti said. "The engagement of cities, farmers and even traditional and Indigenous communities is much greater this year."

The year before, fires in the Amazon roused global concern, and several European governments openly criticized Bolsonaro's administration. Bolsonaro countered that fires nationwide and in the Amazon, while up from 2018, were roughly in line with the average of the preceding several years and were down sharply from 15 years earlier. He called on European leaders to mind their own backyards.

Earlier studies showed the Amazon absorbs about 2 billion of the 40 billion tons of carbon dioxide the world emits into the atmosphere each year, making it an important part of the global effort to curb climate change. But a study led by the Brazil's Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, published in Nature on July 14 — spanning 10 years and involving nearly 600 flyovers — found the dry season's intensification and increased deforestation had caused more fires and higher carbon emissions. The southeastern part of the Amazon, particularly ravaged by logging, has become a net source of carbon.

Paulo Artaxo, professor of environmental physics at the University of Sao Paulo and a member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said other recent studies have shown even the more preserved western Amazon region is now carbon neutral in terms of emissions, while a few years ago, it was

a carbon sink.

Carlos Nobre, a prominent climatologist, says Brazil's Amazon is nearing a "tipping point," after which the thick jungle will cease to generate enough moisture to sustain its current form and will begin transforming into tropical savanna.

Nobre said Bolsonaro's government has yet to demonstrate any encouraging change in approach to help save the rainforest.

The federal government "continues incentivizing organized crime in the Amazon that is responsible for the theft of timber, illegal deforestation and fires," he said. "Those who practice these crimes haven't given any sign of worry that enforcement will become rigorous. They continue to feel rather empowered." _____
Álvares is based in Brasilia. AP writer David Biller contributed.

Richard Trumka, longtime president of AFL-CIO, dies at 72

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Richard Trumka, the powerful president of the AFL-CIO who rose from the coal mines of Pennsylvania to preside over one of the largest labor organizations in the world, died Thursday. He was 72.

The federation confirmed Trumka's death in a statement. He had been AFL-CIO president since 2009, after serving as the organization's secretary-treasurer for 14 years. From his perch, he oversaw a federation with more than 12.5 million members and ushered in a more aggressive style of leadership.

"The labor movement, the AFL-CIO and the nation lost a legend today," the AFL-CIO said. "Rich Trumka devoted his life to working people, from his early days as president of the United Mine Workers of America to his unparalleled leadership as the voice of America's labor movement."

President Joe Biden eulogized Trumka from the White House and said the labor leader had died of a heart attack while on a camping trip with his son and grandkids. He said he spoke with Trumka's widow and son earlier in the day.

"He wasn't just a great labor leader. He was a friend," Biden told reporters Thursday. "He was someone I could confide in, and you knew, whatever he said he would do, he would do."

A burly man with thick eyebrows and a bushy mustache, Trumka was the son and grandson of coal miners. He was born in 1949 in the small southwest Pennsylvania town of Nemacolin and worked for seven years in the mines before earning an accounting degree from Penn State and then a law degree from Villanova University.

Trumka was tough and combative, a throwback to an old guard of union leaders from the labor movement's heyday. But he rose in a distinctly different era, as union membership declined and labor struggled to retain political power. He often focused on making the case for unions to the white, blue-collar workers who had turned away from Democrats — and speaking bluntly to them.

Trumka met with President Donald Trump on trade and health care issues, but their relationship remained contentious. He called Trump a "fraud" who had deceived the working class. Trump criticized Trumka as ineffectual. "No wonder unions are losing so much," Trump tweeted in 2019.

At times, Trumka challenged blue-collar workers to confront their own prejudices, including a forceful denunciation of racism in the union ranks during Barack Obama's first campaign for the White House.

"We can't tap dance around the fact that there's a lot of white folks out there ... and a lot of them are good union people, they just can't get past this idea that there's something wrong with voting for a Black man," he said during an impassioned 2008 speech.

Until his death, he used his power to push for health care legislation, expanded workers rights and infrastructure spending.

Trumka was focused on the future, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler said, in the form of the proposed \$1 trillion infrastructure bill that he believed would propel organized labor forward.

"He saw that if we were using the breadth and power of the labor movement and training it on a single goal that no one could stop us," Shuler said.

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Larry Cohen, a longtime labor activist and former president of the Communications Workers of America, said Trumka's death was a "devastating" loss for labor, in part because of his long-standing relationship with Biden.

"His ability to talk to the president of the United States will be very hard to replace. It's a long history, based on personal trust. It's remarkable," said Cohen, who had known Trumka since the early 1980s.

Trumka burst into national union politics as a youthful 33-year-old lawyer when he became the United Mine Workers of America's president in 1982. Pledging the economically troubled union "shall rise again," Trumka beat sitting president Sam Church by a 2-to-1 margin and would serve in the role until he became the AFL-CIO's secretary-treasurer in 1995.

There, he led a successful strike against the Pittston Coal Company, which tried to avoid paying into an industrywide health and pension fund.

"I'd like to retire at this job," Trumka said in 1987. "If I could write my job description for the rest of my life, this would be it."

At age 43, Trumka led a nationwide strike against Peabody Coal in 1993. During the walk-off, he stirred controversy.

Asked about the possibility the company would hire permanent replacement workers, Trumka told The Associated Press, "I'm saying if you strike a match and you put your finger on it, you're likely to get burned." Trumka insisted he wasn't threatening violence against the replacements. "Do I want it to happen? Absolutely not. Do I think it can happen? Yes, I think it can happen," he said.

As AFL-CIO president, he vowed to revive unions' sagging membership rolls and pledged to make the labor movement appeal to a new generation of workers who perceive unions as "only a grainy, faded picture from another time."

"We need a unionism that makes sense to the next generation of young women and men who either don't have the money to go to college or are almost penniless by the time they come out," Trumka told hundreds of cheering delegates in a speech at the federation's annual convention in 2009.

That year, he was also a leading proponent during the health care debate for including a public, government-run insurance option, and he threatened Democrats who opposed one.

"We need to be a labor movement that stands by our friends, punishes its enemies and challenges those who, well, can't seem to decide which side they're on," he said.

During the 2011 debate over public employee union rights in GOP-controlled statehouses, Trumka said the angry protests it sparked were overdue.

Trumka said he hoped then-Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker's bill to strip public employee unions of their bargaining power could renew support for unions after decades of decline. The move drew thousands of protesters to the Capitol in Madison.

Whether he meant to or not, Trumka said, Walker started a national debate about collective bargaining "that this country sorely needed to have."

Remembrances poured in Thursday from Trumka's Democratic allies in Washington.

"The working people of America have lost a fierce warrior at a time when we needed him most," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said in announcing Trumka's death from the Senate floor.

"Richard Trumka dedicated his life to the labor movement and the right to organize," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said.

Former Labor Secretary Tom Perez, perhaps Trumka's closest ally during Obama's presidency, remembered Trumka as the "son and grandson of a miner," who brought that family history to the halls of power in Washington.

"You know, Rich had a view of the White House from his office," Perez said, recalling that Trumka displayed one of father's mining helmets in his office. "His father and grandfather never could have imagined their son and grandson ascending to such a high level. But what they'd be even more proud of is that he didn't allow it to go to his head. He never forgot his roots."

US to probe Phoenix police over excessive force allegations

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and BOB CHRISTIE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department on Thursday said it was launching a widespread probe into the police force in Phoenix to examine whether officers have been using excessive force and abusing people experiencing homelessness.

The investigation into the City of Phoenix and the Phoenix Police Department is the third sweeping civil investigation into a law enforcement agency brought by the Justice Department in the Biden administration and comes as the department has worked to shift its priorities to focus on policing and civil rights. Few such investigations were opened during the Trump administration.

Attorney General Merrick Garland said the probe will also examine whether police have engaged in discriminatory policing practices and will work to determine if officers have retaliated against people engaged in protected First Amendment activities.

In June, the top prosecutor in Maricopa County, which includes Phoenix, permanently dismissed charges that included gang allegations against more than a dozen people arrested at an October 2020 protest against police brutality.

The move came amid complaints from civil rights advocates that Phoenix police and prosecutors were pursuing gang charges as part of abusive political prosecutions intended to silence dissent and scare protesters.

Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego, a Democrat, hailed the Justice Department investigation and said it will help with ongoing police reform measures she has been pushing since taking office in 2019.

"Public safety reform is an ongoing process in Phoenix, and now, with the help of the USDOJ, this robust program will continue," Gallego said in a statement.

The city also plans to start a new program this year to respond to mental health calls by placing behavioral health professionals in the field. The city also has a new office of police accountability that is charged with independently investigating allegations of wrongdoing by officers.

That office may be hamstrung, however, by a new state law signed by Republican Gov. Doug Ducey that limits civilian review boards like the one Phoenix has set up.

City Councilman Sal DiCiccio, a frequent defender of Phoenix police, said the department "has been under extreme attack by activists bent on defunding the police."

"I welcome another set of eyes to see what we already know: that we have a department staffed by dedicated individuals who go to great lengths to protect our community, and do so honorably and fairly," he said in a statement.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Arizona, which has sued Phoenix police in the past for actions against protesters, said the investigation was needed to force the department to change.

"This is not a case of a few bad apples – Phoenix PD has deep-rooted, systemic problems with the way it treats community members," Victoria Lopez, the group's advocacy and legal director, said in a statement.

Part of the investigation will also examine whether police officers have been violating the rights of people who are experiencing homelessness by "seizing and disposing of their belongings in a manner that violates the Constitution," Garland said.

The new investigation is known as a "pattern or practice" — examining whether there is a pattern or practice of unconstitutional or unlawful policing — and is generally is a sweeping review of the entire police department.

In announcing the probe, Garland also pointed to what he described as "straining the policing profession by turning to law enforcement to address a wide array of social problems."

"Too often we asked law enforcement officers to be the first and last option for addressing issues that should not be handled by our criminal justice system," he said "This makes police officers' jobs more difficult, increases unnecessary confrontations with law enforcement and hinders public safety."

Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke said investigators will meet with police officers and supervisors, review body camera video, along with training materials and other records. She said the Justice Depart-

ment spoke with Phoenix city officials and they had expressed support for the probe.

"Protecting the rule of law demands that those who enforce our laws also abide by them," Clarke said.

The Justice Department had reviewed an array of publicly available information, including lawsuits and news reports before it decided to open the Phoenix investigation, Clarke said.

The police force has come under fire in recent years for its handling of protests and the high number of shootings. One lawsuit alleged that police and prosecutors colluded to target protesters during a demonstration last summer. In February, a local television station reported that a team of police officers had celebrated shooting a protester in the groin during another protest with commemorative coins they would share.

"We found that the evidence here warrants a full investigation, but we approach this process with no predispositions or pre-drawn conclusions," Clarke said.

Phoenix Police Chief Jeri Williams defended the department and the reforms it has made in recent years at a news briefing. But she said she is open to any Justice Department recommendations.

"The Department of Justice inquiry is another opportunity to further improve the department and to better serve our city," Williams said. "Wearing the badge is a privilege, not a right. I'll say that again, wearing this badge is a privilege, not a right."

"The majority of our officers out there act every day with professionalism and compassion," she added.

Earlier this year, the Justice Department announced it was opening similar investigation into police forces in Minneapolis, after the death of George Floyd, and in Louisville, Kentucky, after the death of Breonna Taylor.

'There are only so many beds': COVID-19 surge hits hospitals

By KELLI KENNEDY and PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Florida hospitals slammed with COVID-19 patients are suspending elective surgeries and putting beds in conference rooms, an auditorium and a cafeteria. As of midweek, Mississippi had just six open intensive care beds in the entire state.

Georgia medical centers are turning people away. And in Louisiana, an organ transplant had to be postponed along with other procedures.

"We are seeing a surge like we've not seen before in terms of the patients coming," Dr. Marc Napp, chief medical officer for Memorial Healthcare System in Hollywood, Florida, said Wednesday. "It's the sheer number coming in at the same time. There are only so many beds, so many doctors, only so many nurses."

Coronavirus hospitalizations are surging again as the more contagious delta variant rages across the country, forcing medical centers to return to a crisis footing just weeks after many closed their COVID-19 wards and field hospitals and dropped other emergency measures.

The number of people now in the hospital in the U.S. with COVID-19 has almost quadrupled over the past month to nearly 45,000, turning the clock back to early March, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That's still nowhere close to the nearly 124,000 people who were in the hospital at the very peak of the winter surge in January. But health experts say this wave is perhaps more worrying because it has risen more swiftly than prior ones. Also, a disturbingly large share of patients this time are young adults.

And to the frustration of public health experts and front-line medical workers, the vast majority of those now hospitalized are unvaccinated.

Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi alone account for more than 40% of all hospitalizations in the country.

Mississippi has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the nation, with less than 35% of its population fully inoculated, and Louisiana and Georgia aren't much better, at around 38%. Florida is closer to the national rate at 49%, but none of the four Southern states comes close to the New England region, where most states are well over 60%.

The variant has sent new U.S. cases surging to 94,000 a day on average, a level not seen since mid-

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February. Deaths per day have soared 75% in the past two weeks, climbing from an average of 244 to 426. The overall U.S. death toll stands at more than 614,000.

Across Florida, more than 12,500 patients were hospitalized with COVID-19 as of Thursday, over 2,500 of them in intensive care. The state is averaging nearly 18,000 newly confirmed infections per day, up from fewer than 2,000 a month ago. In all, Florida has recorded more than 39,100 coronavirus deaths.

Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis has taken a hard line against mask rules and other compulsory measures, saying it is important to keep Florida's economy moving.

"Florida is a free state, and we will empower our people. We will not allow Joe Biden and his bureaucratic flunkies to come in and commandeer the rights and freedoms of Floridians," DeSantis, who has been exploring a possible bid for president in 2024, said in a fundraising email Wednesday.

The reversal in fortune at some hospitals has been stark.

In central Florida, AdventHealth hospitals had 1,350 patients hospitalized with COVID-19 as of Thursday, the most ever. The health care system has postponed non-emergency surgery and limited visitors to concentrate on treating coronavirus patients.

Less than two months ago, Miami's Baptist Hospital had fewer than 20 COVID-19 patients and was closing down coronavirus units. By Monday, hospital officials were reopening some of those units to handle an influx of more than 200 new virus patients.

"As fast as we are opening up units, they're being filled with COVID patients," said Dr. Sergio Segarra, the hospital's chief medical officer.

In Georgia, more than two dozen hospitals said this week that they have had to turn away patients as the number of hospitalizations for COVID-19 has risen to 2,600 statewide.

Mississippi reported that its hospitals were overwhelmed with nearly 1,200 COVID-19 patients as of Thursday. State Health Officer Dr. Thomas Dobbs said the delta variant is "sweeping across Mississippi like a tsunami" with no end in sight.

In Louisiana, with roughly 2,350 coronavirus patients in hospitals, any non-emergency surgery that might require an overnight stay is being delayed at the state's largest hospital system. Dr. Robert Hart, chief medical officer at Ochsner Health, said an organ transplant involving a live donor was postponed.

"You can imagine the expectations both the recipient and the donor had leading up to the surgery, and then to have to put that off," he said, declining to disclose the type of transplant.

The swift turn of events has been disheartening for health care workers who just weeks ago thought the battle was in its final stages. The crisis is also making it harder for hospitals to provide other crucial types of medical care.

"If you don't get vaccinated, you are taking resources from people who have diseases or injuries or illnesses," said Dr. Vincent Shaw, a family physician in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. "COVID doesn't call people who have had strokes, who have had heart attacks, who have had other horrific or traumatic things happen and say, 'Y'all take the week off. I am going to take over the ER and the ICU.'"

In Florida, Judi Custer said she and her husband did everything they were told to do to ward off the virus. The Fort Lauderdale retirees got vaccinated and wore masks, even when the rules were lifted. Still, they fell ill with COVID-19 a few weeks ago, and 80-year-old Doug Custer was hospitalized for five days.

Judy Custer said she still believes more people need to get vaccinated.

"We've had it long enough to know it is helping people, even if they get sick with it," she said. "You're less likely to be put on a ventilator. You're less likely to be hospitalized."

End of an era: Barcelona says Messi won't stay with the club

By TALES AZZONI AP Sports Writer

MADRID (AP) — Lionel Messi's time at Barcelona appears to be over.

Barcelona announced Thursday that Messi will not stay with the club, saying that the Spanish league's financial regulations made it impossible to sign the Argentina star to a new contract.

He is leaving after 17 successful seasons in which he propelled the Catalan club to glory, helping it win

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numerous domestic and international titles since debuting as a teenager.

Barcelona said in a statement that a deal for a new contract had been reached but financial “obstacles” made it impossible for the player to remain with the club.

“Despite club and player reaching an agreement and their clear intention to sign a new contract today, this cannot happen because of financial and structural obstacles,” the club said.

It blamed “Spanish league regulations” for not allowing the club to sign a new contract with the player. His previous one had ended on June 30.

“As a result of this situation, Messi shall not be staying on at FC Barcelona,” it said. “Both parties deeply regret that the wishes of the player and the club will ultimately not be fulfilled.

“FC Barcelona wholeheartedly expresses its gratitude to the player for his contribution to the aggrandizement of the club and wishes him all the very best for the future in his personal and professional life,” the statement said.

Messi had asked to leave Barcelona for free at the end of last season but had his request denied by then-president Josep Bartomeu. Joan Laporta took over the presidency and appeared to have convinced Messi to stay. But Laporta had said recently that the club was struggling to fit the player’s salary — even with hefty reductions accepted by the player — into the league-controlled salary cap.

In Messi’s previous contract, signed in 2017, he reportedly earned 138 million euros (\$163 million) per season.

The league had announcement on Wednesday that it secured \$3.2 billion in private equity funding to help the clubs, which appeared to pave the way for Barcelona to re-sign the Argentina star. But the deal with Messi fell through after club officials met with the player’s representatives in Barcelona on Thursday. Some local reports said it was Messi who had changed his mind about staying, while others said it was the club that got upset with new demands made by the player’s staff.

Barcelona was one of the clubs hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic. The league slashed its salary cap last season and the club had been trying to clear cap space by releasing some of its players. It had only signed free agents this summer — including Memphis Depay, Sergio Aguero and Eric Garcia — to avoid paying transfer fees.

The league has worked hard over the years to create stability through strict economic control that kept clubs from going into heavy debt. President Javier Tebas had said earlier that the league would not take a huge hit by losing a player like Messi, noting that it continued to thrive after Cristiano Ronaldo left Real Madrid to Juventus a few years ago.

It was unclear whether Messi was already in talks with other clubs, but he has previously been linked with cash-rich Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain.

The Argentine made no immediate public statement. Club president Laporta was going to address the media on Friday.

Barcelona removed Messi from its squad list on the club’s website shortly after the announcement, and posted a video on its Twitter accounts thanking the player.

Messi will be leaving after having won 35 titles. He helped the club win the Champions League four times, the Spanish league 10 times, the Copa del Rey seven times and the Spanish Super Cup eight times.

While with the club, Messi earned himself a record six Ballon d’Or awards as the world’s top player. He is the team’s all-time scorer with 672 goals in 778 appearances, and the top scorer in the Spanish league with 474 goals in 520 matches. He also is the player with most matches with the club.

He was the top scorer in the Spanish league in eight seasons, and the top scorer in the Champions League on six occasions. His 26 goals against Real Madrid are a record for the “clásico” matches against Barcelona’s fiercest rival.

Messi arrived at Barcelona at age 13, when he and his family came to Spain to try his luck at Barcelona’s youth academy. He made his official debut on Oct. 16, 2004, and two years later helped the club win its first Champions League in a squad led by Ronaldinho.

Iran swears in new hard-line president amid regional tension

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By AMIR VAHDAT Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — The protégé of Iran's supreme leader, Ebrahim Raisi, was sworn in as the country's new president during a ceremony in parliament on Thursday, an inauguration that completes hard-liners' dominance of all branches of government in the Islamic Republic.

The former judiciary chief known for his distrust of the West takes the reins at a tense time. Iran's indirect talks with the U.S. to salvage Tehran's landmark 2015 nuclear deal have stalled, as Washington maintains crippling sanctions on the country and regional hostilities simmer.

"The sanctions must be lifted," Raisi said during his half-hour inauguration speech. "We will support any diplomatic plan that supports this goal."

Wearing the traditional black turban that identifies him in the Shiite tradition as a direct descendant of Islam's Prophet Muhammad, Raisi recited the oath of office with his right hand on the Quran.

In his address, Raisi stressed his embrace of diplomacy to lift U.S. sanctions and mend rifts with neighbors, a subtle reference to Sunni rival Saudi Arabia. But he also signaled that Iran seeks to expand its power as a counterbalance to foes across the region.

"Wherever there is oppression and crime in the world, in the heart of Europe, in the U.S., Africa, Yemen, Syria, Palestine ... we will stand by the people," he said, referring to Iran-backed militias like Yemen's Houthi rebels and Lebanon's Hezbollah. His voice rose with emotion, eliciting a clamor of approval from the audience. "The message of the election was resistance against arrogant powers."

Raisi, who won a landslide victory in an election that saw the lowest voter turnout in the nation's history, faces a mountain of problems — what he described on Thursday as "the highest level of hostilities by Iran's enemies, unjust economic sanctions, widespread psychological warfare and the difficulties of the coronavirus pandemic."

Amid ongoing sanctions, Iran is grappling with runaway inflation, diminishing revenues, rolling blackouts and water shortages that have sparked scattered protests. Barred from selling its oil abroad, Iran has seen its economy crumble and its currency crash, hitting ordinary citizens hardest.

Without offering any specific policies, Raisi pledged to resolve the country's mounting economic crisis, improve the spiraling currency and "empower poor people."

In Washington, State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters that the U.S. would wait to see what approach the new government in Iran will take.

"Our message to President Raisi is the same as our message to his predecessors and that is very simple: the U.S. will defend and advance our national security interests and those of our partners," he said. "We hope that Iran seizes the opportunity now to advance diplomatic solutions."

Former President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from Iran's nuclear deal in 2018 has led Tehran to abandon over time every limitation the accord imposed on its nuclear enrichment. The country now enriches a small amount of uranium up to 63%, a short step from weapons-grade levels, compared to 3.67% under the deal. It also spins far-more advanced centrifuges and more of them than allowed under the accord, worrying nuclear nonproliferation experts, though Tehran insists its program is peaceful.

Raisi, 60, a conservative cleric long cultivated by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has promised to engage with the U.S. But he also has struck a hard-line stance, ruling out negotiations aimed at limiting Iranian missile development and support for regional militias — something the Biden administration wants to address.

The official proceedings in Tehran come just a week after a drone crashed into an oil tanker linked to an Israeli billionaire off the coast of Oman, killing two crew members.

The U.S., Israel and the United Kingdom blamed Iran for the raid and vowed a collective response, with Israel's defense minister on Thursday even warning the country is ready to strike Iran. Although Tehran denied involvement, the assault escalates a yearslong shadow war targeting commercial shipping in the Mideast and threatens to complicate efforts to revive the nuclear deal.

Thursday's inauguration ceremony, scaled back because of the coronavirus pandemic ravaging the country, still drew leaders and dignitaries from around the world. The presidents of Iraq and Afghanistan

flew in for the occasion, along with Enrique Mora, the European Union official who has coordinated the recent nuclear negotiations in Vienna. Senior officials from Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Venezuela and South Korea also attended.

Northwest heat wave targeted vulnerable, tested climate prep

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Karen Colby thought she could make it through an unprecedented Pacific Northwest heat wave with a little help from her neighbor, who dribbled cold water on her head and visited every hour to wrap frozen towels around her neck.

But when temperatures in her tiny fifth-floor studio soared to 107 degrees Fahrenheit (42 Celsius), Colby suddenly stopped responding to questions and couldn't move from her recliner to her walker. The friend called an ambulance, and Colby, 74, wound up hospitalized for 10 days with heatstroke.

"We had just survived the coronavirus and had been in complete lockdown. We were basically in jail here," said Joel Aslin, Colby's longtime friend who lives in the same apartment complex for low-income Portland residents who have a disability or are over 62.

"We did everything right and she survived — and then we had that stupid heat wave and that almost took her life," Aslin said.

The record-smashing heat that swept through cities from Portland to Vancouver, British Columbia, at the end of June silently killed scores of the region's most vulnerable who could not leave their homes, afford air conditioning or get a ride to public cooling centers.

Consecutive days of temperatures as high as 116 F (47 C) in Portland made a folly of years of planning for more anticipated emergencies such as earthquakes and snowstorms — and it was only as the disaster unfolded that authorities got a sense of how devastating it would ultimately be. Emergency rooms overflowed, 911 calls spiked and death reports rolled in.

The crisis was a wake-up call for the normally temperate Pacific Northwest about what lies ahead with climate change and was a harsh lesson in how unprepared the region is, particularly when it comes to those living on society's margins.

The median summer temperature in Oregon could increase as much as 10 degrees by the end of the century, according to the Climate Impact Lab, and extreme weather events like heat waves will become more frequent.

"The really important and complex point is that places that are already hot — and are going to get hotter — are already adapted. They have air conditioning and they have homes built for wind to flow through," said Alan Barreca, an associate professor at the University of California, Los Angeles' Institute of Environment and Sustainability.

"Definitely the Pacific Northwest is not used to those temps, and so they're more vulnerable," he said.

Authorities in Portland spent days leading up to the heat wave warning the public, calling and texting hundreds of the most vulnerable, dispatching volunteers with thousands of bottles of water and opening round-the-clock cooling centers.

Still, it was not enough to prevent what officials labeled a mass casualty event.

While nobody is certain exactly how many died, officials have estimated that the number is in the hundreds in Oregon, Washington state and British Columbia combined.

In Oregon, officials say 83 people died of heat-related illness, and the hot weather is being investigated as a possible cause in 33 more deaths. Washington state reported at least 91 heat deaths, and officials in British Columbia say hundreds of "sudden and unexpected deaths" were likely due to the soaring temperatures.

Most of the Oregon deaths occurred in Multnomah County, home to Portland, where the average victim was white, lived alone and 70 years old. There were more heat deaths in Portland in June than in the entire state over the past 20 years, authorities said.

Cassie Sorenson, who heads a nonprofit that does free grocery shopping and delivery for the home-

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bound, said their phone lines were swamped by desperate clients in need of an air conditioning unit or a ride to a cooling center.

"We have clients who are bedbound or chairbound on their couches, and they were home in the heat until 'home in the heat' became a medical emergency and they were in an ambulance taking them to the hospital. It was a bit of a helpless feeling," said Sorenson, who runs Store to Door.

The crisis also exposed gaps in planning that stymied those seeking transportation to cooler locations. Leading up to the heat wave, officials publicized the number of a statewide call center that could direct people to cooling centers or help them get rides — but it was unstaffed for more than 24 hours during the peak heat, which fell on a weekend.

More than 700 callers gave up on hold or in the voicemail system as temperatures hit 112 F (44 C); it's unclear how many needed rides or what happened to them.

Portland's famed light rail system also shut down during the worst heat to reduce strain on the power grid, eliminating one transportation option for low-income people seeking relief. And many homeless people didn't want to leave their belongings or pets behind to go to a cooling shelter, advocates said.

"This is great that we're having a conversation around cooling centers, but what are we doing around people who can't get there? Those are the people who are literally dying," said Sorenson, who has been involved in discussions about how Portland can improve.

When a shorter and less intense heat wave struck last weekend, authorities applied some of the easiest lessons. Many more cooling centers opened, buses were free for people headed to those facilities and the statewide call center was staffed 24/7. It included a new option high in the voicemail menu for information on cooling centers.

Gov. Kate Brown activated an emergency coordination center, making more resources available to tribes and local governments, and authorities held a press conference to urge each resident to check on five people during the peak heat.

"We hadn't experienced an event like that before, so we were working off potential impacts," said Andrew Phelps, director of Oregon Emergency Management. "Now, we understand just how deadly these events can be, especially in our urban centers."

Yet the longer-term solutions needed to prepare the Pacific Northwest for its future climate require much bigger fixes: revising building codes to require air conditioning, installing heat-repelling sidewalks in city centers and providing subsidies so lower-income residents can afford air conditioning.

Authorities also are looking at using an existing emergency alert system that would send a phone notification or landline message to warn people in real time as temperatures spike, said Dan Douthit, spokesman for the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management.

An "earthquake is a big, looming hazard for Portland, but globally, heat emergencies kill more people than any type of emergency," he said. "We did more for this heat emergency than any heat emergency we've ever responded to, but it doesn't mean that we did enough."

EXPLAINER: How Cuomo might be impeached, removed from office

By MARINA VILLENEUVE Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, buffeted by sexual harassment allegations, is increasingly looking like he could be impeached and removed from office — something that hasn't happened to the state's governor in nearly 108 years.

A majority of members of the state Assembly, the legislative body that has the power to start impeachment proceedings, have already said they favor removing Cuomo if he won't resign. Pressure has built since a team of independent investigators hired by the state attorney general concluded that Cuomo sexually harassed 11 women.

Cuomo, a Democrat, has vowed to stay in office, rejecting the allegations against him as either fabricated or a misunderstanding of gestures and comments meant to convey warmth.

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If the Legislature goes ahead with an impeachment, it will follow procedures that have some parallels — and some important differences — to the process the U.S. Congress uses for impeaching presidents. Here's a look at how impeachment might work:

THE PROCESS

Like at the federal level, New York impeachments start in the lower house of the legislature — in this case, the Assembly.

The state's constitution says the Assembly can impeach officials with a simple majority vote for "misconduct or malversation."

If a majority of members vote to impeach, a trial on Cuomo's removal from office would be held in what's known as the Impeachment Court.

The court consists not only of members of the state Senate, but also judges of the state's highest court, the Court of Appeals, who would also cast votes.

There are seven appeals court judges and 63 senators, though not all would serve on the impeachment court. Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul (HOH-kull) and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins would also typically be members, but they are excluded when a governor is on trial.

At least two-thirds of the jurors must vote to convict in order to remove Cuomo.

HISTORICAL PRECEDENT

New York has only impeached a governor once, in 1913, when Gov. William Sulzer was bounced after just 289 days in office in what he claimed was retribution for turning his back on the powerful Tammany Hall Democratic machine.

Sulzer was accused of failing to report thousands of dollars in campaign contributions and commingling campaign funds with personal funds. He blasted the court's secret deliberations, complaining: "A horse thief in frontier days would have received a squarer deal."

SIDELINING CUOMO

If Cuomo were impeached by the Assembly, the state constitution forces him to step aside immediately, according to some legal experts, and remain on the sidelines until his trial is complete.

That's a dramatic difference from what happens when the U.S. president is impeached.

When Sulzer was impeached, Lt. Gov. Martin Glynn was appointed acting governor. Sulzer, however, didn't accept his suspension, arguing that the state constitution allowed him to continue performing his duties until he was convicted.

The dispute was never decided by a court, but Gerald Benjamin — an expert on the New York Constitution and a political scientist at SUNY New Paltz — said he believed the rules governing impeachment are clear: Cuomo would have to temporarily relinquish power to Hochul.

"The constitution is clear. He remains governor until he is impeached," Benjamin said. "Once they impeach him, she (Hochul) acts as governor."

If Cuomo were to be acquitted by the Impeachment Court, he would return to office. If he's convicted, Hochul would serve out the remainder of Cuomo's term — through the end of 2022. The court could also opt to disqualify him from holding office in the future.

THE TIMELINE

How quickly could this all happen? It's not clear.

The Assembly's judiciary committee has scheduled its next meeting for Aug. 9. A law firm representing the committee has given Cuomo until Aug. 13 to turn over evidence to bolster his defense.

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie has said he wants to wrap up the investigation "as quickly as possible."

But drafting articles of impeachment could take time.

One issue is that the Assembly, when it first began contemplating impeachment, asked investigators to look into a range of issues beyond sexual harassment. There's a discussion among lawmakers now about how to handle other parts of the inquiry, including an examination of Cuomo's handling of data on COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes, his use of state employees to help him with a \$5 million book deal and even potential safety issues on a newly built bridge.

"As far as I'm concerned, there are a lot of things that are on table, and what would happen is we'd have to see what the committee thinks the articles of impeachment should include," said Judiciary Committee member Phil Steck, a Democrat. "It gets complicated and I don't see how we're going to do this in a couple of hours."

Lawmakers have yet to agree on key questions, like whether there will be public hearings.

"Are the witnesses willing to testify?" Judiciary Committee member Tom Abinanti, also a Democrat, said. "Do the written documents support what we're going to allege? We're almost in the role of a grand jury and the prosecutor. We've got to decide: is the evidence sufficient and does it in fact constitute an impeachable offense? It's not so easy."

In the meantime, many elected officials in New York are hoping that Cuomo will save the legislature the trouble and resign.

So far, Cuomo has insisted he isn't going anywhere, saying Tuesday he would focus on doing more for New Yorkers, even as other leaders called for his ouster.

"I will not be distracted from that job. We have a lot to do," Cuomo said.

Delta variant challenges China's costly lockdown strategy

By JOE McDONALD and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The delta variant is challenging China's costly strategy of isolating cities, prompting warnings that Chinese leaders who were confident they could keep the coronavirus out of the country need a less disruptive approach.

As the highly contagious variant pushes leaders in the United States, Australia and elsewhere to renew restrictions, President Xi Jinping's government is fighting the most serious outbreak since last year's peak in Wuhan. The ruling Communist Party is reviving tactics that shut down China: Access to a city of 1.5 million people has been cut off, flights canceled and mass testing ordered in some areas.

That "zero tolerance" strategy of quarantining every case and trying to block new infections from abroad helped to contain last year's outbreak and has kept China largely virus-free. But its impact on work and life for millions of people is prompting warnings that China needs to learn to control the virus without repeatedly shutting down the economy and society.

Zhang Wenhong, a Shanghai doctor who became prominent during the Wuhan outbreak, suggested in a social media post that China's strategy could change. "We will definitely learn more" from the ongoing outbreak, he said, calling it a stress test for the nation.

"The world needs to learn how to coexist with this virus," wrote Zhang, who has 3 million followers on the widely used Sina Weibo platform.

China's controls will be tested when thousands of athletes, reporters and others arrive for the Winter Olympics in Beijing in February. And the ruling party faces a politically sensitive change of leadership in late 2022, for which leaders want upbeat economic conditions.

Last year, China shut down much of the world's second-biggest economy and cut off almost all access to cities with a total of 60 million people — tactics imitated on a smaller scale by governments from Asia to the Americas. That caused China's most painful economic contraction in five decades, but Beijing was able to allow business and domestic travel to resume in March 2020.

The new infections, many in people who have already been vaccinated, have jolted global financial markets, which worry Beijing's response might disrupt manufacturing and supply chains. The main stock indexes in Shanghai, Tokyo and Hong Kong sank Tuesday but were rising again Thursday.

China needs to shift to creating barriers to infection within communities by stepping up vaccinations and quickly treating infected people while allowing business and travel to go ahead, said Xi Chen, a health economist at the Yale School of Public Health. He said country needs access to the full range of vaccines, including allowing in the shot developed by Germany's BioNTech.

"I don't think 'zero tolerance' can be sustained," said Chen. "Even if you can lock down all the regions in China, people might still die, and more might die due to hunger or loss of jobs."

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But Beijing has shown no sign of abandoning its tactics.

Disease controls must "be even faster, more firm, stricter, more expansive and ready," He Qinghua, an official of the National Health Commission's Disease Control Bureau, said at a news conference Saturday.

The year's biggest outbreak has tentatively been traced to airport employees who cleaned a Russian airliner on July 10 in Nanjing, northwest of Shanghai in Jiangsu province, according to health officials.

Some travelers flew through Nanjing to Zhangjiajie, a popular tourist spot southwest of Shanghai in Hunan province, turning that city into a center for the virus's spread. The disease was carried to Beijing and other cities in more than 10 provinces.

On Tuesday, the government of Zhangjiajie announced no one was allowed to leave the city, imitating controls imposed on Wuhan, where the first virus cases were identified, and other cities last year.

Flights to Nanjing and Yangzhou, a nearby city with 94 cases, were suspended. Trains from those cities and 21 others to Beijing were canceled. Jiangsu province set up highway checkpoints to test drivers. The government called on people in Beijing and the southern province of Guangdong not to leave those areas if possible.

In Yangzhou, children at two tutoring centers were quarantined after a classmate tested positive, according to Zhou Xiaoxiao, a university student there. She said some parts of the city were sealed.

Eggs and some other food was scarce after shoppers cleared out supermarkets in anticipation of a lockdown, Zhou said. She said the government was delivering rice to households.

"The price of vegetables has risen. That's nothing to me. But to the kind of family whose life isn't very good and who have no income, it's very troublesome," said Zhou, 20.

The 1,142 infections reported since mid-July, many linked to Nanjing, are modest compared with tens of thousands of new daily infections in India or the United States. But they jolted leaders in China, which hasn't recorded a fatality since early February.

The outbreak poses "serious challenges to the country's hard-won victory in the epidemic battle," said the newspaper The Global Times, which is published by the ruling party's People's Daily.

China has reported 4,636 deaths out of about 93,000 confirmed cases.

So far, most of the people infected in Nanjing had been vaccinated, and few cases are severe, the head of the critical care unit at the hospital of the city's Southeastern University, Yang Yi, told the Shanghai news outlet The Paper.

She said that means "vaccines are protective" — though concerns remain that Chinese-made vaccines offer less protection than some others.

Authorities have blamed Nanjing airport managers and local officials for failing to enforce safety rules and to detect infections for 10 days until July 20, after the virus spread.

A 64-year-old woman who is believed to have carried the virus from Nanjing to Yangzhou was arrested Tuesday on charges of hindering disease prevention, police announced.

Cleaning staff at Nanjing's new international terminal mingled with co-workers in the domestic wing, when they should have been separated, according to news reports. The Russian flight was diverted due to bad weather from Shanghai, where airports are better equipped to handle foreign travelers.

Still, the city of 9.3 million people is the second-biggest in eastern China after Shanghai and has more resources than many smaller cities.

China needs to learn how to "allow the virus to exist" in areas with high vaccination rates and stronger health care, said Chen, the economist. He noted some areas have vaccinated at least 80% of adults.

"I don't think they are blind to this," said Chen. "They should already be thinking about it."

Summer funding helped school districts address disparities

By ANNIE MA Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — After another pandemic-disrupted school year, organizers of vastly expanded summer learning opportunities are investing heavily in efforts to make them accessible to the most vulnerable students.

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While there have been success stories, the programs have faced many of the same challenges that educators have been up against since the pandemic hit: Attendance has been inconsistent, some families have lost interest, and COVID-19 still has many reluctant to let students learn in-person.

Educators also have had to address persistent barriers to access for summer programs for families that juggle work and child care and have limited access to transportation.

"We're starting from a really unequal playing field," said Halley Potter, a senior fellow at The Century Foundation who studies educational inequity. "There's a lot that school districts have to do, and community organizations that are running these programs as well, in order to help pick that up."

The summer programs offered by schools and community groups are powered by an infusion of private and public funding — including billions of dollars in federal stimulus money — to help students catch up on learning. School districts targeted their outreach to students identified as high needs, including students with failing grades in core classes or in high-poverty neighborhoods.

When Peñasco Independent School District, which serves roughly 350 students in New Mexico, announced a summer program this year, demand overwhelmed the number of slots until the district doubled the number of seats available.

But of the 85 children signed up, more than half would not be able to attend if it weren't for district-provided transportation services.

In Peñasco, pervasive intergenerational poverty has pushed school districts to embrace the so-called "community schools" model that provides services like counseling, transportation, internet access and other resources, ensuring participation in school programs.

In the rural district, community schools director Michael Noll said, some families don't own a car. Some who do have periods where they can't afford gas. And others are often juggling work and child care, unable to constantly shepherd kids back and forth.

The district runs three buses to make sure those 50 kids can attend. Like many families in these rural foothills of the Rocky Mountains, social worker Carmen Lyn Romero lives on a dirt road too narrow for a school bus.

Romero, who balanced taking care of her five children with serving nearby tribal reservation Picuris Pueblo, relied on an SUV the district sent to pick up her children.

"The school has been so accommodating to my kids, to pick them up and drop them off. I can't do that," said Romero, 28.

Even before the pandemic, students' summer experiences divided heavily along socioeconomic lines. Middle and upper class students typically experience learning gains over the summer and are more likely to have access to summer enrichment, Potter said.

In contrast, low-income students typically see learning loss, Potter said. Families often struggle to find slots in affordable summer enrichment programs, where demand can readily outpace the number of available seats.

The dramatically expanded number of seats available through school districts this year eased some of those pressures, and targeted outreach policies aimed to get high-needs students into those slots.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools typically does not host a summer session, but offered more than 30,000 slots this year to any student interested and saw an average daily attendance of around 15,000.

While any student could sign up and get a seat, the district identified those with Ds or Fs in core classes, students with unstable housing or who were chronically absent, and students with special needs for individual outreach, including home visits and phone calls to inform families about registration.

About 65,000 students were identified as at-risk under those criteria, and nearly 20,000 of those children signed up for a summer slot. The program saw an average daily attendance of about 10,000 at-risk students.

Tangela Williams, who is overseeing summer programming, said that because attendance was not mandatory, some students came only on certain days of the week or started during the middle of the 24-day program. While some parents said they were simply no longer interested, staff members contacted each family if a student missed three consecutive days to provide any support needed in case the student wanted to return.

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Williams said that while there were limits to what could be done, she hoped the experience would go beyond teaching content and help students make the transition back to in-person learning.

"A percentage of our kids who are attending summer camp were full-remote kids during the school year," Williams said. "Having them in school this summer is a way to reacclimate them to school life with new processes and socialization that they're going to have with their peers."

The impact of extended school closures and the coronavirus pandemic has fallen unevenly across communities. Black and Latino families, who were more likely to get sick or face serious health consequences from the virus, tended to keep their children in remote learning at higher rates even as districts increasingly offered in-person options.

Building relationships and trust with families was crucial to reengaging students who had largely been disconnected from the school system, said Kendra Banks, chief of arts and learning academies at Young Audiences of Maryland, which partners with Baltimore City Schools to run arts-integrated educational summer camps.

Some parents were still hesitant to send their children back to in-person programming because of the coronavirus, Banks said. The program offered weekly testing and walked parents through all the additional safety protocols to reassure them, Banks said.

"We went above and beyond what the requirements were to make sure that the sites were safe and to assure them that we will be practicing the necessary protocols," Banks said. "It was calling and having personal conversations with each family about any questions they had."

Districts also used the boost in funding to expand the types of programs they were able to offer. Aaron Philip Dworkin, CEO of the National Summer Learning Association, said that in addition to barriers to access, inequities can be driven by the cost of more intensive programs, such as residential experiences on university campuses.

While those programs can expose students to new subjects and the college experience, they are often inaccessible to low-income families.

"It shouldn't be that the kids who have the least resources now have to do the least engaging types of programs," Dworkin said.

In San Diego Unified School District, students spent half the day in the classroom and the other half in summer camp-style programming organized by a wide array of nonprofit organizations.

Andrew Sharp, the district's chief public information officer, said those partnerships made experiences like surfing, flying a drone and learning about wildlife conservation accessible to families who normally cannot afford the cost of similar summer programs.

After a difficult year, Sharp said, he hoped the students could focus on finding the joy in reconnecting with their peers in addition to the academics.

"We really wanted to put the emphasis on bringing programs to some of our historically disadvantaged communities," Sharp said. "And at the same time, we wanted to provide kids with the best summer of their lives."

Belarus runner used quick thinking to avoid being sent home

By MONIKA SCISLOWSKA and DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — A Belarusian Olympic sprinter who feared reprisals back home after publicly criticizing her coaches at the Tokyo Games used quick thinking to get help, using her phone to translate a plea and show it to Japanese police as she tried to avoid being forced onto a plane.

Krystsina Tsimanouskaya described on Thursday a dramatic series of events at the Olympics that led her to decide not to return to Belarus, where an authoritarian government has relentlessly pursued its critics. She fled instead to Poland, arriving Wednesday.

After posting a message on social media that criticized the way her team was being managed, Tsimanouskaya said she was told to pack her bags. Team officials told her to say she was injured and had to go home early.

On her way to the airport, she spoke briefly to her grandmother, who explained that there was a massive

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backlash against her in the media in Belarus, including reports that she was mentally ill. Her grandmother, she said, advised her not to return. Her parents suggested she could go to Poland.

At the airport, she sought help from police, using Google translate to convey her plea in Japanese. At first, they didn't understand, and a Belarusian official asked what was going on. She claimed she forgot something at the Olympic village and needed to return. Police eventually took her away from the Belarusian officials.

As the drama unfolded, European countries offered to help her, and the runner ended up at the Polish embassy, where she received a humanitarian visa. Many of Belarus' activists have fled to Poland to avoid a brutal crackdown on dissent by President Alexander Lukashenko's government.

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, tweeted to say he was "Reassured to see that the athlete Krystsina #Tsimanouskaya arrived safe in Poland." He deplored, however, that "One more proud Belarusian has however been forced to flee her own country due to the actions of the Lukashenko regime and Olympic truce been violated."

At a news conference in Warsaw on Thursday, Tsimanouskaya thanked the people who supported her during the standoff.

"It was the whole world, and these people make me much stronger," she said. She added that she feels safe now.

She also had a message for her fellow Belarusians.

"I want to tell all Belarusians not to be afraid and, if they're under pressure, speak out," said the runner, who spoke in both English and Russian at the news conference.

Still, she expressed concern for the safety of her family back home. Her husband, Arseni Zdanevich, fled Belarus this week shortly after his wife said she would not be returning. Poland has also granted him a visa.

The events have drawn more attention to Belarus' uncompromising authoritarian government. When the country was rocked by months of protests following an election that handed Lukashenko a sixth term but that the opposition and the West saw as rigged, authorities responded with a sweeping crackdown. Some 35,000 people were arrested and thousands of demonstrators beaten. The government has also targeted independent media and opposition figures.

In a sign of the lengths authorities are willing to go to silence their critics, Belarus officials diverted a passenger jet to the capital of Minsk in May and arrested a dissident journalist who was on board.

While Tsimanouskaya's criticism was aimed at team officials, her defiance may not sit well with political authorities. Lukashenko, who led the Belarus National Olympic Committee for almost a quarter-century before handing over the job to his son in February, has a keen interest in sports, seeing it as a key element of national prestige.

But Tsimanouskaya has insisted that she is no political activist, never intended to flee Belarus and only wanted to be allowed to run in her preferred event at the Olympics. The standoff began after she complained that she was scheduled to participate in a race she had never competed in.

Tsimanouskaya has called for an investigation into what happened, and the International Olympic Committee said it opened a disciplinary case "to establish the facts" in her case.

The main opposition challenger to Lukashenko in last August's disputed election said Tsimanouskaya's case showed the lengths his government would go to.

"The message now is that even if you are not involved into opposition movement, even if you have never participated in any demonstrations, but you show your disloyalty to the regime because you do not agree with actions, you are under attack," Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya told The Associated Press in an interview.

The 24-year-old runner said she hadn't thought about seeking political asylum and hoped to return home one day, when it is safe. She also said she wanted to figure out soon how she might continue her career. She said she will speak with Polish officials on Friday about her next steps.

"I just wanted to run at the Olympics, it was my dream," she said. "I still hope that these were not the last Olympics in my life."

Shipping snags prompt US firms to mull retreat from China

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Game maker Eric Poses last year created The Worst-Case Scenario Card Game, making a wry reference to the way the coronavirus had upended normal life.

He had no idea.

In a twist that Poses never could have predicted, his game itself would become caught up in the latest fallout from the health crisis: a backlogged global supply chain that has delayed shipments around the world and sent freight costs rocketing.

Worst-Case Scenario, produced in China, was supposed to reach U.S. retailer Target's distribution centers in early June. Instead, the games were stuck for weeks at the Port of Seattle and didn't arrive until mid-July.

"It's consuming my life," said Poses, who started his Miami Beach, Florida-based toy company All Things Equal in 1997, selling games from the trunk of his car. "You do everything right. You produce on time. You're psyched about your product."

And then ... unforeseeable disaster.

Like other importers, Poses is contending with a perfect storm of supply trouble — rising prices, overwhelmed ports, a shortage of ships, trains, trucks — that is expected to last into 2022. The experience proved disturbing enough that Poses is reconsidering a cost-saving decision he made five years ago: to shift production of his games and toys out of the United States to China. Now, he thinks, it might make sense to bring production back — at least to Mexico, if not the United States — to protect him from the risks of relying on factories an ocean away in China.

"I'm willing to make smaller margins," he said, "if it means less anxiety."

Other American companies are making similar calculations: 52% of the U.S. manufacturing executives surveyed by the consulting firm Kearney said they have started buying more supplies in the United States in response to COVID-related supply disruptions. Forty-seven percent said they plan to reduce reliance on supplies or factories from a single country; 41% specifically said they wanted to cut their dependence on China.

And not just because of the virus-related bottlenecks in shipping, severe as they are. Companies are worried, too, about becoming caught in the crossfire of a trade war between the United States and China, the world's two biggest economies.

The conflict began when President Donald Trump imposed taxes on \$360 billion worth of Chinese imports to protest Beijing's combative effort to surpass American technological dominance.

But neither Chinese leader Xi Jinping nor Trump's successor, Joe Biden, appears to be in a hurry to seek peace.

"The whole relationship is in bad shape," said Rosemary Coates, a longtime consultant to companies wanting to establish factories in China.

In America, there is bipartisan frustration over China's sharp-elbowed trade practices — which, critics say, includes cybertheft — as well as its crackdown on civil liberties in Hong Kong, repression of Muslims in Xinjiang and bullying of neighbors in South and Southeast Asia.

"Are we in a 21st century version of the Cold War? Yes," said trade lawyer Michael Taylor, a partner at King & Spalding. "The endgame is not nuclear annihilation. The endgame now is economic dominance."

For decades, companies have piled up profits by moving manufacturing to China and other low-wage countries, then exporting their products back to the United States. They have also held down costs by keeping inventories to a minimum. Under a "just-in-time" approach, factories buy materials only as they need them to meet orders.

But relying on distant factories and keeping inventories threadbare is risky. In March 2011, an earthquake and tsunami damaged auto parts plants in northwestern Japan. The resulting parts shortages temporarily idled car plants around the world, including some in the United States — a sobering reminder that lengthy supply chains are vulnerable to disruption.

Then came Trump's trade war. Importers scrambled to reconfigure their supply chains and find alternatives to Chinese factories after Trump imposed stiff tariffs on goods from China.

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But they'd never seen anything like what COVID-19 inflicted on global commerce.

As countries locked down and families took refuge at home in February and March last year, companies sold off inventories and canceled orders from suppliers. And the economy did, in fact, collapse: In the United States, gross domestic product, the broadest measure of economic output, fell at a 31.2% annual rate from April through June 2020 — the worst quarter in records dating to 1947.

Then something unexpected happened.

"What nobody knew was that when you send everybody home, the first thing we all do is shop" online, said Lewis Black, CEO of Almonty Industries, which mines the rare metal tungsten. "You had, on one hand, inventories being run down and manufacturing ground to a halt, and on the other, people were spending like crazy."

Fueled by pent-up consumer demand, especially as vaccines allowed economies to reopen and families to get back outside again, growth roared back. The U.S. economy expanded at a stunning clip — a record annual rate of 33.8% from July through September 2020 — and kept chugging along, most recently registering a healthy 6.5% annual growth rate from April through June this year.

Suddenly, companies were overwhelmed with orders they couldn't meet.

"They had an oops moment," Black said.

"It's a classic case of overreacting on the front end and having to play catchup," said Tom Derry, CEO of the Institute for Supply Management, an association of purchasing managers. "No one really foresaw the strength in the surge of demand Supply just can't keep up."

As companies hurried to meet surging demand, the cost of raw materials soared: The price of oil is up more than 70% over the past year, aluminum 55%. Tin prices have doubled. The price of high density polyethylene blow-molded plastic — common in bottles, fuel tanks, industrial drums and other products — has surged 157%, according to the Plastics Exchange spot market.

Freight costs shot up, too, as companies tried to book shipping containers. The Baltic Dry Index, which measures shipping costs, has rocketed more than 700% since mid-May 2020.

Getting products onto container ships was hard. But that wasn't the end of the trouble. Ports were overwhelmed when the cargo arrived.

"They couldn't get the ships in and out," said Richard Gottlieb, CEO of the consultancy Global Toy Experts. "They were backed up. You know that horrible experience where your airplane lands and there's no open gate? That's what happened to containers."

The result is that the supply chain breakdown is paralyzing many businesses.

Consider Elmer Schultz Services, a Philadelphia company that repairs and maintains kitchen equipment for restaurants and other clients. It is facing maddening delays in getting parts. It used to take seven to 10 days to get backordered parts. Now, it takes three or four weeks.

"It's very frustrating to tell a customer we can't fix their oven for three or four weeks," said Kirby Malon, president of Elmer Schultz and of the trade group Commercial Food Equipment Service Association.

Glitches made things worse. The huge container ship Ever Given got stuck in the Suez canal for a week in March, cutting off shipping between Asia and Europe. The world's fourth-busiest port — Yantian near the Chinese manufacturing center Shenzhen — was shut down for a month by a resurgence of COVID cases in late May.

"When you give up your own manufacturing and let somebody manufacture for you — if it all goes well, you can make more money. But the reason you can make more money is there's more risk," said Taylor, the trade lawyer. "And that risk is supply disruptions, labor issues, quality control, theft of your" intellectual property.

Importers tried to calculate how much of the higher costs they could pass on to their customers. At Mindscope Products near Los Angeles, owner George Balanchi wants to avoid raising the prices he charges retailers for his company's toys, including remote-controlled cars and the Jabberin' Jack talking pumpkin.

"It's tough," he said.

Raising prices, he said, is easier online. He has upped the online price of Mindscope's radio-control stunt car to \$22.99 from \$19.99 and plans another price hike to \$24.99 next year.

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Companies that resisted moving production overseas now enjoy an advantage. They don't have to wait for their products to cross the ocean — or figure out whether they can pass along to customers the import taxes that hit them at the U.S. border.

"The guys who stuck through the tough time while their competitors had huge profit margins now look like they were smarter than everybody thought they were," Taylor said.

Make-A-Fort in Wichita, Kansas, is one of the fortunate — or visionary — ones. Co-founder Kent Johnson decided to make his company's products — easy-to-assemble cardboard fortresses to play in — in the United States. He didn't like the long lead times required for manufacturing overseas. He wanted more control over the quality of the product and wanted to be able visit the assembly lines regularly.

And he wanted to keep jobs in America.

"We started out doing it at a disadvantage," he said. "We just got a little bit lucky. We don't have a lot of supply chains."

Freight charges are way up in the United States, he said, but that's still nothing like the exploding cost of shipping containers.

Mursix Corp., which makes precision metal components for the auto and healthcare industries, has been pounded by higher steel costs and shipping bottlenecks.

"We used to be able to put something on a boat and get it in five to seven weeks," said Andy Dieringer, director of supply chain for the Yorktown, Indiana, company. Now, it takes nine to 11 weeks for shipments to arrive from China.

As a result, the company is looking for new suppliers in Mexico, said company co-owner Susan Murray Carlock, also vice president of business development. "I could see us being able to get there by next year" — maybe by the second quarter of 2022, she said.

But leaving China isn't easy. Costs there remain low. And specialized suppliers cluster in Chinese manufacturing centers, making it easy for factories to get parts when they need them.

At All Things Equal, for example, Poses laments that "I have not yet had luck in finding a North American factory to produce my games at a competitive price. But, I'm still trying!"

"There are zillions of parts that are not made in the U.S. and probably won't be made in the U.S. because they're low-cost parts and because the industry is so vertically integrated," said Coates, the consultant, who is executive director of the Reshoring Institute, a nonprofit that helps companies manufacture in the United States.

It can also be risky. Companies might be forced to leave equipment behind, raising the possibility that the Chinese workers they've trained can put the abandoned molds and machine tools to work cranking out competing products.

"It's complicated to extract yourself from China," Coates said, "and often very expensive."

But growing awareness of the risks of depending on supplies that must cross a vast ocean — especially at a time of U.S.-China tensions — is making U.S. companies look for alternatives closer to home. After all, major supply chain disruptions are becoming more common, the consulting firm McKinsey has found

"Although COVID feels like such a black swan — and it is — disruptions in supply chains have been increasing in severity and frequency," said Katy George, a McKinsey partner.

Once rare, supply chain breakdowns that last a month or more are now occurring every 3.7 years, McKinsey found, noting in a report that "a single severe event that disrupts production for 100 days — something that happens every five to seven years on average — could erase almost a year's earnings in some industries."

Native Hawaiians 'reclaim' surfing with Moore's Olympic gold

By SALLY HO Associated Press

Carissa Moore wore a white and yellow plumeria pinned next to her ear for her victory-lap interviews after making history as the first Olympic gold medalist at surfing's historic debut.

Her mother — crowned the Honolulu Lei Queen in 2016 — had given her the flower hair clip before she

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left for Tokyo to remind the only Native Hawaiian Olympic surfer of where she came from.

At this pinnacle point, Moore is still in disbelief when she's compared to Duke Kahanamoku, the godfather of modern surfing who is memorialized in Hawaii with a cherished monument.

"I don't think I'll have a statue," Moore said, grinning from ear to ear while her body bobbed into a quiet giggle at the suggestion. "Gosh, there's only a few people in Hawaii that I think deserve that."

As celebrated at home as she is loved by fans and peers around the world, it was a characteristically modest statement from one of the world's greatest surfers after she took home gold in the sport's inaugural Olympic competition.

The methodical Moore found her rhythm with the ocean to deliver the kind of standout, power-surfing performance that has defined her career. The picture-perfect ending even included a rainbow that popped into the sky as she shredded waves in the final against South African rival Bianca Buitendag.

Moore has now become a realization of Kahanamoku's dream, at once the symbol of the sport's very best and a validating force for an Indigenous community that still struggles with its complex history.

"It's a reclaiming of that sport for our native community," said Kūhiō Lewis, president of the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement, which convenes the largest annual gathering of Native Hawaiians.

Lewis said all the locals he knew were texting each other during the competition, glued to the TV and elated, even relieved, by Moore's "surreal" win. He called it a "come to home moment" for a community that may never reconcile its dispossession.

After centuries of colonization by various European settlers, Hawaii was annexed by the United States in 1898 after the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy by U.S.-backed forces in 1893.

"At times, we're an invisible people. We're lumped in to other ethnic groups. Our sport is being defined by other groups. This puts it into perspective," Lewis said. "It feels like an emerging of a people, of a native community that has been invisible to many."

All eyes were on Moore when the Tokyo Games began, not only because she was the medal favorite as the reigning world champion but also because she was competing for the United States. Until then, Moore had always surfed for Hawaii in the professional World Surf League, which recognizes it as a "sovereign surfing nation."

Moore is biracial and grew up in the only majority Asian American and Pacific Islander state in the United States. Her white father, of Irish and German ancestry, taught her how to surf. Her mother is ethnically Native Hawaiian and Filipino and was adopted and raised in a Chinese-American family.

"I'm proud to be representing the USA, but specifically the islands of Hawaii because there are just so many different kinds of people there, and I feel like such a connection to all of them," Moore said. "And I wouldn't be where I am today without the community of people that have really raised me."

U.S. Senator Brian Schatz of Hawaii this week honored both Moore and Kahanamoku on the Senate floor.

"There's a saying that the best surfer is the person having the most fun and that's unquestionably the case with Carissa," Schatz said. "She's an intense competitor who wants to win every event she enters, but also one who wants to see her opponents — and more importantly the sport of surfing itself — succeed."

Kahanamoku was among the first athletes to break sports' color barrier as an Olympic swimmer who medaled five times. It was at the 1912 Summer Games in Stockholm that he first pushed the International Olympic Committee to include surfing, though it was virtually unknown outside of his native Hawaii back then.

Hawaii's most famous son then dedicated his life to promoting surfing and his homeland, famously introducing the sport via exhibitions in places from California to New Jersey, Australia and Europe. Kahanamoku was the ultimate waterman: His legacy includes popularizing flutter swimming kicks and spreading the concept of lifeguarding and water rescue to the masses. On top of that, he dabbled in Hollywood movies and served as Honolulu's sheriff.

A century later, Moore was plenty accomplished in the sport before her Olympic Games. She became the youngest ever champion at age 18, and today has four world titles in addition to being the first Olympic gold medalist in her sport. She's also recruiting young girls to take up a sport that once very much prioritized men, and has spoken publicly about her struggles with body image and disordered eating as a teenager.

With this new global platform, Moore says she is proud of what she represents and wants to spread positivity as her idol did.

"This was his dream to have surfing in the Olympics," Moore said. "I hope I made him and my people proud."

'Trauma as his shield': Cuomo's apology, defense criticized

By JOCELYN NOVECK and MALLIKA SEN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — He said his actions had been misconstrued, his words misunderstood. He said it was cultural: He hugs, he kisses, he says "Ciao, bella." He said it was generational: Sometimes he lapses into "honey" or "sweetheart" or tells bad jokes.

But of all New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's responses to investigative findings that he sexually harassed 11 women, one that most disturbed many women — particularly sexual assault survivors and their advocates — was his use of a family member's sexual assault to explain his own behavior with an accuser.

"We will not be moved by Governor Cuomo's attempts to use the stories of survivors, including those he harassed, as a shield for his own misconduct and abuse of power all while claiming the harassment was a 'misunderstanding,'" said an open letter to be released Thursday by the National Women's Law Center and several gender and survivor groups, demanding the Democratic governor's resignation or removal.

Tarana Burke, the survivor and advocate who gave the #MeToo movement its name, wrote in an email to The Associated Press that "abusers, no matter their own personal histories, do not get to center themselves in cases of abuse."

"In these moments, survivor's stories are the ones that should be elevated," Burke said. "There are 11 women, whose stories were corroborated, who experienced harassment at the hands of the governor. His family's story does not exonerate him, and he does not get to use someone else's trauma as his own shield."

The allegations that investigators said they corroborated ranged from inappropriate comments to forced kisses and groping.

In a taped statement Tuesday, Cuomo denied ever touching anyone inappropriately but apologized to two accusers, including former staffer Charlotte Bennett. He said he asked Bennett about her love life in a misunderstood bid to help her cope with trauma from a past sexual assault. He spoke of a family member, about the same age, who'd been sexually assaulted in high school.

"I thought I could help her work through a difficult time," the governor said of Bennett.

Emily Martin, vice president for education and workplace justice at the NWLC, said Cuomo was "suggesting that he is a hero for survivors of sexual assault, which is an especially disturbing move given all that this report found."

"In some ways it reminds me of the 'father of daughters' comments that we hear from so many men in power," Martin said, "that we should take them at their word that they care about these issues based on their personal family relationships."

Bennett herself called Cuomo's apology "meaningless."

"If he were sorry, he would step down. That's how accountability works," she told the AP immediately following the remarks.

Elaborating Wednesday on ABC's "Good Morning America," Bennett said: "He insinuated that survivors of trauma and sexual assault can't tell the difference between mentorship and leadership and sexual harassment itself, which is not only insulting to me but to every survivor who listened to him yesterday."

Marissa Hoehstetter was one of those survivors. She said she was saddened by Cuomo's reference to his relative's assault "because I do not want to diminish those experiences." But, added the advocate for reform in New York state, "two things can be true. You can have someone in his family who experienced sexual harm, and he could also have caused this harm."

"You feel so gutted when you see people's trauma trotted out to try to explain away another person's rightful voice," Hoehstetter said.

Deborah Tuerkheimer, a Northwestern University law professor who specializes in sexual misconduct,

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saw Cuomo's remarks as part of a larger strategy to discredit his accusers and save his political career.

"We often draw on a set of longstanding misconceptions about abusers as 'monsters' with no redeeming qualities whatsoever," Tuerkheimer said. "Whenever an accused man looks different from this imagined monster, we're more inclined to doubt the allegations against him. And accused men often strategically tap into this cultural bias by highlighting, as evidence of innocence, their best qualities — including, perhaps, empathy for victims of sexual assault."

For Indira Henard, director of the D.C. Rape Crisis Center, the case against Cuomo's statement was simple: You can't support survivors in one sentence and discredit them in another.

"If you stand and believe survivors, then you believe survivors," Henard said. "You don't get to take apart their story."

Many also questioned the effectiveness of other parts of Cuomo's taped statement, which was accompanied by a slideshow of him hugging and kissing people in benign settings.

"I do kiss people on the forehead," he said. "I do kiss people on the cheek. I do kiss people on the hand. I do embrace people. I do on occasion say, 'Ciao, bella.'"

Evan Nierman, CEO and president of Red Banyan, a crisis public relations firm based in Florida and Washington, D.C., called it "a bold move" by Cuomo "to assert that he's some sort of a serial hugger and therefore none of the allegations could be true because he hugs and kisses everybody."

"There's a big difference between appropriate physical contact and types of allegations that were levied against the governor," said Nierman, "and so I don't think most people are going to conflate the two."

Deborah Tannen, a Georgetown University linguistics professor who studies cross-cultural communication, noted Cuomo's reference to his heritage. She acknowledged that Italian Americans tend toward casual touches in conversation, "but that's not touching sexual places."

"That is friendly kissing," she said. "So I think that, too, is not really relevant to the most serious allegations."

From crisis communication experts to survivors, many agreed that Cuomo's political future seems unsalvageable. For New York and his accusers to move forward, they said, the governor needs to be held accountable.

"Simply put, he needs to resign," Henard said, adding that if he doesn't, he should be removed. "There's no coming back from this."

Olympics Latest: China women win table tennis again

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

MEDAL ALERT

China's women continued their table tennis dominance, winning their fourth straight gold in the team event with a 3-0 win over Japan.

First-time Olympians Chen Meng and Wang Manyu beat Kasumi Ishikawa and Miu Hirano 3-1 in the opening match, and then World No. 2 Sun Yingsha topped third-ranked Mima Ito 3-1 in the second match.

Wang closed out the sweep by beating mixed doubles silver medalist Shiwen Liu 3-0. China has taken ever gold in the women's team event since it started at the 2008 Beijing Games. It didn't drop a single match in this year's tournament.

MEDAL ALERT

Belgium defeated Australia in a shootout to win gold in men's field hockey.

The score was tied 1-all at the end of regulation before Belgium won the shootout 3-2. Alexander Hendrickx scored the penalty stroke that put Belgium ahead in the shootout and Vincent Vanasch got the clinching save.

Belgium was the 2016 Olympic runner-up.

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India won bronze earlier in the day with a 5-4 victory over Germany. It was India's first field hockey medal since 1980.

It's Denmark against France for the gold medal in men's handball.

Mikkel Hansen scored 12 goals to send defending-champion Denmark into the Olympic men's handball final after beating European-champion Spain 27-23.

Hansen scored 12 off 16 shots when no other player in the contest scored more than five. That takes him to a tournament-leading 52 goals, nine more than anyone else.

Denmark will play France on Saturday in a repeat of the 2016 final, which the Danes won 28-26. France beat Egypt 27-23 in the other semifinal game to reach the final for the fourth Olympics in succession.

It will be Norway and Russia playing for the men's beach volleyball gold medal.

The top two seeds advanced to the championship with semifinal victories. After Norway beat Latvia, Russia's Viacheslav Krasilnikov and Oleg Stoyanovskiy beat Qatar 21-19, 21-17 to advance.

Neither country has ever won an Olympic beach volleyball medal before. Now they will divide up the gold and silver.

Latvia and Qatar will play in the bronze medal match on Saturday.

France is assured of its first medal ever in Olympic volleyball after the men's team swept Argentina in the semifinals.

This is the first time the French have made it as far as the semifinals in either men's or women's indoor volleyball. They advanced to play the team representing the Russian Olympic Committee in the gold medal game on Saturday.

Argentina will face Brazil for the bronze. Argentina's only medal in volleyball came with a bronze medal win over Brazil in 1988.

The French lost three of five matches in pool play but upset Pool A winner Poland in five sets the quarterfinals followed by the win over Argentina.

Eddy Alvarez became only the third American to earn medals at both the Summer and Winter Olympics when the United States baseball team beat defending-champion South Korea 7-2 to gain a berth into this weekend's gold medal game against host Japan.

The former U.S. speedskater-turned-infielder wept in the dugout after the final out as teammates patted him on the back and offered handshakes and hugs.

After earning a silver in 2014 at Sochi as part of the U.S. four-man short track team, he'll get at least a silver in baseball. The other Americans with summer and winter medals are Eddie Eagen (boxing in 1920, bobsled in 1932) and Lauryn Williams (track and field in 2004 and 2012, bobsled in 2014).

MEDAL ALERT

Spanish teenager Alberto Gines Lopez has won the first Olympic gold medal in sport climbing, riding a win in the speed discipline to the top of the podium.

The 18-year-old opened the finals with the speed win, then showed off his all-around skills by finishing seventh in lead and fourth in bouldering. He finished with 30 points — the finishes are multiplied together — to edge American Nathaniel Coleman by two.

Coleman topped three of the four "problems" to win bouldering, was fifth in lead and sixth in speed.

Austrian Jakob Schubert had the climb of the night, becoming the first man or woman to reach the top of the 15-meter high lead wall in three days of competition. His climb moved him into the bronze medal spot and knocked Czech climber Adam Ondra off the podium.

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Damian Warner of Canada won the decathlon after two grueling days of competition in the Tokyo heat and humidity.

Warner, who wore an ice vest often during the competition to battle those conditions, posted an Olympic record of 9,018 points for the gold. He improved on his bronze five years ago in Rio de Janeiro.

Kevin Mayer of France (8,726 points) took the silver, as he did in Rio. Ashley Moloney of Australia (8,649) won the bronze medal.

Nafissatou Thiam successfully defended her Olympic title in the heptathlon as a seventh-place finish in her heat in the last event, the 800 meters, was enough for her to take the gold with 6,791 points.

She won ahead of Dutch pair Anouk Vetter in silver (6,689) and Emma Oosterwegel in bronze (6,590).

Thiam got revenge for losing out to Britain's Katarina Johnson-Thompson at the world championships two years ago. Johnson-Thompson withdrew on the first day of the heptathlon in Tokyo with a calf injury.

Slovenia's Luka Doncic has recorded the third known triple-double in Olympic men's basketball history.

Doncic got there with his 10th rebound, coming with 19 seconds remaining in Slovenia's semifinal game against France. Doncic already had 16 points and 18 assists at that point in the contest.

Doncic has 36 triple-doubles in his three seasons with the NBA's Dallas Mavericks. That's already 11th-most in NBA history. He missed a triple-double by one assist in Sunday's group-play finale against Spain and by two rebounds in Slovenia's win over Germany in the quarterfinals on Tuesday.

The other triple-doubles in Olympic men's play: Alexander Belov had one for the Soviet Union in 1976, and LeBron James had one for the U.S. in 2012.

Belov — perhaps best known for making the layup that gave the Soviets a controversial gold-medal-game win over the U.S. in the 1972 Olympics — had 23 points, 14 rebounds and 10 assists in a 100-72 win over Canada in Montreal. James had 11 points, 14 rebounds and 12 assists in a win over Australia at the London Games.

It is possible there have been others, but full boxscores began being kept in FIBA games in the 1970s.

MEDAL ALERT

Japan's Risako Kawai won her second Olympic wrestling gold, defeating Belarus' Iryna Kurachkina 5-0 in the women's 57-kilogram freestyle final.

Kawai won the 63kg category at the 2016 Games. Her younger sister, Yukako, won the 62kg class on Wednesday.

American Helen Maroulis defeated Mongolia's Khongorzul Boldsai Khan 11-0 in a bronze medal match. Maroulis won Olympic gold at 53kg in 2016. She became the first U.S. woman to win more than one Olympic medal.

Bulgaria's Evelina Nikolova won the other bronze, defeating the Russian Olympic Committee's Valeria Koblova 5-0.

Top-seeded Norway will play for the Olympic gold medal in men's beach volleyball.

Christian Sorum and Anders Mol beat Latvia 21-15, 21-16 to advance to the final. They'll play the winner of the semifinal between Qatar and Russia. Latvia's Martins Plavins and Edgars Tocs will play the loser for bronze.

The Norwegians opened a 5-1 lead and never trailed in the first set. The second set was closer before Norway scored three straight points to turn a 14-13 lead into an easy win.

It's the first time since inaugural Olympic beach tournament in 1996 that there hasn't been a team from Brazil in the men's championship match. The United States, which won three of the first four men's gold medals, was also shut out.

MEDAL ALERT

Steven Da Costa of France has won the first gold medal in Olympic men's karate competition, beating

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Turkey's Eray Samdan 5-0 in the final of the 67-kilogram kumite division in the martial art's Olympic debut.

The 24-year-old Da Costa is the 2018 world champion and a two-time European champion in his weight class, but he won a disappointing bronze at the European competition last May.

He overcame an early loss Thursday in Tokyo to Jordan's Abdl Rahman Almasatfa and got a boost from the injury retirement of Italy's Angelo Crescenzo, the 2018 world champion at 60 kilograms. Da Costa beat Kazakhstan's Darkhan Assadilov to reach the final.

Da Costa joined Bulgaria's Ivet Goranova (women's 55 kilos) and Spain's Sandra Sánchez (women's kata) as the inaugural champions in the long-awaited debut of karate, which finally gained Olympic inclusion for Tokyo after a half-century of trying.

MEDAL ALERT

Ivet Goranova has won Bulgaria's first gold medal at the Tokyo Games and the first Olympic karate gold medal in kumite competition, beating Ukraine's Anzhelika Terliuga in the final of the women's 55-kilogram division.

The 21-year-old Goranova won the final bout 5-1, scoring two yukos in the opening minute and adding a waza-ari with 1:16 left. The 2019 European champion qualified in June for the inaugural Olympic competition in karate at the Budokan.

Chinese Taipei's Wen Tzuyun and Austria's Bettina Plank took bronze. Wen lost a thriller to Terliuga in the semifinals despite making a last-second rally to tie it.

MEDAL ALERT

Steven Gardiner of the Bahamas won the men's Olympic 400-meters gold medal, pulling away from the field at the halfway point and finishing in 43.85 seconds.

Gardiner adds the Olympic gold to the world title he won in Qatar two years ago.

Jose Anthony Zambrano of Colombia took silver, also the same as he did at worlds. The bronze medal went to Grenada's Kirani James, who now has gold, silver and bronze from the last three Olympics.

Americans Michael Cherry and Michael Norman finished fourth and fifth, respectively. It's only the second time since 1904 that the U.S. has been shut out of the medals in a non-boycotted Games.

MEDAL ALERT

Katie Nageotte won an unexpected gold for the United States in the pole vault at the Olympics ahead of world champion Anzhelika Sidorova of Russia.

Nageotte failed on her first two attempts of the competition at 4.50 meters but improved from there to clinch her first major medal.

Sidorova took the silver at 4.85. Britain's Holly Bradshaw won the bronze medal.

Nageotte cleared 4.90 at her third attempt in the medal-clinching round. Sidorova passed on her last chance at 4.90 and moved the bar to 4.95 but didn't come close to clearing that.

Sidorova's silver was the first medal in track and field at the Tokyo Games for the Russian team, which is competing under the Russian Olympic Committee name as a result of the country's long-running doping scandal.

MEDAL ALERT

American David Taylor scored a double-leg takedown with 17 seconds remaining to beat Iran's Hassan Yazdani 4-3 and claim wrestling gold in the men's freestyle 86-kilogram class.

Yazdani, the No. 1 seed, won the 74kg class at the 2016 Olympics.

San Marino's Myles Amine defeated India's Deepak Punia 4-2 for bronze. It was the first-ever Olympic wrestling medal for the country with about 34,000 people.

In the other bronze medal match, the Russian Olympic Committee's Artur Naifonov defeated Uzbekistan's Javrail Shapiev 2-0.

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After days of drama, the Belarus women's 4x400-meter relay team finished last in its first-round heat at the Olympics.

The team was embroiled in controversy when sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya criticized officials on social media for putting her in the relay — an event she'd never raced — setting off a massive backlash in state-run media in Belarus. She was later barred from competing in the 200 meters.

She left Tokyo en route to Europe after resisting an attempt by her Olympic team's officials to send her home to Belarus, where she feared she could be in danger from authorities who have relentlessly cracked down on dissent.

Before leaving Japan, Tsimanouskaya said she hoped she could continue her track career but that safety was her immediate priority.

Several countries offered to help after the 24-year-old runner sought refuge in the European Union, and Poland has granted her a humanitarian visa.

Belarus placed last in the first heat in a time of 3 minutes, 33 seconds. The U.S. advanced with the fastest time, winning in 3 minutes, 20.86 seconds.

MEDAL ALERT

Sandra Sánchez of Spain has won the first Olympic gold medal in karate, beating Japan's Kiyou Shimizu in the final matchup in women's kata.

The 39-year-old Sánchez scored a 28.06 in the final bout, her screams echoing off the walls at the Budokan as she put in a spirited demonstration of karate form. Shimizu's score was 27.88.

Sánchez has dominated her discipline in Europe for the past seven years, making her a fitting first champion in the Olympic debut of karate. The martial art is in the Olympic program on a temporary basis in Japan after a half-century of attempts to gain Olympic recognition.

Grace Lau of Hong Kong, China, and Viviana Bottaro of Italy won bronze.

The Olympic women's soccer gold-medal match between Canada and Sweden has been moved from Friday morning in Tokyo to the evening in Yokohama.

There were concerns about playing in the heat with an 11 a.m. kickoff in the National Stadium, and the final couldn't be played there later in the day due to the venue being used for track and field.

So the match has been moved about an hour outside Tokyo to Yokohama, which is also staging the men's final Saturday night.

The announcement was made Thursday at Sweden's pre-match news conference. The game as scheduled would have occurred during primetime in the United States, which lost in the semifinals.

Megan Rapinoe and Carli Lloyd each scored a pair of goals and the United States won the bronze medal in women's soccer at the Tokyo Olympics with a 4-3 victory over Australia.

It was arguably the best the Americans had looked during the course of a rocky tournament that opened with an uncharacteristic 3-0 loss to Sweden. Rapinoe set the tone early with a goal scored directly from a corner kick.

The loss spoiled the Australians' first-ever trip to the medal round at the Olympics. No Australian soccer team, men or women, has ever won a medal.

The Matildas were the underdogs against the United States, the top-ranked team in the world and the defending World Cup champions who came to Japan hoping for a fifth gold medal. But the Americans struggled at times during the tournament, including a 1-0 loss to Canada in the semifinals.

MEDAL ALERT

Britain's Matthew Walls won the opening scratch race of the four-event omnium and was never really challenged over the remainder of the races in winning the gold medal at the Tokyo Olympics.

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Walls finished third in the tempo race and second in the elimination race before taking a lap on the field early in the concluding points race to effectively put the gold medal out of reach.

Campbell Stewart of New Zealand gained his second lap on the field just before the race concluded, sending him soaring from out of the medals to silver. Defending champion Elia Viviani of Italy fell to bronze.

France has beaten Egypt 27-23 for a place in the final of the Olympic men's handball tournament.

France was 5-1 down after a slow start but recovered to 13-13 at half time and squeezed out Egypt in the second half. The French will play either Spain or Denmark in Saturday's final.

France can become the first country in 37 years to win the men's and women's tournaments at the same Olympics. The French women's team faces Sweden in their semifinal game Friday.

Egypt will play for the men's bronze medal and could become the first African nation ever to reach an Olympic handball podium.

MEDAL ALERT

Italy's Massimo Stano won the men's 20-kilometer race walk at the Olympics, and Japan secured the silver and bronze.

It was the first time since the 2008 Beijing Games that China wasn't on the podium.

Stano took the gold medal in 1 hour, 21 minutes and 5 seconds in Sapporo on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido.

Koki Ikeda took silver for the home country in 1:21:14 and Toshikazu Yamanishi the bronze in 1:21:28.

The race walks and marathon races were moved to cooler Sapporo to avoid the heat and humidity of the Tokyo summer.

MEDAL ALERT

Shanne Braspenninx of the the Netherlands has won gold in the women's keirin at the Tokyo Olympics, hours after teammate Laurine van Riessen was taken out of the Izu Velodrome on a stretcher following a crash.

Braspenninx went to the front on the final lap of the six-lap race, where the first three are paced by a motorized bike and the last three are a free-for-all sprint to the finish.

She was followed across the line by New Zealand's Ellesse Andrews with the silver medal and Lauriane Genest of Canada taking bronze.

Braspenninx's victory keeps the gold medal in Dutch hands. Elis Ligtlee won it at the Rio Games before retiring.

World champion Harrie Lavreysen of the Netherlands has cruised past two-time defending Olympic champ Jason Kenny in their best-of-three quarterfinal in the men's sprint at the Tokyo Games.

Kenny's gold medals at the 2012 London Games and the 2016 Rio Games came after he took silver against countryman Chris Hoy at the 2008 Games in Beijing. Kenny will head home without a medal in his signature event.

Britain still has hopes of a fourth consecutive gold medal in the men's sprint after Jack Carlin advanced to Friday's semifinal round. Also advancing were Dutch rider Jeffrey Hoogland and Trinidad and Tobago's Nicholas Paul.

Maddie Musselman and the U.S. beat the Russian Olympic Committee 15-11 to advance to the women's water polo final, continuing the team's bid for a third consecutive gold medal.

The U.S. beat the Russian team 18-5 last week, but the ROC was much more engaged in the semifinal meeting. The U.S. had to rally after it trailed 7-4 with 48 seconds left in the first half.

Musselman scored five times, and captain Maggie Steffens had three goals. Next up for the U.S. is the winner of the Spain-Hungary semifinal.

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The U.S. improved to 133-4 since it won gold at the Rio de Janeiro Games. It has won three in a row since it lost 10-9 to Hungary in group play for its first loss at the Olympics since the 2008 final against the Netherlands.

MEDAL ALERT

Chinese teenagers Quan Hongchan and Chen Yuxi have swept the top two spots in women's 10-meter platform diving.

The 14-year-old Quan took gold with 466.20 points and the 15-year-old Chen grabbed silver with 425.40 as China completed a golden sweep of the women's diving events.

Melissa Wu of Australia claimed the bronze medal with 371.40 points.

Dutch track cyclist Laurine van Riessen was taken from the track at the Izu Velodrome on a stretcher after a crash in the semifinals of the keirin at the Tokyo Olympics.

Van Riessen was trapped between two riders entering the final lap of the race. Her front wheel suddenly dodged to the right, wiping out British favorite Katy Marchant and sending both of them to the track.

Marchant was able to get back on her bike but van Riessen lay on the track apron for several minutes. She eventually was loaded onto a stretcher and taken down a tunnel.

The keirin is a six-lap race in which riders follow a motorized bike called a derny for the first three laps. It slowly picks up speed before leaving the track, leaving the riders to sprint the final three laps to the finish.

MEDAL ALERT

Albert Batyrgaziev of the Russian team has won the gold medal in men's featherweight boxing, beating American Duke Ragan in a meeting of two professional fighters chasing Olympic glory.

Batyrgaziev won the bout 3:2, cruising to victory after winning the first two rounds on three of the five judges' cards. He got off to an impressive, active start against Ragan, who needed time to find his groove before winning the third round on four of five cards.

Batyrgaziev and Ragan both turned pro last year during the Olympic delay caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Batyrgaziev recorded the best tournament run of his Olympic and amateur careers in Tokyo, while Ragan surged from an unseeded position to fall just short of the American team's first men's gold medal since 2004.

Lázaro Álvarez of Cuba and Samuel Takyi of Ghana won bronze medals. Takyi's medal is the fifth won by Ghana in all sports in its Olympic history, and its first since 1992.

The Russian Olympic Committee men's volleyball team avenged a semifinal loss to Brazil in the last Olympics by mounting a big rally in the third set to win their semifinal match in four sets.

The ROC fought back from eight points down to win the crucial third set and then closed it out in the fourth in a matchup of the sport's two biggest powerhouses.

The Russians will play the winner of the France-Argentina semifinal on Saturday for the gold medal. Brazil will play the loser for the bronze after failing to make it to the gold medal game for the first time since 2000.

IOC investigators are "setting up the interviews" with the Belarus team suspected of trying to forcibly remove sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya from the Olympics.

IOC spokesman Mark Adams says the disciplinary process that formally opened Tuesday is "determining who needs to be heard."

Belarus officials Artur Shumak and Yuri Moisevich have been linked by the IOC to taking Tsimanouskaya in a car to the airport Sunday to put her on a plane to Belarus.

It is unclear if Shumak and Moisevich retain Olympic accreditation and can contact other Belarus athletes.

The IOC was asked Thursday if it acted fast enough when Olympic accreditations have been quickly removed in other cases.

Adams says the IOC moved "pretty swiftly ... there has to be a process because there's all sorts of al-

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legations swirling around and we have to hear what they are.”

Tsimanouskaya, who had criticized team coaches on social media, is now in Poland, which gave her a humanitarian visa.

Marcell Jacobs will carry Italy’s flag at Sunday’s closing ceremony after succeeding Usain Bolt as 100-meter champion at the Olympics.

Italian Olympic Committee president Giovanni Malagò made the announcement shortly after Jacobs helped the Azzurri qualify for the final of the 4x100 relay.

The Texas-born sprinter was the surprise winner of the biggest race of the Olympics last weekend.

MEDAL ALERT

Australia’s Keegan Palmer has won the last skateboarding gold of the Tokyo Games.

He won in men’s park, breaking what had been Japanese domination in all three previous events.

The silver went to Pedro Barros of Brazil. Cory Juneau took bronze, the second skateboarding medal for the United States.

The first for the U.S., also a bronze, was won by Jagger Eaton in men’s street. Palmer, who is 18 and was born in the United States, was untouchable with two runs of tricks and stunts in the eight-man final.

His gold was the first medal in skateboarding for Australia. All the golds in the other three events went to Japanese skaters.

MEDAL ALERT

Pedro Pichardo of Portugal has won the men’s triple jump gold medal at the Olympics.

The Cuban-born Pichardo recorded 17.98 meters on his third attempt to clinch his first Olympic title. He previously won silver medals at the 2013 and 2015 world championships while representing Cuba.

China’s Zhu Yaming took silver at Tokyo’s Olympic Stadium with 17.57.

Burkina Faso’s Hugues Fabrice Zango claimed the bronze with 17.47, the first Olympic medal ever for his West African country.

MEDAL ALERT

Australia’s Thomas Green and Jean van der Westhuyzen have won the men’s kayak double 1,000 meters at the Sea Forest Waterway with a finishing kick over the final 200.

Germany’s Mox Hoff and Jacob Schopf were 0.304 seconds behind to take silver. Rodek Slouf and Josef Dostal of the Czech Republic won bronze.

The International Olympic Committee says it’s not aware of any plans to change the schedule for the women’s soccer final between Canada and Sweden.

Both teams asked to avoid kicking off in the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo’s heat and humidity at 11 a.m. Friday — an almost unprecedented early start for soccer at any time of year.

The forecast temperature at kickoff is around 91 degrees (31 Celsius).

A later kickoff time would risk a clash with the track and field program in the stadium later Friday, though other venues in Tokyo have been used for Olympic soccer and seem available.

IOC spokesman Mark Adams says he “can’t shed any more light” on the process of moving the game.

Changes to the Olympic schedule involve the IOC, Tokyo officials, sports bodies like soccer’s FIFA and broadcasters.

The world champion United States team was expected to make the final and the 11 a.m. kickoff in Tokyo would have allowed NBC to broadcast the final at 10 p.m. on the east coast and 7 p.m. on the west.

MEDAL ALERT

New Zealand’s Lisa Carrington has won the women’s kayak single 500 to add to her gold medal haul at the Sea Forest Waterway.

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Carrington won her third gold medal in three days, to go with her victories in the kayak single 200 and double 500. She is still scheduled to race the 500 fours.

Like her earlier races, Carrington was dominant from start to finish. Tamara Csipes of Hungary won silver. Denmark's Emma Aastrand Jorgensen won bronze.

MEDAL ALERT

Ryan Crouser has broken his own Olympic record on his way to defending his shot put title.

On his last attempt, Crouser went 23.30 meters to earn the first track and field gold for the American men at the Tokyo Games. U.S. teammate Joe Kovacs finished second and Tomas Walsh of New Zealand was third.

The 28-year-old Crouser went 22.52 meters when he won at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games.

Crouser is already the world-record holder after breaking a 31-year-old mark on June 18 at the U.S. Olympic trials. His throw that evening went 23.37 meters.

In the heat at Olympic Stadium, Crouser took the lead on his first attempt and saved his best for his final one.

Teenagers Quan Hongchan and Chen Yuxi dominated the semifinal round of the women's 10-meter platform as China seeks a sweep of the women's diving events.

The 14-year-old Quan led with 415.65 points and the 15-year-old Chen was second with 407.75.

Delaney Schnell of the United States advanced in third with 342.75 points.

The top 12 finishers of 18 starters qualified for the final later Thursday.

China has won every women's diving event at the past three Olympics.

The only diving event that China has not won at these Games came in the men's 10-meter synchro, which was won by Tom Daley and Matty Lee of Britain.

Chen is the reigning world champion in 10 meters and already won gold at these Games in the 10-meter synchro with teammate Zhang Jiaqi.

MEDAL ALERT

Hansle Parchment of Jamaica has won gold in the 110-meter hurdles at the Olympics by overtaking American Grant Holloway right near the end.

Holloway, the world champion, was in front through nine out of the 10 hurdles, but suddenly faded on the last. Parchment flew past him to add an Olympic gold to the bronze medal he won at the 2012 London Games.

Parchment won in his season's best time of 13.04 seconds.

Holloway took silver in 13.09 and another Jamaican, Ronald Levy, had the bronze in 13.10 seconds.

MEDAL ALERT

Hungary's Sandor Totka has won the gold medal in the men's kayak 200, becoming the first non-British paddler to win the event since it started in 2012.

Rizza Manfredi of Italy took silver and defending Olympic champion Liam Heath of Britain won bronze.

Totka beat Heath for the European championship earlier this year and bolted off the start line before claiming victory in a photo finish that saw 0.045 seconds separate gold from silver.

The U.S. men have failed to advance to the final of the 4x100 relay in track and field, extending a long string of failure in an event they used to own.

The team of Trayvon Bromell, Fred Kerley, Ronnie Baker and Cravon Gillespie finished sixth in the second heat of qualifying, done in by a series of bad exchanges that resulted in a time of 38.10 seconds.

This marks the 10th time since 1995 that the men have botched a relay at a world championships or Olympics. They were disqualified for a faulty exchange five years ago in Rio de Janeiro.

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The U.S. women made it through with a second-place finish in their heat. They'll race for the gold medal Friday.

Tokyo Olympics organizers have apologized for introducing Ukrainian athletes as Russians at an artistic swimming medal ceremony.

Tokyo spokesman Masa Tanaka says it was "purely an operational mistake" when he announced the apology at the daily Tokyo Games news conference.

The error is more sensitive because of diplomatic tensions between Ukraine and Russia.

The Ukrainian region of Crimea was annexed by Russia soon after the 2014 Sochi Winter Games and conflict between government forces and Russia-backed separatists continues

The artistic swimming duet competition was won late Wednesday by the Russian Olympic Committee athletes Svetlana Romashina and Svetlana Kolesnichenko.

The Ukrainian duo of Marta Fiedina and Anastasiya Savchuk took bronze but were announced at the podium as representing the ROC.

Australia will play the United States for the beach volleyball gold medal.

Mariafe Artacho and Taliqua Clancy beat Latvia 23-21, 21-13 on Thursday to clinch at least a silver. Latvia's Tina Graudina and Anastasija Kravcenoka will play for the bronze against Switzerland, which lost to the Americans in the earlier semifinal.

Australia was an early Olympic beach volleyball power, when Natalie Cook and Kerri Pottharst claimed a bronze medal in Atlanta and gold at Bondi Beach in Sydney.

But they haven't reached the podium since.

The American "A-Team" has advanced to the gold medal match of the Olympic beach volleyball tournament.

April Ross and Alix Klineman beat Switzerland 21-12, 21-11 at Shiokaze Park on Thursday to clinch at least a silver medal. It will be the third medal for Ross, who won silver in London and bronze in Rio de Janeiro. Klineman is a first-time Olympian.

Switzerland's Joana Heidrich and Anouk Verge-Depre will play for the bronze against the loser of the second semifinal, between Australia and Latvia.

The Americans never trailed in the first set. They lost the first point of the second before rolling off three straight points to take a lead they never relinquished.

The victory also assures the United States of a beach volleyball medal for the seventh straight Summer Games. That's every one of them since the sport was added to the program in Atlanta in 1996.

Only Brazil had achieved the same success -- until now. It has been shut out in Tokyo for the first time, with none of its teams reaching the semifinals.

BMX rider Connor Fields was released from St. Luke's International Hospital in Tokyo on Thursday, five days after a horrific crash in his semifinal race at the Tokyo Olympics left him with a brain bleed and other injuries.

Dr. Jonathan Finnoff, the chief medical officer for the U.S. Olympic Committee, said in a statement that Fields will be able to return to his home in Henderson, Nevada, to begin his rehabilitation.

The 28-year-old Fields had already qualified for the finals last Friday based on his first two semifinal heats when the gate dropped for the final one. He was flanked by riders on each side of him as he landed hard on a jump into the first turn. The impact with the ground was severe enough, but Fields also was hit at high speed by two other riders.

He remained motionless while the race concluded. Medical personnel then rushed out to attend to Fields, who eventually was loaded onto a stretcher and taken to the hospital in an ambulance.

Fields sustained a brain hemorrhage in the crash, and while the Olympic neurosurgeon was on standby in case surgery was needed to relieve pressure on his brain, a follow-up CT scan taken the next morning

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showed no additional injuries.

Fields also had broken ribs and a collapsed lung from the crash.

MEDAL ALERT

Germany's Florian Wellbrock has added a gold medal in marathon swimming to his bronze medal at the pool, winning the men's 10-kilometer race at Tokyo Bay.

Wellbrock raced out to an early lead and was up front most of the way on another sweltering morning in Tokyo. Even with the race starting at 6:30 a.m. local time, the temperature was already 81 degrees (27.2 Celsius) with 80 percent humidity, making it feel like close to 90 degrees.

The stifling conditions apparently got to France's David Aubry, who dropped out of the race with less than two laps to go and was carried off the deck on a stretcher. There's no word yet on his condition.

Britain's Hector Pardoe also failed to finish.

Wellbrock pulled away on the final lap to win by a dominating 25.3 seconds, finishing in 1 hour, 48 minutes, 33.7 seconds. He also won a bronze in the 1,500-meter freestyle on the last day of swimming at the pool.

The silver went to Hungary's Kristof Rasovsky in 1:48.59.0, while Italy's Gregorio Paltrinieri picked up the bronze in 1:49.01.1. The Italian was silver medalist in the 800 freestyle at the pool.

Defending Olympic marathon champion Ferry Weertman of the Netherlands finished seventh, while American Jordan Wilimovsky was 10th.

Israel launches airstrikes on Lebanon in response to rockets

By LAURIE KELLMAN and ZEINA KARAM Associated Press Writer

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel on Thursday escalated its response to rocket attacks the previous day from Lebanon by launching rare airstrikes on its northern neighbor, the army and Lebanese officials said.

A statement from the Israeli military said jets struck the launch sites from which the rockets were fired, as well as an additional target used to attack Israel in the past. The military blamed the state of Lebanon for the shelling and warned "against further attempts to harm Israeli civilians and Israel's sovereignty."

The overnight airstrikes in southern Lebanon were a marked escalation at a politically sensitive time. Israel's new eight-party governing coalition is trying to keep peace under a fragile cease-fire that ended an 11-day war with Hamas' militant rulers in Gaza in May. Several incidents leading up to this week's rocket fire from Lebanon have focused attention on Israel's northern border. The United States swiftly condemned the attacks on Israel.

Lebanon is mired in multiple crises, including a devastating economic and financial meltdown and a political deadlock that has left the country without a functional government for a full year.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun said Israel's use of its air force to target Lebanese villages "is the first of its kind since 2006 and indicated the presence of aggressive, escalatory intentions" against Lebanon. In a statement, he said Lebanon would submit a complaint to the United Nations.

The commander of the U.N. peacekeeping force in Lebanon, known as UNIFIL, Stefano Del Col, called on the parties "to act with urgency" to de-escalate tensions and prevent violations of the cessation of hostilities that has been in effect since 2006.

Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah fought a devastating, monthlong war in 2006 which killed some 1,200 Lebanese, mostly civilians, and around 160 Israelis, mostly soldiers. The war failed to neutralize the group's rocket threat, and Israeli officials say the Iran-backed Hezbollah's improved missile arsenal is now capable of striking virtually anywhere in Israel.

No one has claimed responsibility for the rocket fire from Lebanon, and Hezbollah has not commented. The Hezbollah-owned Al-Manar TV reported the Israeli strikes at around 2 a.m. Thursday, saying they hit an empty area in the village of Mahmoudiya in Marjayoun district.

Avichai Adraee, the Israeli army's Arabic-language spokesman, said the Lebanese government is responsible for what happens on its territory and warned against more attacks on Israel from southern Lebanon.

On Wednesday, three rockets were fired from Lebanon into Israeli territory and Israel responded with

sustained artillery fire. Sirens sounded in northern Israel, warning of a possible rocket attack. Two rockets landed inside Israeli territory, the army said.

Channel 12 said one rocket exploded in an open area and another was intercepted by Israel's defense system, known as the Iron Dome. Israeli media reported that the incoming rockets set off fires near Kiryat Shmona, a community of about 20,000 people near the Lebanese border.

The Lebanese military said 92 artillery shells were fired by Israel on Lebanese villages as a result of Wednesday's rocket fire from Lebanon. It said the Israeli artillery shelling resulted in a fire in the village of Rashaya al-Fukhar. The Lebanese army also said it was conducting patrols in the border region and had set up a number of checkpoints and opened an investigation to determine the source of the rocket fire.

There have been several similar incidents in recent months.

U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price condemned the rocket fire from Lebanon.

"Israel has the right to defend itself against such attacks," he told reporters on Wednesday in Washington, adding that the U.S. would remain engaged with partners "in the region in an effort to de-escalate the situation."

US jobless claims down 14,000 to 385,000 as economy rebounds

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell last week by 14,000 to 385,000, more evidence that the economy and the job market are rebounding briskly from the coronavirus recession.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that unemployment claims — a proxy for layoffs — dropped last week from a revised 399,000 the week before. The applications have more or less fallen steadily since topping 900,000 in early January. Still, they remain high by historic levels: Before the pandemic slammed the United States in March 2020, they were coming in at around 220,000 a week.

Since cratering in the spring of 2020, the U.S. economy has bounded back as the rollout of vaccines encourages businesses to reopen or return to normal operating hours and consumers to return to shops, restaurants and bars. The United States has been adding more than 540,000 jobs a month this year, and the Labor Department's July jobs report out Friday is expected to show it tacked on nearly 863,000 more last month, according to a survey of economists by the data firm FactSet.

The U.S. economy is still 6.8 million jobs short of where it stood in February 2020.

Companies are posting job openings — a record 9.2 million in May — faster than applicants are showing up to fill them. Many states have responded to business complaints of a labor shortage by ending expanded federal unemployment benefits meant to ease financial strains from the health crisis, including an extra \$300 a week on top of traditional state benefits. The federal benefits are scheduled to expire nationwide Sept. 6.

Altogether, 13 million Americans were receiving some type of unemployment aid the week of July 17, down from 13.2 million the previous week and 32 million a year earlier.

The health crisis isn't over. COVID-19 cases are rising as the highly contagious delta variant spreads, largely among the unvaccinated. The United States is reporting an average of more than 70,000 new cases a day, up from fewer than 12,000 a day in late June.

So far, the uptick in cases hasn't had noticeable economic consequences. "The surge in Covid cases related to the delta variant is unlikely to cause a renewed spike in joblessness as there have been few shutdowns so far," Contingent Macro Advisors said in a research note.

Tokyo logs record 5,042 cases as infections surge amid Games

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Tokyo reported 5,042 new coronavirus cases on Thursday, its most since the pandemic began as infections surge in the Japanese capital hosting the Olympics.

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Tokyo has been under a state of emergency since mid-July, and four other areas of the country have since been added. But the measures, basically shorter opening hours and a ban on alcohol for restaurants and bars, are increasingly ignored by the public, which has become tired of restrictions.

"We need to tackle the situation now that we have a stronger sense of urgency," Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told reporters, referring to Tokyo exceeding 5,000 new daily cases for the first time. "The infections are expanding at a pace we have never experienced before."

Suga, who has been criticized for insisting on hosting the Olympics despite the coronavirus's surge, says there is no evidence linking the increase in cases to the July 23-Aug. 8 Games. He urged people to firmly stick to the emergency requests and stay at home during summer vacation.

The new cases brought Tokyo's reported total to 236,138. The entire country registered more than 14,000 new cases on Wednesday, for a 970,460 total.

Alarmed by the pace of the spread, some experts have called for the state of emergency to be expanded nationwide.

Instead, Suga on Thursday announced a milder version of the emergency measures in eight prefectures, including Fukushima in the east and Kumamoto in the south, beginning Monday. The less-stringent measures allow prefectural heads to target specific towns but do not allow them to order business closures.

Suga also pledged to "prevent the further spread of the virus by firmly carrying out vaccinations."

Experts say people are not cooperating because many feel less of a sense of urgency about the pandemic while the Olympics are going ahead and the government's repeats of the same requests for people to stay at home.

Experts on a Tokyo metropolitan government panel cautioned that infections propelled by the more contagious delta variant have become "explosive" and could exceed 10,000 cases a day in two weeks.

Measures targeting business owners begin with requests and increase to orders, and violators can be fined, though this rarely happens. Those who comply can receive compensation, but thousands of eateries still stay open after the requested 8 p.m. closing time. Measures for the general public are only voluntary requests, including staying at home, wearing a mask outside and avoiding nonessential trips.

Japan has managed to keep its cases and deaths lower than much of the world, but testing is still insufficient and Tokyo's positivity rate stands at 20%, indicating widespread infections. Japan has 8.9 new confirmed cases per 100,000, compared to 8.5 in Vietnam and 28.4 in the United States.

In Tokyo, nearly 17,000 patients with mild symptoms are currently isolating at home — more than a tenfold increase from a month ago — and more than 10,000 others are waiting for beds in hospitals or special hotels.

As hospital beds fill, Suga's government introduced a new policy this week in which coronavirus patients with moderate symptoms will isolate at home instead of in hospitals, an attempt to save hospital beds almost exclusively for seriously ill patients.

Opposition lawmakers criticized Suga for not increasing hospital capacity sufficiently despite warnings about the delta variant. Coronavirus treatment in Japan is limited to public and university hospitals that have adequate facilities and expertise.

Dr. Masataka Inokuchi, the vice chair of the Tokyo Medical Association, said he hopes to establish a system that allows patients to isolate safely at home. "This system, however, will collapse if the number of patients at home keeps rising," he said.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Aug. 6, the 218th day of 2021. There are 147 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On August 6, 1945, during World War II, the U.S. B-29 Superfortress Enola Gay dropped an atomic bomb code-named "Little Boy" on Hiroshima, Japan, resulting in an estimated 140,000 deaths. (Three days later,

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the United States exploded a nuclear device over Nagasaki; five days after that, Imperial Japan surrendered.)

On this date:

In 1806, the Holy Roman Empire went out of existence as Emperor Francis II abdicated.

In 1962, Jamaica, formerly ruled by Britain, became an independent dominion within the Commonwealth of Nations.

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act.

In 1973, entertainer Stevie Wonder was seriously injured in a car accident in North Carolina.

In 1978, Pope Paul VI died at Castel Gandolfo at age 80.

In 1986, William J. Schroeder (SHRAY'-dur) died at Humana Hospital-Audubon in Louisville, Kentucky, after living 620 days with the Jarvik 7 artificial heart.

In 1991, the World Wide Web made its public debut as a means of accessing webpages over the Internet. TV newsman Harry Reasoner died in Norwalk, Connecticut, at age 68.

In 1993, Louis Freeh won Senate confirmation to be FBI director.

In 2005, anti-war activist Cindy Sheehan, whose soldier-son, Casey, was killed in Iraq, began a weeks-long protest outside President George W. Bush's Texas ranch.

In 2009, Sonia Sotomayor was confirmed as the first Hispanic Supreme Court justice by a Senate vote of 68-31. John Hughes, 59, Hollywood's youth movie director of the 1980s and '90s, died in New York City.

In 2013, U.S. Army Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan went on trial at Fort Hood, Texas, charged with killing 13 people and wounding 32 others in a 2009 attack. (Hasan, who admitted carrying out the attack, was convicted and sentenced to death.)

In 2015, "Hamilton," the hip-hop flavored biography about Alexander Hamilton, the nation's first treasury secretary, opened on Broadway. Jon Stewart bade an emotional goodbye after 16 years as host of Comedy Central's "The Daily Show."

Ten years ago: Insurgents shot down a U.S. military helicopter during fighting in eastern Afghanistan, killing 30 Americans, most of them belonging to the same elite Navy commando unit that had slain Osama bin Laden; seven Afghan commandos also died. Deion Sanders, Marshall Faulk, Shannon Sharpe, Richard Dent, Chris Hanburger, Les Richter and NFL Films founder Ed Sabol were inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Five years ago: The White House released a version of President Barack Obama's 3-year-old guidance on the use of lethal force against terrorists overseas, laying out what it said were safeguards to minimize civilian deaths and errant strikes while preserving the capability to take quick action with drone attacks and other means. At the Rio Olympics, Hungary's Katinka Hosszu stormed to a world-record victory in the women's 400 individual medley on the first evening of the swimming competition. Brett Favre, Tony Dungy and Marvin Harrison were among an eight-member class inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Clarinetist Pete Fountain, a Dixieland jazz virtuoso, died in New Orleans at age 86.

One year ago: Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine skipped a scheduled meeting with President Donald Trump after testing positive for the coronavirus. (Three subsequent tests results were negative.) The government reported that nearly 1.2 million laid-off Americans had applied for state unemployment benefits in the previous week, just as a critical \$600 weekly federal jobless payment expired. An oversight board voted to demote Milwaukee Police Chief Alfonso Morales to captain after questioning how he handled multiple incidents, including ordering officers to fire tear gas and pepper spray against protesters demonstrating over the death of George Floyd. (Morales chose to retire rather than accept the demotion.) Longtime presidential adviser Brent Scowcroft died at 95; he'd served as national security adviser to Presidents Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush.

Today's Birthdays: Children's performer Ella Jenkins is 97. Actor-director Peter Bonerz is 83. Actor Louise Sorel is 81. Actor Michael Anderson Jr. is 78. Actor Ray Buktenica is 78. Actor Dorian Harewood is 71. Actor Catherine Hicks is 70. Rock singer Pat MacDonald (Timbuk 3) is 69. Country musician Mark DuFresne is 68. Actor Stephanie Kramer is 65. Actor Faith Prince is 64. R&B singer Randy DeBarge is 63. Actor Leland Orser is 61. Actor Michelle Yeoh (yoh) is 59. Country singers Patsy and Peggy Lynn are 57. Basketball Hall of Famer David Robinson is 56. Actor Jeremy Ratchford is 56. Actor Benito Martinez is 53. Country singer

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Lisa Stewart is 53. Movie writer-director M. Night Shyamalan (SHAH'-mah-lahn) is 51. Actor Merrin Dungey is 50. Singer Geri Halliwell Horner is 49. Actor Jason O'Mara is 49. Singer-actor David Campbell is 48. Actor Vera Farmiga is 48. Actor Ever (cq) Carradine is 47. Actor Soleil (soh-LAY') Moon Frye is 45. Actor Melissa George is 45. Rock singer Travis McCoy is 40. Actor Leslie Odom Jr. is 40. Actor Romola Garai is 39.